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Stirring up the fires: John Spencer Bassett, "the negro question" and southern history

Robert Spencer Dicks

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In 1903 John Spencer Bassett, a young history professor at Trinity College, took to his pen to produce, "Stirring up the Fires of Racial Antipathy," a bold article intended to provoke discussion about southern race relations. An intense public backlash followed, nearly costing Bassett his job. The event, known as the "Bassett Affair," made national headlines. Many scholars have referenced the "Bassett Affair" as a triumph for academic freedom or as a part of a larger story about southern dissent. The 1903 controversy, however, was just one episode in the story of this iconoclastic historian. Delving into Bassett’s personal correspondence, published works, and speeches, this thesis chronicles Bassett’s personal experience, his mentors and interlocutors, and the context in which he lived. The result is an illuminating narrative of how this "objective" historian sought to change the way southerners viewed their own past and present.
I certify that I have read this thesis and find that, in scope and quality, it satisfies the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

Dr. Eric Yellin (Advisor)

Dr. Robert Kenzer (Reader)

Dr. Hugh West (Reader)
Stirring up the Fires:
John Spencer Bassett, “The Negro Question,” and Southern History

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B.A., University of Richmond, 2005

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and Library of Congress. Their work and enthusiasm for helping me locate the vast amount of sources connected to Bassett’s life were crucial to this project.

One final acknowledgement must be given to John Spencer Bassett himself. His extraordinary devotion to seek the truth not only makes his story interesting but also inspirational. Bassett’s zeal for facilitating thoughtful discourse amongst his students, peers, and the general public were commendable. His narrative, if nothing else, convinces us of the power of history and its salient relationship with our present.
The critic is born to wage war on the conservative. He is a tester of conservatism, putting it to a defence of itself. He watches for its weak places and strikes through them as skillfully as he can. He lops off the excrescences which conservatism breeds on the body of society. He gives the exercise to the minds of the masses which serves to awaken them from lethargy. He stimulates and serves society, even though he may at times go farther than it seems prudent to go.

- John Spencer Bassett “The Task of the Critic” 1904
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Introduction

On November 1, 1903, readers of the Raleigh *News and Observer* were greeted by the headline, “PROF. BASSETT SAYS NEGRO WILL WIN EQUALITY.”¹ The inflamed reaction that followed was directed both at John Spencer Bassett, a history professor, and at Trinity College, the Methodist institution where he taught.² Josephus Daniels, chief editor of the *News and Observer* and future United States cabinet secretary under two United States presidents, led the attack against Bassett and Trinity. Daniels’s headlines set in motion a series of conversations and actions that went well beyond the walls of Trinity College. Trinity’s Board of Trustees voted 18 to 7 to retain the young professor, and the event quickly became known as the “Bassett Affair.” Though the Affair became a symbol of academic freedom and a triumph for Trinity College, for Bassett the event was a frustrating and exhausting chapter in his ongoing struggle to reform his native South through thoughtful discourse.

Bassett’s controversial comments and the enraged reaction they inspired were entangled in a web of politics, reform, rivalries, insecurities, and, most importantly, race. Weighing heavily on the mind of white southerners at the time of Bassett’s remarks was the so-called “negro question,” which presented the status of blacks in the South as a problem to be “dealt with.” The race question was immensely challenging to answer for both the South and the nation. For three centuries the white South had grown accustomed to a labor and social system predicated on the subordination and exploitation of blacks, and now, with emancipation in effect, and black demands for civil, economic, and

¹*News and Observer,* “Prof. Bassett Says Negro Will Win Equality,” November 1, 1903.
²Trinity College would later become Duke University in 1924.
political equality growing, these systems felt as fragile as ever. What role did blacks play in southern society? How would whites respond to their demands? More broadly, what should the South look like in a post-reconstruction world?

Tracing how white southerners tried to answer the “negro question” takes one through a complicated history. Even an examination of how one man, Bassett, tried to answer the “negro question” presents a challenging narrative. His article in the *South Atlantic Quarterly* that led to the Affair was by no means his first or last attempt to engage in a discussion about race relations. It was during his final years as a doctoral student in history and political science at The Johns Hopkins University in 1893-1894 that Bassett began privately and publicly making appeals to reform the South. Even after the uproar at his 1903 remarks, Bassett continued, albeit with greater caution, to promote progressive views on how the South should deal with the race problem. Although loaded with racism, Bassett’s racial ideology, as compared to mainstream white southern thought, allowed for a more promising place for blacks in society. Furthermore, his liberal views were deeply entrenched in a crusade for freedom of ideas and open dispassionate discourse that would allow for reform in a number of arenas.

A narrative of Bassett’s struggles with his native South reveal that he embraced a dual role as historian and critic, with the ultimate goal of serving as a “physician” to the South. Beyond altering how southerners approached the race question, Bassett sought to make the South less provincial, create a less partisan press, and inspire a greater literary effort on the part of trained southern historians. Bassett’s training at The Johns Hopkins University under Herbert Baxter Adams, one of the preeminent historians of the era,
equipped him with a method of approaching and understanding southern history that was absent in the South in the 1890s. When Bassett became a professor at Trinity College, he sought to challenge not just methodological assumptions about the study of history, but also his fellow southerners’ understanding of their region’s past. This was a monumental task. This thesis, therefore, places Bassett, and his well-known 1903 controversy, in a deeper context of the young professor’s scholarly training, attempts at reform, and experiences with white liberals, black leaders, and white supremacists in the New South.

Bassett clearly saw himself as both historian and reformer, but how in particular did he hope to affect change? As a professor at one of the more progressive colleges in the South, Bassett saw his classroom as a starting point. Train the promising and ambitious college students to think “objectively” and they would become leading citizens of influence in North Carolina and the South. Scholarly journals and newspapers would provide another forum for addressing contemporary issues plaguing the South. And, as his reputation grew, the Trinity professor gave countless speeches in the South and the North that offered a new way of thinking about the South’s past and present. Bassett, like many scholars at his time, was not content with seclusion in the ivory tower; rather, he sought to facilitate and lead the public in a dialogue about current events.

In doing so, however, he had to tread with care. Indeed, Bassett, and many other “progressive” scholars in the South, were often guarded in the views they expressed in the public arena. Through his writing and the various organizations to which he belonged, Bassett also became plugged into a network of intellectuals who influenced how he operated. It was in private correspondence to this group of highly educated white men
that Bassett recorded his “uncensored” views on the South and its problems. This channel was a two-way street; Bassett used this network not only to express his own views but also to hear the views of his respected peers.

These relationships eventually led Bassett to grow bolder, and more candid, in airing his views. By 1902 his ambition to change how white southerners dealt with issues of politics and race, boost their literary effort, and foster a more accurate account of southern history materialized into his ultimate attempt to reform the South, the *South Atlantic Quarterly*. This journal was the primary medium to which Bassett thought he could “dispassionately” create a forum that would advance the South intellectually.

In a speech given to the Trinity Historical Society Bassett told his students: “If we write the history of a given period we should make it stand out faithfully in the entire life of that period. If we write the history of a man’s life, we should make it a portrayal of all the forces of life, so far as they affect him, with which he came into contact.”

Exploring Bassett’s own narrative requires implementing the charge he gave his students: to understand the individual a historian must accurately portray the ever-changing environment in which that individual lived. The political and social conditions in North Carolina during the transition into the twentieth century were tumultuous. His actions and thoughts were undoubtedly connected with the time and place he lived, that he did not fit into his surroundings perfectly did not lessen the influence that they had on him.

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His narrative thus sheds light on not only his own life, but also on the life of Trinity College, North Carolina, and the South as a whole.

By 1903 North Carolina had been through forty years of tremendous political upheaval and remained intensely divided. During Reconstruction and continuing on into the early 1890s blacks had held public office throughout the eastern parts of the state. In 1894 the Populist Party became pivotal to the political landscape of North Carolina, dethroning the Democrats from a majority in the state senate for the first time since 1876. Populists found a new alliance with Republicans, inaugurating the “fusion period” (1895-1901) in North Carolina politics. Eventually Democrats would regain power by radicalizing around the issue of race. During the “fusion period” North Carolinians became intensely emotional about the “Negro question.” Democrats, led by Senator Furnifold Simmons, helped to stir the pot, by exaggerating and sometimes fabricating stories of white women being raped by black men in counties with a black majority. Simmons made the connection between black crime and black politics explicit and threatening. This “brilliant strategy” specifically sought to engender fear in those who had voted Populist in the piedmont and Republican in the western part of the state that

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5 Gilmore. Gender and Jim Crow, 77-78.
their votes had endangered white women in the East.⁶

Outspoken dissenters against these white supremacy campaigns often paid a stiff price and thus, protests became milder and less frequent. Some dissenters, like Thomas E. Watson and Lewis Harvie Blair, had initially advocated for uniting the two races and providing equality to African Americans, but eventually reversed their stances and fell into the white supremacist line.⁷ Other dissenters, including Bassett, actually held strongly racist views, emphatically maintaining that blacks were inferior to whites socially and intellectually. Most of these “heretics” also felt that southern progressivism was for white men only and that solutions to questions of race should and could only be solved by southern white males.

According to George Washington Cable there was also a “Silent South”; a large portion of the southern population who believed that the white supremacy campaigns were not the solution. Part of this “Silent South” was the intellectually elite who were “conditioned by the need for patience and persuasion.”⁸ The trend, as Joel Williamson and other historians have suggested, was that the “native heretics” who did speak out often became so frustrated with the South that they migrated north and continued to speak of reform in exile.

Trinity College in many ways harbored and bred members of this “Silent South.”

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⁶Ibid., 92.
Republican patrons, most notably the tobacco magnate Duke family, coupled with Trinity’s northern influences in the administration and faculty, meant that the college often became a target for North Carolinian Democrats, like Josephus Daniels. Furthermore, Trinity, especially under the leadership of John C. Kilgo, did not shy away from confrontation with white supremacists like Daniels. Their ongoing feud revolved around several issues regarding politics and educational reform. Kilgo opposed the use of state funds to grant scholarships and free tuition to students to attend the University of North Carolina (UNC), or for that matter, any public college in the state. Identifying this as an unfair practice in deterring students from choosing denominational colleges such as Trinity, Kilgo argued that this funding only “showed that the state schools could not compete with the Christian colleges on the ground of pure merit.” For his stance, Kilgo drew the ire of Daniels, the Democratic Party, and virtually all North Carolinians who “favored state or secular education.”

Kilgo’s views were emblematic of many others at Trinity who thought progressively about race but quite conservatively in terms of education and religion. This contentious relationship between Kilgo and his critics would only be exacerbated by the political and social conditions from the time he took the presidency to the Bassett Affair. But Kilgo, Bassett, and other members of the college saw Trinity as a place that would not succumb to the pressures of the state and region. Despite becoming targets of so many prominent North Carolinians, or perhaps because of this belligerent spirit, Trinity

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9 For the most detailed work on Kilgo, see Paul N. Garber, *John Carlisle Kilgo, President of Trinity College, 1894-1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1937).
10 Garber, 55.
11 Garber, 66.
experienced tremendous institutional growth during these years.\(^\text{12}\)

Bassett’s own experiences, therefore, intertwined with the tumultuous conditions of both Trinity and the state of North Carolina. Kilgo would become one of Bassett’s most loyal supporters, defending the young professor without reservation during his time under the public microscope. Embracing this context is necessary in fully appreciating Bassett’s struggles and methods to reform the South. Consequently, examining Bassett’s individual story allows for deeper understanding of Trinity College and North Carolina during the years 1888 to 1906. It also tells an important and underappreciated story about a network of racially liberal white southerners operating in a period dominated by white supremacists.

Although many historians mention John Spencer Bassett, few provide much detail into Bassett’s life both before and after the 1903 Affair. The most in-depth coverage of the Bassett Affair comes from Earl Porter’s, *Trinity and Duke, 1892-1924: Foundations of Duke University*.\(^\text{13}\) Porter studies the controversy from Trinity’s perspective, paying close attention to the conversations among the faculty, administration, members of the Board of Trustees, and others invested in the college. Porter’s coverage of the Bassett affair, although detailed, is written to demonstrate the evolution of Trinity as it became, in 1924, Duke University, one of the most reputable educational institutions in the South.

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\(^{12}\)In 1896, Kilgo published a pamphlet, *Christian Education: Its Aims and Superiority*, that outlined why a Christian education was superior to a secular one. See Garber, 59. The public attacks were primarily led by *Raleigh News and Observer*, the *Wilmington Messenger*, and *Webster’s Weekly*. See Garber, 70. The editor of *Webster’s Weekly*, John R. Webster, was actually a Trinity graduate (class of 1869). It is also important to note that many publications (usually religious ones) came to his defense or at the very least called the attacks on Kilgo as overreactions. See Garber, 69.

For Porter, the Bassett affair stands, above all else, as a symbol of academic freedom and a victory for Trinity and the South.

Wendell Holmes Stephenson’s two articles in the 1948 *North Carolina Historical Review* offer far more detail about Bassett’s work as a historian. In the first article, “John Spencer Bassett As Historian of the South,” Stephenson enumerates Bassett’s published works, praising the professor for his accomplishments and efforts as a pioneer historian to the South. His second article, “The Negro in the Thinking and Writing of John Spencer Bassett,” takes a more comprehensive look at Bassett’s work in regards to race. Both articles are excellent starting points in a more general examination of Bassett’s work as a historian. But Stephenson’s work, written in 1948, lacks the sort of nuance and detail that one can obtain only through studying wider documentation and secondary sources.14

Joel Williamson’s *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* focuses primarily on southern dissent, while recognizing the context in which dissenters, like Bassett, operated.15 The narrative of John Spencer Bassett and his trials in the Jim Crow South are important to Williamson’s taxonomy of southern mentalities: liberal, conservative, and radical. He identifies Bassett as a “staunch conservative” in a time in which to be conservative was to be heretical.16 According to Williamson, Bassett was not against racism nor did he think that blacks were equal to whites; rather he opposed the radicalized white supremacist movement. As that

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16Ibid., 262.
movement was at the forefront for change and reform in the South, standing against it, according to Williamson, made one a conservative.

Although Williamson’s work contributes to the understanding of the Bassett Affair and how it fits into the story of the Jim Crow South, it lacks several crucial dimensions. First, Williamson does not delve deeply into the events and relationships that preceded the Affair. Bassett’s experiences at The Johns Hopkins University and his network of friends and supporters are essential to understanding his attempts at reform. Only by reference to Bassett’s apparent southern and northern mentalities, and only through a detailed look at Bassett’s activities, correspondences, speeches, papers, and articles from before and after the controversy of 1903, can one fully comprehend the action he took that year and the response that it engendered. In doing so, what becomes apparent is that Bassett’s mindset cannot be systematically categorized in the way Williamson suggests.

Lastly, Williamson writes of Bassett to show that he also fits in a category of southerners who dissented and then retreated. The Bassett Affair, to Williamson, becomes an event that supports his notion of a pattern he calls the “one-shot style of Southern leadership.” What is lost in this is Bassett’s individual experience. He was certainly not aware of these groupings and his narrative is far more complicated than Williamson’s account. Bassett should not be seen as a robot programmed to dissent and then self-destruct. His experiences in the South and North, his relationships, his articles and speeches were all deeply connected with the political and social atmosphere of North Carolina between 1888 and 1906. He had, as did many of his opponents, insecurities

17 Ibid., 287.
about how southern white men were to handle issues of race. Furthermore, Bassett’s 1903 editorial was in no ways his first or his last attempt to reform the South. His racial ideology and his solutions for the South evolved throughout his academic tenure. Therefore, Bassett’s role as an intellectual reformer can emerge only through a detailed narrative that carefully analyzes his life-long struggle with his native South.

Although Bassett viewed himself as a reformer and southerner, throughout his tenure at Trinity he primarily saw himself as a trained historian. He became part of a cohort of “objective” scholars who placed history and historiography in the vanguard of reform efforts. His connections to these other like-minded scholars primarily stemmed from his studies at Hopkins under Herbert Baxter Adams. Upon his return to Trinity, however, his network would dramatically grow and included some of the most influential historians of the era including Albert B. Hart, Frederic Bancroft, William A. Dunning, Walter Hines Page, and Woodrow Wilson. By the time Bassett was gaining a national reputation, however, all these men were tucked away in the North hoping to encourage and embolden the young Bassett from afar. He sought to build relationships and organize the handful of trained and “objective” historians who remained in the South but with limited success. Of this southern contingent, William E. Dodd of Randolph-Macon College, became Bassett’s closest confidant and friend outside of Trinity. Dodd and this cohort of historians are essential to illuminating Bassett’s narrative as he wrestled with how he as a historian could elicit change in the South.
Chapter 1: A “Scientific Historian,” 1867-1897

Bassett’s Early Education

Born on September 10, 1867 in Tarboro, North Carolina, Bassett grew up in a rural area of the state in a devoutly Methodist household. His mother, Mary Jane Wilson, was originally from Maine but moved to North Carolina when her father took a job in the state.18 His father, Richard Baxter Bassett, was a builder who was “deeply religious, absolutely opposed to slavery, charitable, hospitable, industrious, and generous in his expenditure of money.”19 Richard’s antislavery views, however, did not stop him from serving in the Confederate army as a soldier and then as a manufacturer. John Spencer was born two years after the conclusion of the Civil War, growing up in a time and place where the questions surrounding emancipation and a newly interracial southern society were salient and all-consuming.

Wendell Holmes Stephenson argued that it was during Bassett’s adolescent years in the “piedmont environment” that he developed a strong connection with “the common man, whether black or white.”20 Bassett’s childhood was not well documented and statements like Stephenson’s are difficult to evaluate. A memoir written in 1943 by Bassett’s wife, Jessie Lewellin, provides a brief glimpse into Bassett’s childhood. Written fifteen years after his death and over fifty years since the events of his childhood the memoir hardly should be considered flawless.21 It does make clear, however, that the

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21 Jessie Bassett, “John Spencer Bassett.”
Bassett family moved frequently but remained in rural areas and in the eastern part of the state.

John went to a public high school in Goldsboro. Here he first encountered Edwin A. Alderman, a University of North Carolina graduate who would later serve as the president of three different universities: North Carolina, Tulane, and Virginia. While in North Carolina, Alderman worked closely with Booker T. Washington to promote African-American education while also supporting Henry G. Connor, a North Carolina Democratic legislator who ran on a white supremacy platform in 1898. Alderman, like Bassett, was a deeply intellectual southerner whose views on race were complicated, contradictory, and constantly evolving.

Following graduation, Bassett fell ill with pneumonia and did not enroll in Jefferson Davis Military Academy until 1885, where he graduated a year later. As a “sensitive, impressionable, and somewhat shy” eighteen-year old, John entered into the junior class at Trinity College in Randolph County, a small rural county in the center of North Carolina.

In the two years Bassett was a student at Trinity he witnessed major change and a new era in the life of the College. Much of this change was due to the leadership of the new president, John Franklin Crowell, who took the helm in 1887. Crowell, a twenty-nine-year-old Pennsylvanian and Yale graduate, was an unlikely choice for most southern colleges at the time. However, Trinity’s Board of Trustees intentionally looked north for

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23 Jessie Bassett, “John Spencer Bassett.”
both its hiring and its ideological influences, seeking a man that would bring “progressive management” and “fresh ideas” without being caught up in the politics of the Methodist church.\textsuperscript{24} Crowell, the Board believed, was the progressive leader that could increase Trinity’s visibility and reputation beyond the borders of North Carolina and the South.

For Bassett, the most important reformation came from Crowell’s approach to liberal education. Influenced by the German model, Crowell wanted to give Trinity students a broader curriculum with an emphasis on experience in research. He greatly enhanced and expanded the social sciences to which Bassett gravitated.\textsuperscript{25} Handcuffed by limited resources, Crowell found it challenging to implement his vision fully for the College during Bassett’s years as a student. Yet, Bassett’s experience at the Crowell-led Trinity served as a launching pad for his graduate studies and future career in academia.

Crowell’s leadership produced a new campus, revamped curriculum, and fresh direction for Trinity. Though the name change was still some twenty-five years away, Trinity College was undergoing the metamorphosis that would ultimately produce Duke University. As Trinity grew, Crowell hired new faculty who embraced his approach to education.\textsuperscript{26} Fittingly Bassett would become one of Crowell’s last hires as president in 1894 and was even in consideration to become Crowell’s presidential successor.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{24}Porter, \textit{Trinity and Duke}, 6. Porter concludes, “The choice of a Northern man was not mere impulse... Indeed, Crowell was not the only Northern man approached.” John W. Saborn of Albion, New York was also considered for the presidency.

\textsuperscript{25}Ibid., 26. For more on the German model of education and its influence on American education, see Dorothy Ross, \textit{The Origins of American Social Science} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

\textsuperscript{26}William I. Cranford and Edwin Mims were two other examples of Crowell hires with graduate experience.

Although Bassett was at the beginning of Trinity’s transformation into a nationally recognized college, he epitomized the graduate that Crowell wanted Trinity to produce. In 1888 Bassett graduated from Trinity in a class of twenty. In his class were two other notable graduates, Theodore E. McCrary and Daniel C. Roper, both of whom went on to prominent careers in politics. McCrary became a lawyer and then later a Republican leader and legislator in North Carolina. Roper became a leading Democrat and presidential cabinet member under Woodrow Wilson. Bassett would become both a product and an agent of Trinity’s transformation and growing reputation. Immediately following his graduation at Trinity, Bassett taught in the Durham public schools for two years and then returned to Trinity’s preparatory department as principal and English teacher. From there he looked for an opportunity to challenge himself as a student and teacher.

Herbert Baxter Adams and The Johns Hopkins University

_They went North not to become Yankees, but to be better Southerners. They were already good, and they wanted to be the best._

John Spencer Bassett “went North,” as Joel Williamson puts it, to become a “better Southerner.” Bassett was part of the first wave that made it only as far as Baltimore and

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28“Class of 1888”, appears to be dated 1923, Trinity College Miscellany, Box 42, JSB Papers, LC.
30Jessie Bassett, “John Spencer Bassett.”
31Williamson, _The Crucible of Race_, 359.
The Johns Hopkins University where he found a "distinctly pro-Southern intellectual environment." Although Baltimore lay south of the Mason-Dixon line, to Bassett and other southerners, Johns Hopkins, was worlds apart from the South they had grown up in. The university’s distinctly “liberal” character had resulted from the efforts of Herbert Baxter Adams, a northerner whose progressive, globally influenced thinking and teaching at Hopkins created an enclave for southerners exposed to the limitations of provincialism in the South. It was through Adams and Johns Hopkins that Bassett, and many of his fellow southern scholars, found refuge and inspiration to become more equipped intellectuals while distancing themselves from southern stigmas.

Bassett’s experience at Johns Hopkins also opened the door for connections and influence that branched north and west of Baltimore. Southern boys trekking north in academic pursuits was neither new nor surprising, as the South simply had no major academic research institutions. Furthermore, the specific path to Hopkins was a well-traveled one for southerners in pursuit of high academic standards. By 1891, the year Bassett applied to Hopkins, several of Bassett’s peers throughout the South were going to Johns Hopkins and even further north to Harvard and Columbia.

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35 A few examples include William Garrott Brown, William Preston Few, and Woodrow Wilson. Brown went to Harvard for his undergraduate work and then stayed in 1892 for his master’s degree. See Williamson, 359. Few attended Wofford College (Spartanburg, South Carolina), would teach for several years and then go to graduate school at Harvard in 1892. The most notable example of a southerner going north, however, would be Woodrow Wilson who spent his childhood in Virginia, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Wilson attended Davidson College for one year before moving onto Princeton and eventually completing his doctorate at Hopkins in 1886. By 1903 Bassett was in communication with all three of these men.
Although Bassett had the credentials and references that would have made him a viable candidate for all of those schools, Hopkins was the best fit. This was in large part due to Bassett’s keen interest in history and the prospect of working with Adams, a leading historian of the time.\textsuperscript{36} Adams became central not only to Bassett’s development at Johns Hopkins, but also to his later work as a teacher, researcher, and writer during his time at Trinity. Adams, in fact, was deeply interested in the South, and understood well the inextricable link between conditions in the South and the wellbeing of the nation as a whole. In this regard he saw Johns Hopkins as a training facility for the best southern minds, a place where they not only could pursue their own academic goals but also to develop the tools to reform a region in dire need of enlightened leadership. Adams had a track record of inspiring southerners who would go on to have tremendous impacts on the social, educational, and political scenes both in the South and the entire nation.\textsuperscript{37}

The biggest advocate for Bassett’s admission to Hopkins was Stephen B. Weeks, a professor at Trinity during Bassett’s years of teaching at the preparatory school. Weeks was a University of North Carolina graduate who had also received his doctorate under Adams at Hopkins. Like Bassett, Weeks had grown up in eastern North Carolina and felt the need to leave his state in furtherance of his education. Weeks returned to North Carolina in 1891 where he was hired by Crowell to head up the History and Political Science Department at Trinity. He was one of the first of many to establish Trinity as a

\textsuperscript{36}Jessie Bassett, “John Spencer Bassett.”
\textsuperscript{37}Again, see Brown, Few, Wilson as examples. Evidence of JHU having a large representation of southerners can be found in Wendell H. Stephenson, “Herbert B. Adams and Southern Historical Scholarship at the Johns Hopkins University.”
“colony” of Hopkins, as many Hopkins graduates took positions teaching at Trinity.\textsuperscript{38} Crowell was pleased to hire a Hopkins graduate, especially one who had been exposed to detailed historical inquiry and research. Additionally, Weeks established the Trinity College Historical Society, which Bassett would later inherit.

Although Weeks had been at Trinity for only a few months and had not spent significant time with Bassett, he felt inclined to write Adams about Bassett’s prospects at Hopkins. In his letter, he commended Bassett for his reputation as a “diligent and faithful student” and added that “he [Bassett], like the rest of us, has not gone far into the subject, but he is ready and willing to learn.”\textsuperscript{39} Weeks also emphasized that pursuing the field of history in North Carolina had limits and that he, and other southern intellectuals, had to go to places like Hopkins to find excellent scholarship. Weeks continued, “Besides, Trinity College is now definitely connected with Johns Hopkins through myself. I claim Mr. Bassett as the fruit of my labor for the higher culture of North Carolina.”\textsuperscript{40} It was remarkable that Weeks would call Bassett the “fruit of my labor” considering how little he had interacted with Bassett at the time. But Weeks clearly felt invested in Bassett, perhaps because he saw in Bassett his younger self, a southerner trying to escape the educational limits of the state and region.

It was connections like this one between Weeks, Bassett, and Adams that fostered this trend of going north. As he continued his career in academia, these connections would grow into a support network that bound Bassett to other professors and

\textsuperscript{38}Stephenson, “John Spencer Bassett As Historian of the South,” 290.
\textsuperscript{39}Stephen Weeks to Herbert Adams, September 26, 1891, JSB Papers, LC.
\textsuperscript{40}Ibid. Hopkins offered six scholarships at the time, typically only given to students in the state of Maryland, and Bassett applied for an honorary scholarship for financial purposes.
intellectuals throughout the country. As a result, an event like the Bassett Affair became of much greater interest to professors at Johns Hopkins, Emory, Vanderbilt, Columbia, Harvard, and elsewhere. This connection between southern and northern intellectuals started because men like Weeks and Bassett felt it necessary to leave the South temporarily, and sometimes permanently, in order to realize their full academic ambitions. What evolved, for Bassett, was a channel of highly educated men to whom he could discuss and debate in safe company issues sensitive to the South, primarily the "negro question."

Until his death in 1901, Herbert B. Adams was the central figure in this channel. For it was in Adams that Bassett not only found a teacher and mentor, but also a "worthy friend" who inspired him to take up the challenging issues that plagued the South.41 Bassett wrote glowingly, "No man ever had to a greater extent the faculty of inspiring boys to work....A prime notion of this was that young students ought to be encouraged to write. This just suited me. From the earliest stage of my education it seemed to me that the thing most worth doing in life was to write books. There was never a time when I did not have some notion of a literary life." When Bassett left Hopkins he would become a prolific researcher and writer, with Adams continuing to serve as his closest advisor and confidant.

In bold letters plastered onto the wall of Herbert B. Adams's seminar classroom was the motto: "History is past Politics and Politics are present History."42 The mission

41 Jessie Bassett, "John Spencer Bassett."
42 Image found in Raymond J. Cunningham, "Is History Past Politics? Herbert Baxter Adams as Precursor of the 'New History'" The History Teacher 9, no. 2 (February, 1976): 248. This motto was first coined by the English historian, Edward A. Freeman.
of Adams’s seminar at Hopkins was not just to train students to interpret and write about the past, but also to become influential citizens, facilitating and leading discussion about current issues through the lens of history. In a speech delivered to the American Historical Association in 1896 Adams asserted: “It must be fully recognized that history is past politics, past philosophy, past civilization, past sociology, and included all man’s recorded action and experience in organized society.” Adams, a major proponent of his students taking interests in the current events, undoubtedly encouraged Bassett to use his knowledge and skills as historian but also to stir up discussion about pertinent contemporary matters.

But Adams’s influence went much further than just motivating Bassett and his classmates to engage with the public. He systemically trained Hopkins men to become “scientific historians,” running classes like “laboratories where books are treated like mineralogical specimens, passed about from hand to hand, examined, and tested.” W. Stull Holt explained in his 1940 article, “The Idea of Scientific History in America,” that there were two main groupings of these “scientific historians.” The first tried to create a clearer link between history and the natural sciences, particularly biology and Darwinian thought. Meanwhile, the second and more “numerous” group, in which Adams and Bassett fell, believed that authentic history could be achieved through “complete objectivity” and a utilization of the “recently perfected method.” For this second group of

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Historians, Leopard von Ranke, not Darwin, was the pioneer.\textsuperscript{45} Historians were to be “objective” investigators who used primary sources in applying the “scientific method” to historical problems. Crucial to Bassett’s self-identify was that he saw himself as “objective” and a “scientific historian.” These emphases were central to the shared value system between Bassett and his network of intellectual peers.

This sort of rational and detached thinking would often put these highly educated men in a bind when it came to issues of race. Racism for Bassett and his peers, could be rationalized by the “scientific consensus that blacks were genetically inferior.”\textsuperscript{46} Still, as historian Edward Ayers contends, southerners like Bassett who trained under Adams “found themselves in conflict with the South to which they returned.” Adams instilled in them a “belief in economic development, sectional reconciliation, and racial moderation” which essentially alienated them from their homeland. As they returned they found what Ayers terms as “vitriolic critics beyond the walls of the college, critics, who had no appreciation for academic freedom, who had developed no taste for friendly criticism by some upstart infected Yankee notions.”\textsuperscript{47} When Bassett became a professor at Trinity, this was the environment he faced.

Inspired by his work at Hopkins and wanting to establish his reputation as an “objective” historian, Bassett submitted a letter to the \textit{New York Evening News}
expressing his opinions on European immigration to the South. The primary aim of the letter was to respond to a recent convention of several southern state governors, at which they agreed that the South needed to secure more immigrants as a way to boost industrial conditions. Bassett argued that the “South has no business to go immigrant-hunting” because immigrants would find the South unappealing for three reasons: wages, education, and lawlessness. First, he stated, in the South “the wage standard is fixed by negro laborers” and thus the North and West could offer wages nearly double that of the South. Second, Bassett claimed that the South guaranteed public schooling for three to five months of the year, whereas the Northwest offered it five to eight months. “If the [European immigrant] prizes education for his children-and if he does not prize it he is not worth having-he will not go to the South.” Third, Bassett explained, most European immigrants come from a place where “Government is much more absolute” and police surveillance did not allow for lynching. Therefore, an immigrant would find the act of lynching to be incomprehensible and condemn such a community as lawless. Fittingly, the article directly beneath Bassett’s letter was titled “Another Negro Lynched” referring to an incident in Columbus, Mississippi, in which a black man was taken from the police to be hanged.

In the opening paragraphs of the letter, Bassett referred to himself as a “loyal Southerner, who desires the industrial prosperity of my section.” Although this article was directly addressing the problems that immigrants would find with the region, implicit

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48 “Southern Immigration: Some Practical Obstacles to It Plainly Stated,” New York Evening News, Thursday, July 13, 1893, JSB Collection, Duke. He was in his final year at Hopkins when he wrote this letter.
in the article was that these were the problems, regardless of immigration, that Bassett found in the South.

With this letter, Bassett was testing the waters at an early point in his academic career. To be sure, the letter revealed him to be a skilled researcher and writer. But it did much more than that. Most importantly, it recorded Bassett's first major attempt to reform the South through thoughtful discourse. The letter to the Evening News offered insight into how Bassett felt the South could heal its wounds. "The impediment is in the human factor," Bassett concluded. He, like many of his fellow southerners, felt that reform needed to be inspired and led by southerners themselves, specifically white males. He pinpointed education as the primary source of how that reform would start, but he put the onus on a fundamental change in individual thought in the South. He insisted that, "southerners must do more for themselves," stating that, "[s]elf-help is the most effective means of winning the confidence of men." The irony, of course, was that Bassett was writing this to a northern newspaper. In fact, throughout Bassett's career he often expressed ideas of reform to a northern audience in hopes that they might help educate and inspire their neighbors to the south. Such were the paradoxical and convoluted attempts in which Bassett would ask the North to help the South help itself.

His pleas to a northern audience could have easily reflected three other motives. One, perhaps he wished the North to see the South in a better light by showing them an intelligent southern man like himself. Two, he could have been reaching out in order to gain northern sympathy and support for himself and other southerners who felt they were in the minority. Three, and perhaps the most likely explanation, Bassett, brimming with
ambition and newfound skills from his training at Hopkins, was likely eager for opportunities to get his writing published and start making a name for himself. The article started a trend in which Bassett appealed to a northern audience about the problems facing the South, serving as a sort of "informant" to the North about the seriousness of southern problems.

The article reflected Bassett's racial ideology. Bassett stated explicitly that white laborers in the North and West were more intelligent than the black laborers of the South. Bassett purposely deviated from his main argument in order to stress that the majority of southerners were opposed to lynching. Those who supported lynching were the "worse element" of southern society. His denouncement of lynching was grounded in the fact that it was "lawless" and demonstrated southerners' inability to control "passions when they see a degraded wretch violate what they consider the most sacred virtues is but an incident of their social life." He contended, "lynching will gradually disappear" when blacks become more "intelligent and independent" and white men become more "self-restrained." Although inherently racist, Bassett's words in 1893 still offered a sense that he saw promise in African-American progress. Throughout his career self-control and dispassion were virtues that Bassett emphatically and consistently preached as vital elements in the reformation of the South. Bassett believed African-American advancement and white self-control would occur with industrial and social progress.

A few months after submitting this article to the Evening News, Bassett secured a job back at his alma mater. He would not take up the post until a year later when he finished his doctorate at Hopkins. When he returned to North Carolina, he returned with
training under one of the best-known historians of the time whose influence would remain immeasurable for the remainder of Bassett's life. Additionally, now that Bassett was a Hopkins graduate and an Adams disciple, he was plugged into a network of academicians who would become vitally important to his writing and actions in subsequent years. Upon taking his doctorate in 1894, he left Baltimore equipped with the tools as a "scientific" historian, ambition, and confidence to return to the South as not only a teacher but also a public intellectual.

Bassett at Trinity

Trinity had also been transformed following Basset's graduation in 1888. A move to Durham in 1892, as Porter describes, brought on two years of "unrelieved tension and struggle" due to financial debt. No one felt the brunt of this more than President Crowell, who desperately tried to increase enrollment and keep the College afloat. The College's financial woes soon prompted several members of the faculty to resign. Stephen B. Weeks was one of the first departing faculty members, and in a letter to Adams he expressed his anger at the College and Crowell specifically.

It was Weeks's departure that opened the door for Bassett's reentry to Trinity as a member of the faculty and chairman of the History Department. During that same year Crowell, due to a multitude of factors including a feud concerning football at Trinity, decided that his time at Trinity was over and offered his resignation. Crowell wrote to

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50 Ibid., 42.
Bassett in the spring of 1894 letting Bassett know that he might end up at Columbia as a fellow and leave Trinity. 51 Crowell also told Bassett that the young professor would need to teach science in addition to history. As Bassett, and other new members of the faculty, would find out, Trinity would be shorthanded and "sweatshop" teaching was necessary. 52 Crowell also offered encouragement in the letter, praising one of Bassett’s proposed courses that Crowell felt "will do much to connect history with current events—a thing which is too much overlooked in the historical revival." 53

Just a few weeks later Bassett received a letter from B.B. Nicholson, an attorney in Washington, North Carolina, and a member of Trinity’s Board, inquiring about Bassett’s potential interest in the presidency left vacant by Crowell’s departure. 54 Crowell also wrote to Bassett encouraging him to pursue the opportunity. 55 During the hiring process, Trinity’s Board of Trustees tapped into Bassett’s acquaintances in order to hear how they felt the young scholar would perform as president. Both Herbert Baxter Adams and Woodrow Wilson received letters asking for their recommendations of Bassett. It was not altogether clear as to why Wilson was chosen to speak on Bassett’s behalf. Wilson was certainly tied to Trinity as he had recently spoken at the college in a lecture series, but his connection to Bassett was less clear. 56 In a small world of historians and through Wilson’s ties to both Trinity and Hopkins, Bassett and Wilson were likely to have

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52 Porter, 32.
53 Crowell to Bassett, April 28, 1894, JSB Papers, LC.
54 B.B. Nicholson to Bassett, May 14, 1894, JSB Papers, LC.
55 Crowell to Bassett, May 30, 1894, JSB Papers, LC.
56 Porter, 50. Crowell had also pursued William Jennings Bryan to speak at this event, but was turned down by Bryan for unspecified reasons.
crossed paths, but even in his reply, Wilson admitted that he had had very little direct contact with Bassett in person. Nevertheless, Wilson wrote of Bassett in glowing terms, commending him for his "sagacity" and claiming that Bassett was a "man of intelligent, discriminating, and steady judgment, and that his scholarship was of the same type: equable, careful, open-eyed." Wilson’s praise revealed both the strong reputation that Bassett had garnered during his years at Hopkins and the beginning stages of Bassett’s entry into a network of the intellectual elite. Members of this network, as Wilson demonstrated, took notice of their colleagues’ pursuits; a trend that had also been reflected in Weeks’s letter of recommendation supporting Bassett’s admittance into Hopkins. Bassett would return this favor to other countless rising scholars, including many of his own students who pursued jobs in academia. Wilson, Adams, and others were keenly interested in the improvement of the South and felt it would take men like Bassett to help inspire the region.

Despite the strong recommendations, in the end, Bassett declined to pursue the position and after a long process, Trinity’s Board finally elected its new president, John C. Kilgo, in July 1894. The thirty-three-year-old Kilgo had earned a strong reputation as speaker, educator, and financial administrator with his work at Wofford College and the Methodist Church in South Carolina.

When Bassett returned to his alma mater to begin teaching that fall, he found the

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57 Wilson to Nicholson, June 1, 1894, JSB Papers, LC. On August 11 Wilson wrote Bassett telling him that his letter had been sent back to him and that Nicholson must have never received it. Wilson to Bassett, August 11, 1894, LC.

58 The documentation provides no answers as to why Bassett declined the opportunity to pursue the presidency. Perhaps it was in large part due to the fact that he saw himself more as a historian than a high-level administrator.
college on a different campus and with a different president from his time as a student. Additionally, the faculty had changed. There were ten faculty members to teach the one-hundred-and-fifty students who attended Trinity. These ten men, for the most part, reflected Crowell’s vision of having a faculty with graduate experience. William I. Cranford, for example, who joined the faculty as a professor of philosophy, had received a PhD from Yale before returning to Trinity as a faculty member. Another member of the faculty, one who would become a close friend to Bassett, was Edwin Mims, who received a Master’s from Vanderbilt University before becoming a professor of English at Trinity. With such a faculty and a growing enrollment, Trinity’s reputation was rising on the national level.

Bassett’s own reputation had also grown. He had been elected as a member of the American Institute of Civics and the American Historical Association. “The Institute’s chief aim is to incite citizens to efforts which shall everywhere result in the promotion of better citizenship, better government, and better social conditions,” ran the letter of invitation from the American Institute of Civics. “Only those who seek, in themselves, to represent the best type of American citizenship, can be expected to appreciate or take part in a work of this character.” As Bassett’s career unfolded, he certainly fit the mold of

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60The ten members of the faculty in 1894 were: John S. Bassett (History and Science), William I. Cranford (Philosophy), Edwin Mims (English), William H. Pegram (Chemistry), M.H. Lockwood (Physics), Robert Lee Flowers (Mathematics), Jerome Dowd (Political Economy and Sociology), Olin Boggess (Greek and French), M.H. Arnold (Latin and German), A.H. Meritt (on leave to Europe but would return in 1895 to teach Greek, Latin, and German). See Garber, *John Carlisle Kilgo*, 102.
61Henry Randall Waite to Bassett, August 4, 1894, JSB Papers, LC. Waite was the acting president of the American Institute of Civics of which Woodrow Wilson was a member; Adams to Bassett, June 12, 1894, JSB Papers, LC. Adams informs Bassett of his election to membership in the American Historical Association. Bassett was also elected into the Virginia Historical Society on August 10, 1895.
trying to "incite citizens" for social progress. The American Historical Association (AHA), however, became far more essential to how Bassett operated. Attending the annual conventions and frequently corresponding and meeting with other members, Bassett used the AHA as a central means by which to connect with fellow scholars.

Despite Trinity's transformation and its emerging status as a highly regarded institution, Bassett sometimes doubted whether he was in the right place. From 1894 to his eventual departure in 1906, Bassett pursued other jobs and often commented on how unhappy he was with his meager salary at Trinity and with the challenges of being a progressive thinker in the constrictive environment of North Carolina. Just a few months into Bassett's teaching at Trinity, Adams wrote to encourage his protégé: "It is undoubtedly more pleasant in many respects to be here [at Hopkins] as a student than to be in North Carolina as a teacher; but you will have the growing consciousness of doing useful and constructive work." In the spring semester of 1895 Bassett inquired about the pay for a job opening at Adelbert College of Western Reserve in Ohio. Bassett also reached out to Adams in hopes of finding an opening, but Adams responded that there were no prospects that would be financially better than his current $1,200 annual salary at Trinity. Contributing to the young professor's duress was the tremendous teaching load required as a result of the understaffed faculty.

Bassett's spirits and attitude towards Trinity, however, lifted over the summer of

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62 Almost all the work that has been done on Bassett neglects his numerous attempts to get out of Trinity well before the Bassett Affair. It seemed that had a promising opportunity opened up from 1896-1903, Bassett would have certainly accepted it.
63 Adams to Bassett, October 22, 1894, JSB Papers, LC.
64 Bassett to ? April 8th, 1895, JSB Papers, LC.
65 Adams to Bassett, May 29, 1895, JSB Papers, LC.
1895. That year, he wrote to Adams optimistically about his faith in President Kilgo and the direction of Trinity, telling his mentor “I hope this may be the beginning of a new era.”

His scholarly attention was directed at constructing a comprehensive history of African Americans in North Carolina. He struggled with whether this history was to be more on “Slavery or on the Negro,” while also feeling anxious about the small number of primary sources available to him. Adams, however, urged him to continue this pursuit and placed him in contact with S.G. Atkins, a prominent black educator. Atkins was directing the North Carolina Negro Teacher’s Association and the Slater Industrial Academy, both of which were in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The Slater School was one of many established in the South as a result of the philanthropy of John F. Slater, a white northern industrialist. Slater had created the Slater Fund in 1882 to advance the “education of colored children in the South.”

Bassett and Atkins began to work closely together, which eventually led Bassett to accept an invitation to deliver the commencement address at the Slater Industrial School in 1900.

Bassett had also continued to develop connections outside the state with other scholars who shared his interest in the study of African Americans in the South. Through his newfound relationship with Atkins, Bassett looked for opportunities to send bright African Americans to reputable institutions in the North and Midwest. In 1895, Bassett turned to a fellow Hopkins classmate, Thomas Nixon Carver, who was teaching at

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66 Bassett to Adams, July 31, 1895, JSB Papers, LC.
67 Ibid.
69 This speech receives more attention in subsequent sections.
Oberlin College in Ohio. Carver declined Bassett’s offer to send a “N.C. negro boy,” stating that Oberlin already possessed “too many negroes” and that, while some showed promise, many were “shiftless vagabonds.” Bassett’s own views on Carver’s commentary were not clear. However, his writing to Carver on the behalf of this young black student revealed Bassett was, in fact, invested in the education and improvement at the individual level of African Americans in the South. Carver’s response also illustrated that racism was also prevalent in northern colleges.

Additionally Carver exchanged letters with Bassett about southern outrage over the honoring of Frederick Douglass after his death in 1895. Carver wrote, “He was half white and half the honor of his attainments belongs to the southern whites.” He added, “I cannot say that I have any unreasonable prejudice in favor of the negro, but I try to be philosophical enough to have no irrational prejudice against him. I have known people to bestow praise upon negro cooks and servants for their proficiency. I see no reason why equal praise should not be bestowed for equal proficiency in oratory and scholarship where it actually exists.” Although Carver and Bassett’s racial ideologies may have differed, they both were willing to recognize African-American progress and praise certain black leaders.

It was in these early years at Trinity that Bassett also started a relationship with Josephus Daniels, editor of the Raleigh News and Observer. Bassett began sending to Daniels and the News and Observer “Trinity College Notes” that would appear frequently

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70 Carver would go on to become a renowned economist during this time. Although he taught and did graduate work at Hopkins starting in 1891, Carver completed his Ph. D. from Cornell in 1894.
71 T.N. Carver to Bassett, April 1, 1895, JSB Papers, LC.
72 T.N. Carver to Bassett, May 13, 1895, JSB Papers, LC.
in the paper. By October of 1896 Bassett had grown frustrated that Daniels was not publishing the “Notes” in full. He felt that readers of the *News and Observer*, and specifically Methodists in the state, should “know what is happening at their institution.” In a letter to Daniels, Bassett insinuated that Daniels gave far more positive attention to UNC then he did to Trinity. Daniels responded with an amicable letter that briefly explained his decision to omit certain portions of Bassett’s writing and insisted that Bassett and Trinity should be grateful for the work of the *News and Observer*.

Throughout Bassett’s first few years at Trinity he received several letters of praise and admiration for the work he was doing as a teacher at Trinity and as a writer. He used the school newspaper to publish “Historical Papers” which were the only publication of historical articles written by southerners in North Carolina and one of the few present in the South. He was also admired and greatly appreciated by his fellow colleagues and students at Trinity for his work ethic, ambition, and desire to challenge students in their own work. He wrote to his mentor Adams that he felt placed at Trinity to do “God’s work in the field of history.” Bassett continued to increase his role at Trinity while also seeking opportunities to spark change in North Carolina educational reform.

Yet Bassett remained dissatisfied. Living in North Carolina, he complained, was “narrow and uninspiring,” and lamented that if he had a larger salary he could “remedy

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73 Bassett to Josephus E. Daniels, October 5, 1896, JSB Papers, LC.
74 Daniels to Bassett, October 7, 1896, JSB Papers, LC. Daniels writes, “My dear sir and friend...With sentiments of esteem and high regard, I am Sincerely yours, Josephus Daniels.”
75 Bassett received many letters asking if they could publish his article “Regulation and Its Retaliation on the Revolution.”
76 Bassett to Adams, January 16, 1896, JSB Papers, LC.
this deficiency” by going north every summer. Bassett once again played the job market and looked to escape Trinity and the South. Adams implored Bassett to remain strong, stating that “whenever a man fails with limited opportunities, he is sure to fail when opportunities are increased.” When Bassett wrote Adams inquiring about job opportunities towards the end of the 1895-1896 term, Adams advised the young professor to make the most of his work at Trinity.

The truth is the academic market is overstocked. You are very fortunate in having a field of work and influence all your own. You are transforming the historic consciousness of your people and your State. You are making constant contributions to North Carolina literature. You are dispelling illusions and bringing the truth to light. Everybody appreciates you in Trinity College where you are really doing great things and things which will last. Remember, my dear Bassett, it is what you [put] into life and not what you get out of it that is truly eternal.

Adams’s words, though certainly well intentioned, also reflected a patronizing tone and perhaps suggested Bassett belonged at Trinity and in the South, at least for the time being. Adams had trained many young southern scholars who rose to a level of prominence in various professions. Often these Hopkins graduates would end up in the North. Considering Bassett’s expressed desire to help reform the South, and his keen interest and research of African Americans, it would have been reasonable to conclude that Bassett’s effectiveness would be best served from his post at Trinity, a southern but progressive-thinking college. Although confident in and supportive of Bassett, Adams also recognized that the young scholar was only twenty-eight years old and had yet to produce work that would merit taking a post at a high profile northern institution.

77 Ibid.
78 Adams to Bassett, February 8, 1896, JSB Papers, LC.
79 Adams to Bassett, May 15, 1896, JSB Papers, LC.
Adams, who had spent decades at Hopkins building up not only his own reputation but also that of the History Department, saw virtue in remaining at a place long enough to have a meaningful impact. Still, Adams made sure to remain positive with his former student and emphasized his adamant belief that the South needed scholars like Bassett to bring “the truth to light.” This “truth” could only be achieved through detached and objective thought. Bassett’s intellect and training, in Adams’s eyes, equipped the young professor not only construct a more comprehensive and accurate version of southern history but also for the young professor to connect the South’s history to its present conditions.
Chapter 2: A “Physician to the South,” 1897 – 1901

The “historical problem” of the South

Bassett seemed to take heart in Adams’s message, entering the 1897-1898 academic year brimming with enthusiasm and a rejuvenated desire to inspire “a new spirit in the historical work of the South.”80 Bassett wrote Adams confidently, “I am doing more satisfactory work, to myself, than I have done since I have been here.” In short, Trinity and the South were beginning to feel more like a home to him, not a place that he needed to escape in order to find academic and personal fulfillment.

As Bassett’s confidence grew, so did his ambition to reform the methodological approach to southern history as well as the current version of history presented in the South.81 As one of the only trained historians in the state, Bassett sought to rewrite the history of slavery within North Carolina. In doing so he hoped that southerners would gain a more thorough, nuanced, and accurate understanding of their own past. His training at Hopkins as a “scientific historian” made him a firm believer that, equipped with a better understanding of their history, southerners could more capably deal with contemporary issues. Truth could bring light.

In 1896 Bassett published *Slavery and Servitude in the Colony of North Carolina*, in hopes of giving a “partial picture of the real life of slaves.”82 Describing his work as a starting point, Bassett’s prefatory note read: “The story of the negro in the colony of

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80 Bassett to Adams, September 26, 1897, JSB Papers, LC.
81 Speech given to Trinity Historical Society on September 25, 1897. From Tilley, 51 “Published first in the Trinity Archive (January 1898): 177-187, and later in the Christian Educator (March 1898).
North Carolina must be reconstructed out of very unsatisfactory materials. If any point in this monograph should not appear to be treated fully enough it must be considered as due to that cause. Any suggestion of further facts on the subject will be duly appreciated.”

Throughout his writing and personal correspondence Bassett emphasized his belief that a more accurate version of North Carolina history would emerge only when a larger collection of primary sources became available to trained historians. Not content with sitting idly by, Bassett took time to curate materials he deemed valuable to the eventual creation of a more complete history of the state.

A few years after the publication of *Slavery and Servitude in the Colony of North Carolina*, Bassett also finished and published *Anti-Slavery Leaders of North Carolina*. Writing this as a follow-up to his previous work, Bassett wanted North Carolinians not to forget about the “anti-slavery cause” and its white leaders within the South. The first chapter described both the places where—and the reasons why—southern “anti-slavery sentiment” had arisen. Geography, in Bassett’s mind, coupled with “economic, social, and political forces” resulted in several portions of the South that opposed slavery. From these regions came five notable anti-slavery leaders, Hinton Rowan Helper, Benjamin Sherwood Hedrick, Daniel Reaves Goodloe, Eli Washington Caruthers, and Lunsford Lane.83

Before publishing *Anti-Slavery Leaders of North Carolina*, Bassett sent a manuscript to Hinton Rowan Helper, the famed southern writer who had condemned the practice of slavery in his 1856 work, *The Impending Crisis of the South*. Helper

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congratulated Bassett on writing, for the most part, an “impartial” work but also gave the Trinity professor some critiques. Helper in particular voiced concern about Bassett’s discussion of Lunsford Lane, an outspoken African American against slavery. Once the champion of the abolition cause, Helper wrote to Bassett: “As for the sable and strife-superinducing Senegambian [Lunsford Lane] with whom you have finished your ingenious and interesting brochure, I can only say that, in my candid opinion, no white man, no white person, can ever maintain any sort of association, direct or indirect, voluntary or involuntary, immediate or remote, with any negro, or any Negroid, without suffering, in some degree, both detriment and dishonor.” Helper’s solution to the race problem was resolute: the “blacks and the browns, and numerous other grossly and offensively inferior miscreants” should be “absolutely and forever separated from ourselves, just as soon as possible.” Bassett’s own views on the race question obviously differed from that of Helper’s. Bassett’s inclusion of Lunsford Lane demonstrated both his desire to be as “objective” as possible and also to credit blacks for their own active role in gaining freedom.

Bassett also found journals as an outlet to express his views and revive a more authentic southern history. In an 1897 article in the Methodist Review, Bassett urged southerners to relinquish their apologetic or glorified version of southern history and to begin to construct a narrative account that better reflected actual events: “We are as a people emotional, loyal, warm-hearted, and chivalrous—and these are good things in their due proportions—but we are not very intellectual. We have very valiantly defended

84Hinton Rowan Helper to Bassett, July 11, 1898, JSB Papers, LC.
our local traditions, while we have utterly forgotten the conditions of life of our grandfathers.”

Explaining that both the antebellum generation and postwar generation of southerners had focused on “the struggle for slavery, or for State rights, call it which you will” Bassett contended, “In the meantime our social and industrial life ran on with no one to observe it and to record its progress.” Here Bassett saw the role of trained historian as essential. He and other “objective” historians could construct a more accurate telling of what life in the South was like before, during, and after the Civil War. Bassett’s own focus on southern history in his writing and research reflected this calling to enlighten southerners’ memory of their own past.

Beyond Bassett’s own scholarship, he was also thrilled with his leadership of two student organizations: the “9019” Historical Society and the Trinity College Historical Society. The “9019” was a secret society founded by both Weeks and Bassett, deriving its name from being founded in the ninetieth year of the nineteenth century. Upon Weeks’s departure in 1893, Bassett took full control of the society and would remain in charge until 1905. The “9019” provided a safe environment for Bassett and a group of hand-selected students and other faculty to examine critically historical topics and current social issues of special relevance to the South. By 1901 Bassett and the student scholarship group decided that it was time to make their voices heard publicly through the establishment of the South Atlantic Quarterly. At this point the mission of this literary journal and the “9019” society became quite clear: to promote the “literary,

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historical, and social development of the South." 86

Bassett's other organization, the Trinity College Historical Society, sought to publish numerous historical articles in the school newspaper, the *Archive*. These articles, or at least sketches of these articles, were often printed in the Raleigh *News and Observer* as well as other newspapers and journals. The *Archive*, in large part due to Bassett's involvement, had made a name for itself and was "in the minds of many leading men, the best college journal in the South." 87

So when Bassett wrote Adams with enthusiasm in September of 1897, it was largely based on a sense of momentum in his ongoing efforts to promote liberal thought and historical scholarship grounded in original research through primary sources. In these Trinity undergraduates, Bassett was finding a group of young white southerners with whom to explore "freedom of thought" and create a "revival of ideas" within the field of history.

Shortly before writing Adams, Bassett gave a speech to the Trinity Historical Society, which had bolstered his spirits further. The primary mission of his speech to the society was to elaborate on the "historical problem of our section" while providing guidance and inspiration at to how these Trinity students could "revolutionize the writing of history in the South."

Explicitly criticizing the "lack of accurate thought," Bassett detailed the three factors that would help improve the writing and thinking of history in the South. 88 First,
he argued, southerners needed to reexamine what made “good history.” Recent historical work, which Bassett contended was not history at all, lacked “proper historical ideals” and amounted to little more than “ancestor worship.” Southerners used historical writing to “exalt the deeds of ancestors, often beyond their merit,” and furthermore, this writing contained “flimsy evidences.” Instead, Bassett wanted students to think of history as the “reproduction of the life of the past; not a part of the life—not necessarily the ornamental or romantic life; but the whole life, either within a certain period or within a scope of a certain experience.” Bassett stressed to his students the importance of closely exploring and realizing historical context, and integrating an understanding of context into their writing on specific events and people. Believing that many southerners misunderstood what constituted “history,” Bassett thought historical writing to be a “serious task” that should be done “systematically and comprehensively.” Members of the Historical Society would be trained and expected to do just that.

Next, Bassett explained that the “historical problem” could not be overcome without proper training and experience for those writing history. Bassett, emphasizing the skills of a good historian, told his students that a historian must “know how to weigh evidence” while also having “a scientific spirit for facts...the clear light of truth...[and] a knowledge of the habits of men in other places and in other times.” Furthermore, a historian must “know the bearing of other sciences and of literatures on history.” Directly influenced by Herbert B. Adams and his graduate experience at Hopkins, Bassett was laying out the essential elements of this model for “scientific history.” Employing the “scientific method,” Bassett’s approach to historical problems and inquiries sought to
mimic the manner in which scientists conducted experiments within the laboratory. Historians, he believed, should carefully gather and evaluate sources, set aside prejudices, and thus produce dispassionate and rational ideas and conclusions grounded in evidence. “Objectivity” in a historian’s work was vital to this method and was a shared value amongst Bassett and his peers. As Peter Novick describes, a historian, therefore, took the role as a “neutral, or disinterested, judge” instead of an “advocate or, even worse, propagandist.”89 Bassett admonished his students to strive for objectivity in their own thinking and writing about the South’s past and present.

Lastly, Bassett contended that the “historical problem” could be solved only if there were major efforts to collect and organize historical materials—echoing the same sentiment he presented in Slavery and Servitude in the Colony of North Carolina. Specifically, Bassett pointed to the collection of primary sources. He charged the society with the mission of asking families to search “their old chests and in their dusty garrets for the multitude of scattered facts of which our history must be written.” Bassett himself was a prolific collector and curator of various items of historical worth and would continue to be throughout his years at Trinity.

Towards the end of the speech, Bassett emphasized “devotion to truth” above all else. He wanted the members of the Trinity Historical Society to become “self-mastered [men]” whose pursuit of accuracy would be impeccable. Specifically, Bassett urged his students not be afraid to criticize the South, its leaders, or its cause during the Civil War. To illustrate his point, he brought into question whether or not Jefferson Davis was in fact

89Novick, That Noble Dream, 1-2.
qualified for the presidency of the Confederacy. Such inquiries would allow the historian to arrive at a conclusion that was grounded in evidence and an evaluation of sources rather than sectional pride or bias. Provincialism, he maintained, too often deterred southerners from speaking or writing candidly about current or historical topics that might trigger public outrage.

Bassett called for Trinity and the Historical Society to become a “leader of thought” in both North Carolina and the South. He charged his students not to take their responsibility lightly: “Let us conduct ourselves that the world may know that there is in the South at least one spot in which our history may be presented in all of its claims, and where it may receive a respectful and unimpassioned hearing. If we cannot do this we are no historians, we are but partisans.”90 Later recounting the speech for Adams, Bassett told him that at this part of the speech the students cheered. Optimistically Bassett wrote, “I think we are making progress.”91

During his speech to the Historical Society Bassett referenced the 1897 “Trent Affair” to underscore his support for an improved approach to southern history. William P. Trent, a professor at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee, had recently published Southern Statesmen of the Old Regime.92 In this book, Trent critically examined the lives of several important southerners from George Washington to Jefferson Davis. His portrayal of several of these southern icons drew the ire of white journalists, such as John Cohen of the Atlanta Journal. Cohen attacked recent

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90 Speech given to Trinity Historical Society on September 25, 1897.
91 Bassett to Adams, September 26, 1897, JSB Papers, LC.
“erroneous” historical work on the Civil War, claiming that it was “written by northerners or foreigners with northern bias.” Even Cohen agreed that historical work in the South had been “partisan” and did not reflect an ideal “historical form.” Cohen told the readers that he had hoped for a “superior” southern historian to emerge and write a work worthy of “public attention,” but that Trent’s book fell well short as it “slandered” great southern leaders.\(^{93}\)

Cohen’s critique of Trent reflected a sense of anxiety amongst white southerners, especially journalists, who felt threatened by the growing number and power of academics who held degrees from northern institutions. In a letter to Cohen published in the *Atlanta Journal*, Bassett stated, “There are no doubt a number of reasons why we of the south have had little accurate or scientific historical literature, but chief of all, it seems to me, is our intolerance of adverse criticism.” Calling out Cohen and southern journalism Bassett continued, “At the present juncture I can not refrain from putting in a plea for a better method of historical criticism on the part of the southern press.” Furthermore, Bassett maintained that academic institutions should not be blamed for the thoughts or actions of professors. Only through this “spirit of truth” and “liberty of thought” could southern colleges and universities become leaders in “liberal ideas.” Bassett concluded, “It is a sad day for one of them when a man in its faculty feels that his liberty of thought is restrained by popular prejudice.”\(^{94}\)

Bassett, Trent, and professors throughout the country, however, were well aware

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\(^{93}\)John C. Cohen, “Great Men of the Old South Slandered by a Southern Man,” editorial, *Atlanta Journal*, April 17, 1897. Underneath the title it read “A Remarkable Book, Written by Professor Trent, of the University of the South, a Southern History of Southern Men, Appears, and the Reader Who has Long Hoped for a Southern Macaulay or Bancroft, Turns From it in Disgust.”

that academic freedom alone was not sufficient to insulate them against popular backlash. If their views, as historian Peter Novick puts it, “deviated seriously from established orthodoxy” then they not only “would fail the test of objectivity” but also “put their careers at risk.”95 The University of Chicago economist Edward Bemis, for example, lost his job after making statements that “upset corporate contributors.” Several other professors met similar fates including Edward Ross at Stanford, Richard Ely at University of Wisconsin, and Scott Nearing at University of Pennsylvania.96

For Bassett, though, the Trent Affair was a bit more personal than just an attack on academic freedom. Bassett most likely saw the attack on Trent as an attack on one of his own: a Hopkins graduate, an Adams student, a member of the AHA, and a fellow southerner seeking to establish the practice of rigorous historical scholarship in the South. Both Bassett and Trent came out of Baltimore well equipped and eager to reform their region. Trent was the founder and editor of the Sewanee Review, whose mission was to provide reviews of “leading books and to papers on such topics of general Theology, Philosophy, History, Political Science, and Literature as require further treatment than they receive in specialist publications.”97 The Sewanee Review would serve as a blueprint to Bassett’s own journal, the South Atlantic Quarterly.

Bassett and Trent argued that trained professionals, like themselves, should lead the discussions and the writing of southern history. In his speech to Trinity Historical

95 Novick, That Noble Dream, 68.
96 Ibid., 68-70.
Society, Bassett asserted that the “Confederate-Brigadier-General” as historian was problematic because although military leaders had “fought bravely with the sword” they were “tempted to make asses of themselves with the pen.”\textsuperscript{98} Bassett, therefore, needed to represent and defend like-minded men such as Trent who shared a similar vision for stimulating the study of history in the South.\textsuperscript{99} Bassett’s defense of Trent, and his willingness to support him publicly, put in practice exactly what Bassett was preaching at Trinity. He saw his classroom and the historical societies as venues that would help cure the lack of “accurate or scientific historical literature” in the South while ridding the region of the pseudo-history that was being written by propagandists lacking historical training and experience.

Though a part of Bassett’s ever growing network of fellow scholars, Trent would be yet another southerner to leave for greener pastures in the North. He wrote Bassett telling him that he was leaving Sewanee for Columbia University because he had become increasingly interested in literature and felt he needed a “larger library and the stimulus of graduate classes.” Assuring Bassett that he was not betraying the South, Trent stated, “Post-graduate work is national not sectional and I do not see why a Southern man should not do good work for his section in such a place. Please do not think that I leave the South and Sewanee without regret.” Furthermore, Trent felt he could depart from the South knowing that there were plenty of young men, like Bassett, who would not “let the

\textsuperscript{98}Speech given to Trinity Historical Society on September 25, 1897.

\textsuperscript{99}Despite Bassett’s defense of Trent, he also criticized him for “employing biting epithets.” Even Wendell Holmes Stephenson, who wrote glowingly of Bassett, disapproved of Trent’s lack of objectivity while evaluating the “Old South” and its former leaders. See Novick, 79.
good work die.”

By 1898 Bassett’s research topics and writing interests had begun to connect more with current conditions of the South and reflected his desire to facilitate public discussion through his writing. He wrote Adams asking, “How do you think a clear and comprehensive study of the Ku Klux would strike the public?” Up to that point, most of Bassett’s inquiries to Adams concerning his own research interests and writing topics were purely guided by methodology or its value to the field of history. Here, however, Bassett was considering something bigger. Utilizing his teaching and writing, Bassett challenged directly a set of firmly entrenched southern viewpoints. As a result of a major race riot in Wilmington, North Carolina, these conditions would change drastically as many North Carolinians radicalized around the issue of race. African Americans were not the only target; white southerners who publicly challenged the white supremacy orthodoxy also placed themselves on dangerous ground.

The Wilmington Massacre

The 1898 state and local elections served as a watershed moment in North Carolina history. Furnifold Simmons, a Trinity College graduate and leader of the Democratic Party, had united his party under the white supremacy campaign. Democrats had regained control from the “fusionists” in the November elections and two days after victory, a major race riot broke out in North Carolina’s most populous city, Wilmington. There had

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100 Trent to Bassett, April 12, 1900, JSB Papers, LC.
101 Bassett to Adams, May 22, 1898, JSB Papers, LC.
been escalating racial hatred in Wilmington, much of which was directly aimed at Alex Manly, editor of the African-American Wilmington *Daily Record*. Manly had boldly challenged commonly-held views about interracial marriage and insisted that southern women and the press often fabricated or overplayed the rape of white women by black men. ¹⁰² But beyond the animosity directed at Manly himself, there were, as Glenda Gilmore states, “tensions created by changing gender roles, the hopelessness of southern poverty, and the challenge of African American success.”¹⁰³ These tensions coupled with a new sense of power amongst North Carolina Democrats culminated in what became one of the most notorious race riots in American history.

On November 10, 1898 a mob of approximately a thousand men led by Alfred Waddell, a failed election-seeker who rekindled his political ambitions under the banner of the white supremacy campaign, took to the streets of Wilmington. After burning the press of the *Daily Record*, the mob of “Red Shirts” then murdered various black leaders while also forcing thousands of blacks out of the city.¹⁰⁴ Republican office-holders also fled the city as Waddell was soon made Mayor.

The effects of the Wilmington massacre, according to Gilmore, were far reaching: “Wilmington was about more than party politics or economic jealousy or even racism. It was about how political rhetoric can license people to do evil in the name of good. It reminds us that murder’s best work is done after the fact, when terror lives on in

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¹⁰² For more on the politics behind the white supremacy campaign and the Wilmington race riot, see Helen G. Edmonds, *The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina*.


¹⁰⁴ The “Red Shirts” refer to the movement in the South originating in the 1870s in which groups of white men would wear red shirts and often use violence to intimidate blacks and Republicans.
memory.”105 This terror and the dominance of the Democratic Party and the white supremacy campaign would consume North Carolina for the subsequent years. All sense of democracy had been destroyed as a new era of fraudulent race-bating politics consumed North Carolina.106

Bassett, alarmed with the developments in Wilmington, wrote to Adams five days after the events providing his initial reaction.107 Although the bulk of Bassett’s letter gave narrative details and his own analysis, in the end, the exasperated professor seemed to write the letter as an implicit plea to Adams for guidance. Enthused at times, frustrated at others, Bassett’s words revealed a restless individual struggling with the implications of the problems that faced both Trinity and North Carolina. Searching for a way to reform the thinking and actions of his students and fellow citizens, he continued to embrace a role that went well beyond history professor. This role as an influential public figure for a professor at this time, however, was not uncommon. Woodrow Wilson, Albert B. Hart, Herbert B. Adams, Frederick Jackson Turner, and countless other professors took on dual roles and identified themselves as having influence over much more than just their students.

Bassett began his letter discussing his disdain for the “fools in N.C.” but also his faith in Trinity as the “only place in the state” trying to “lick them into shape.” By “fools” Bassett was referring to members of the Methodist church who considered withdrawing their own financial support to Trinity because the institution was taking

105 Gilmore, 92.
107 Bassett to Adams, November 15, 1898, JSB Papers, LC.
money from the “Tobacco trust” (i.e., the Duke family). Bassett added, “I used to be weary of the place; but as long as the fool-killing is to go on I want to be here to see the fun.”

As the topic shifted to the riot, so too did Bassett’s tone. He pessimistically commented on his fellow white North Carolinians: “We are crowing down here like children because we have settled the negro question.” To Josephus Daniels, editor of the News and Observer, and other white supremacists, the events in Wilmington restored power where it needed to be: with the Democratic Party. The “negro problem” for many southern whites derived from the threat of “negro rule” in politics. With their removal from power and the restoration of power in the Democratic Party, those same southerners could claim that the problem had been solved. Following the Wilmington Riot, Daniels, who had helped stir up the violence, lauded the new structure as “permanent good government by the party of the White Man.”

Bassett, of course, saw things differently. Disturbed by the actions in Wilmington, he claimed “at best we have only postponed [the race question].” Bassett told Adams that he did not “agree with most of my fellow Anglo Saxons on the negro question” and then outlined what he perceived to be the three possible ways to respond to the role that African Americans would play in politics. One, “We may swallow him, nauseating as the dose is; [and] we may thus submit to the small evils that may come from giving him a vote and an occasional office.” Even Bassett, like those who had led or supported the riot, was repulsed at the notion of allowing African Americans to hold office. However,

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108Cecelski and Tyson, Democracy Betrayed, 8.
Bassett did differ from many of his fellow white southerners in that he did not think this allowance of political opportunity would lead to the anarchy and "Negro domination" that so many feared. In fact, his second possible solution was to "adopt an educational qualification honestly administered." Finding this option to be the most suitable, Bassett's solution to the "negro question" was grounded in the notion that the educated should have the right to vote and thus control the politics of the state. Education as the solution to the South's problems was, not surprisingly, a fundamental principle in the shared value system of Bassett's network of intellectuals.

Bassett lamented, however, that North Carolina had adopted the third and worst possible option: a "campaign of passion" that used "fraud & force to keep [blacks] out of office." After recounting the riot, emphasizing the extent of physical destruction, the culpability of the whites agitators, and the innocence of the black victims, Bassett told Adams that the leader of the mob, Alfred Waddell, had become mayor and proclaimed that "all further violence" must stop. To this Bassett observed, "If he had any sense of humor he must have split his undergarment laughing at his own joke."109

As the letter continued, Bassett shifted his focus to the conduct of blacks during the riot referring to black reaction as cowardly "in the presence of the white man." However, Bassett also applauded blacks for their patience during and following the riot: "it seems to me the negro has acted admirably. Villified, abused, denounced as the unclean thing he has kept his peace; he has been patient. He has borne what no other people in history have borne." Bassett, later in the letter, claimed that "the white man will

109Bassett to Adams, November 15, 1898, JSB Papers, LC.
continue to run over the negro until the negro learns how to defend himself." He contended that if twenty-five white men had been killed then "whites would be a little more careful of how they go into a race riot there again."

Bassett also cautioned Adams about the journalism that indicated African Americans were taking over North Carolina government, thus making violence necessary. Accurately, Bassett explained that Democrats constructed these fears of "negro rule in N.C." to galvanize their own support and dissuade Republican votes. These rampant and hysterical fears of "negro domination" were later seized upon and depicted in Thomas Dixon’s infamous novels, *A Leopard’s Spots* (1902) and *The Clansman* (1905). After consulting many individuals, Bassett had come to the conclusion that "some negro magistrates" and a few appointed to county and school jobs were not "disposed to abuse [sic] the privilege." Avoiding conflict, these "quiet" African Americans, according to Bassett, were "guided in their action by the advice of white men."

Bassett did not feel threatened by the positions that African Americans had held since Reconstruction. One has to keep in mind, however, that his solution to all of this was to grant votes and power to only those black individuals who could pass an educational test. Bassett’s patronizing tone and marginalization of black influence in politics was in line with how many white progressives thought. But Bassett’s views were, in fact, inaccurate. Although the reality in no way represented the fears that Dixon and

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111 Bassett to Adams, November 15, 1898, JSB Papers, LC.
other white supremacists created, African Americans in North Carolina had, in fact, gained a small but real toehold in North Carolina state politics.\textsuperscript{112}

Beyond racial and political ideology, what Bassett deplored most was that his fellow North Carolinians were solving their disputes through irrational behavior, most notably violence. As he put it, Democrats were resorting to “intimidation and a great deal of fraud” to win elections and remove blacks from politics. Although some opposed the “violence and passion,” most were “in support of all that has been done.” Furthermore, Bassett told Adams that there was no daily newspaper in North Carolina that was not Democratic and that all the papers had openly supported the events in Wilmington.

For his part, Adams criticized the \textit{Baltimore Sun’s} coverage of the events in Wilmington, stating that the series of articles written by Guy Carleton Lee, a former student of Adams, had “greatly pleased the Bourbon element, but greatly displeased Baltimore republicans and also friends of the Johns Hopkins.” Adams even confronted Lee, chastising him for “playing to the galleries.” Adams believed the \textit{Baltimore Sun} was “trying to recover patronage in the South and to get ‘solid’ again with the democratic party.” Lee, in Adams’s calculation, was the “first bad break in the history of the [History] department” as he was not approaching his writing objectively. Both Adams and Bassett were thoroughly concerned with the unmistakable partisanship of the southern press and its ability to influence the masses.

\textsuperscript{112}Examples of black leadership in public office include James H. Harris (Wake County), J.E. O’Hara (Halifax), Henry P. Cheatham (U.S. Congressman from 2\textsuperscript{nd} District, Vance County), James Hunter Young (Wake County), George H. White (Edgecombe County), Thomas O. Fuller (Warren County), John C. Dancy (New Hanover County) and others. See Edmonds, 18-20.
Bassett wanted to inspire “men to think.” Disappointed, he wrote, “I have spoken as clearly as a teacher ought to speak on a partisan question. But I have had but little effect.” He felt hopeless in his desire to “reform the state” and turned to his mentor, Adams, for advice: “What would [you] do to meet the disease if you were the physician?” The “disease” to which Bassett referred was twofold. First, as the Wilmington riot had shown, politics in North Carolina had become fraudulent and radicalized around race. Bassett predicted that “as long as the negro question is in politics so long will these things [political violence] occur.” Secondly, the “disease” was that individuals, specifically his students, were not reforming their way of thinking as Bassett had hoped.

Bassett’s use of the term “physician” was telling. He viewed himself as prescribing an “educational qualification” as a sort of medicine that would help to treat North Carolina’s ongoing political ailments. Furthermore, he felt that engaging with students in thoughtful discourse would inoculate individuals against the prejudices and irrationality that pervaded throughout the state.

Adams, in his response, endorsed Bassett and this “physician” metaphor, praising him for his “observations and diagnosis of the situation in N.C.” and “for not losing [his] head in a time of so much public excitement.” Bassett’s letter “made a deep impression” on Adams who used his protégé’s analysis in his own conversations in Baltimore. He shared the letter with various individuals, including Johns Hopkins President Daniel C. Gilman, and he also quoted it at a meeting of the University Club. Adams to Bassett, December 15, 1898, JSB Papers, LC.
but one political party, only one sort of newspaper, only one way of looking at the negro problem!” Calling the events in Wilmington a “revolution,” Adams worried about “rumors … to abandon the cause of negro education.” Like Bassett, Adams emphasized the role education would play in solving the problems in the South.

Despite Adams’s efforts to spread Bassett’s analysis, he also took several measures to insulate Bassett against criticism. Adams carefully did not mention Bassett’s name, believing that “men who disagree with you are quite capable nowadays of destroying your reputation and public influence by malignant accusations.” Adams also advised Bassett to “keep rather quiet, as I know you will, until the storm blows over. The tyranny of public opinion in N.C. at the present time must be frightful.” Adams’s words of caution reflected not only the volatility that consumed North Carolina in 1898, but also his desire to keep Bassett safe from the same fate that other professors had suffered after publicly speaking their mind. Later in the letter, Adams even dissuaded Bassett from incorporating current events into his historical work on the History of Slavery in North Carolina. Adams’s chief concern, after all, was in Bassett’s work as a historian in the South, a task he could not fulfill if he was fired or run out of the region.

A day after receiving Adams’s letter, Bassett eagerly wrote back, thanking Adams for his encouragement. Aspiring to “set a limit to this wildfire of prejudice that is in the South” Bassett had avowed to become less hostile in his words and aimed to use “kindness” rather than “blows and kicks.” Written nearly a month after the riot, his letter reflecting adjustments in his views on violence: “this trouble in Wilmington will set us back any more than the social & intellectual conditions behind it – which we have had all
along.” He asked Adams to relay the message to “Northern philanthropists that the way to help the negro in the South is to educate the white man.” To Bassett, the root of the problem was uneducated southern whites, and the solution was to educate them. A more educated generation of white southerners would produce, in Bassett’s eyes, a region that would confront problems with rational debate rather than passionate violence and prejudice.

With educational reform so central to Bassett’s measures, he requested ideological and financial help from the North. Many southerners were thrilled with the northern philanthropy that supported industrial training of blacks, most notably Tuskegee and Booker T. Washington. One of Bassett’s eventual friends and supporters, Walter Hines Page, was a member of the Southern Education Board and other agencies that used northern philanthropy to reform the South, especially in terms of education. Bassett certainly embraced this charge as a progressive professor who might elicit change in the region with the help of northern money and influence.

Bassett, however, thought it should not just be the millionaires who gave to the South. For example, he recommended that northern Presbyterians give approximately five-thousand dollars to southern Presbyterian colleges, like Davidson. Feeling that this “would give the North a raison d’etre for its Southern sympathy,” Bassett acknowledged that the South and its “masses” did not always “appreciate” such acts of northern

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114 Bassett to Adams, December 16, 1898, JSB Papers, L.C. Underlining in the original.
generosity. He urged Adams, however, that the church was essential to reforming the South and that "the way to appeal to the Southerner is through his religion."\[115\]

The events in Wilmington and the growing significance of the "negro question" left Bassett searching for new ways to engage in the issues with a larger audience while maintaining a "historical approach." Bassett was almost finished with his Slavery in the State of North Carolina and had also begun to prepare a series of three lectures on African Americans during slave period, present, and future. As Bassett saw it, these lectures gave him a way to engage the public in discussions about race using history as the guide.

**Bassett’s “Objective” Attempts to Explore the “Negro Problem”**

Following the Wilmington Riot, Bassett became noticeably more political and also more focused on the race question. Adams encouraged Bassett in this endeavor to educate "white citizens to larger more liberal ideas."\[116\] In the months that followed the violence in Wilmington, Bassett observed and criticized the new political developments in North Carolina. He wrote to Adams telling him that the "'white man’s government' is in full blast in this State" and that those in power were now disenfranchising blacks but not 'ignorant whites.'\[117\] Calling disfranchisement of blacks an "enamelled lie," Bassett declared that if it "honestly provided for an intellectual standard for suffrage it would be

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115 Bassett to Adams, December 16, 1898, JSB Papers, LC.  
116 Adams to Bassett, January 25, 1899, JSB Papers, LC.  
117 Bassett to Adams, February 18, 1899, JSB Papers, LC.
a good thing."\textsuperscript{118}

Additionally, the new "white man's government" was implementing Jim Crow legislation at a breakneck pace. Particularly bothersome to Bassett were the "Jim-Crow-car" laws that segregated train cars for passenger travel. Bassett also told Adams about proposals to adopt a "Jim-Crow-bed law—i.e., a law to prevent white men and negro women occupying the same bed." However, Bassett confidently claimed that this law would not pass because of fear that it "would overthrow the 'white man's government.'"\textsuperscript{119}

Here Bassett highlighted the hypocrisy in the racial ideology held by those with political power in North Carolina. They passed laws that kept blacks and whites from riding on the same railroad car but voted against a law that prevented white males from taking up the same bed with black women. To Bassett, the Jim Crow Laws only underscored the "election machinery" of the Democratic Party that would keep white male Democrats without real opposition for years. Bassett mentioned no concerns about the impact these laws would have on blacks.\textsuperscript{119} Presumably, however, he saw that unchecked dominance of the Democratic Party would result in the terrorizing of blacks.\textsuperscript{120}

As Bassett became noticeably more devoted to exploring racial ideology in his research and writing, he also found several audiences, both white and black, that responded favorably to his views on "historical method."\textsuperscript{121} With the help of Adams,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{118}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{119}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{120}Adams to Bassett, April 17, 1899, JSB Papers, LC.
\item \textsuperscript{121}In October of 1899 he wrote a short paper entitled "Negro Marriages." This is found in the "speeches/lectures" folder, but is unclear as to who the audience might have been. The paper revolved around the premise that African Americans did not care as much "about being disappointed in regard to their love affairs as white people." He was trying to relay the message that the majority of blacks seemed to
\end{itemize}
Bassett prepared a series of lectures on African-American history that would be delivered at a Hopkins-sponsored symposium in Baltimore. Bassett’s article, “The Religious Education of the Negroes in North Carolina after the War” prompted a positive correspondence from E.N. Joyner, a black representative of the Archdeaconry of South Carolina for Colored People. In addition to calling Bassett’s article “valuable” and “delightful,” Joyner indicated that the article would help guide him as a leader of the “religious institution of the negro [in South Carolina].”

Several months later, in the spring of 1900, Bassett delivered the commencement address to the Slater Industrial and State Normal School for Colored Youth of Both Sexes in Winston Salem, North Carolina (Slater School). Delighted with Bassett’s speech, S.G. Atkins, director of the Slater School, deferentially claimed that Bassett’s words had “strengthen[ed] the confidence of the colored people...in the right thinking of white people of our State.” This confidence in whites, according to Atkins, was currently on “severe trial” among blacks. Bassett had gained the “confidence and hearts” of his audience through a speech that Atkins called “thoughtful, so plain, and yet so fresh.” Atkins requested that Bassett send a manuscript of the speech so that he could publish it. Bassett’s willingness to both speak at the commencement and have his speech published reflected his growing commitment to facilitating a more thoughtful conversation on the not possess “a proper respect for their family life” and marriage. John S. Bassett, “Negro Marriages,” October 30, 1899, Box 47, JSB Papers, LC.

122 E.N. Joyner to Bassett, December 28, 1899, JSB Papers, LC.
123 S.G. Atkins to Bassett, April 26, 1900, JSB Papers, LC. I was unable to find the actual speech. The JSB Papers (LC) contain a folder titled “Speeches and Lectures.” Many of these are completely unidentified as to when they were written/read and to what audience. There is one speech in this collection in which the Slater School and President Atkins are referenced quite a bit, but the context of Bassett’s words along with a quote from a 1904 book indicate that this speech was given to a northern audience (probably Boston) in 1904-1905.
124 Atkins to Bassett, May 5, 1900, JSB Papers, LC.
“negro question.”

Shortly after his commencement address, Bassett wrote to Adams telling him that the Slater Industrial School had “raised a great commotion in this State over the franchise amendment” and that he sensed that the “negroes are frightened.” Bassett continued, “They know not what lies in the future for them. Out of it all the politician reaps fatness.”

Sympathetic to the plight of blacks in North Carolina, Bassett had a pulse on the growing anxiety and frustration that blacks felt in regards to the political changes that were transpiring.

Bassett’s academic writings on “the Negro” also created new and deeper connections within the national academic community. In May of 1899 Bassett received a letter of gratitude and encouragement from Bernard Steiner, a Hopkins graduate, a prolific writer, and the head Librarian of the Pratt Library in Baltimore. Steiner had visited Bassett in Durham and wrote to him shortly after his visit. “Stick to the work, brother, it’s a long pull but Right is right since God is God And right the day must win To doubt would be disloyalty To falter would be sin. You have a long and a hard pull to give correct political views and to straighten out the negro question, but keep at it and believe me.”

In much the same laudatory tone, A. Caswell Ellis, a North Carolina native, and at the time a pedagogy professor at the University of Texas, wrote to Bassett inquiring more about his work on African Americans. Ellis emphasized that he was “especially interested in the work you [Bassett] have done and are doing on the Negro.”

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125 Bassett to Adams, May 27, 1900, JSB Papers, LC.
126 For more on Steiner, see the Bernard C. Steiner Papers, Enoch Pratt Free Library.
127 Bernard G. Steiner to Bassett, May 10, 1899, JSB Papers, LC.
Ellis was helping direct efforts within his program, the school of pedagogy, to study problems involving the education of blacks.¹²⁸ He hoped to gain Bassett’s insights into his views on the “education of the Negro” along with any “methods of investigation, or reference to literature.”¹²⁹ There was also Shailer Mathews, a dean at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, who wrote to Bassett calling his paper “valuable” and praising him for doing “exceedingly important work.”¹³⁰ From these and other individuals, Bassett received confirmation that his work was appreciated in intellectual circles throughout the country. Furthermore, his reputation was growing as he became more notable as a historian and valuable southern voice on the race question. The fact that he was not only from the South but still living in the South gave his work a higher degree of legitimacy.

Praise and support also came from Trinity and President Kilgo. Writing to Bassett in the summer of 1901, Kilgo commented on the “marvelous success” Bassett was having in the field of history and on the Trinity students: “No man is more in my confidence and esteem than you.” The primary purpose of this letter, however, was to tell Bassett that the Economics and History departments were to be combined and that he, Bassett, would be the head of the joint department. Kilgo, sensing that Bassett would not necessarily

¹²⁸ For more information on Ellis, see http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fel14.
¹²⁹ A. Caswell Ellis to Bassett, February 13, 1901, JSB Papers, LC. Mathews told Bassett he should look at W.E.B. Du Bois’s paper on the “College Bred Negro.”
¹³⁰ Shailer Mathews to Bassett, April 18, 1901, JSB Papers, LC. For more on Mathews, see http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/projects/centcat/centcats/fac/facch13_01.html.

Mathews and Bassett appear to have many similarities even though they were in different fields. Both were attacked for “liberal” views and Mathews “embraced the role of scientific inquiry....”
embrace the role, implored him to think of this new role as “temporary.”\textsuperscript{131} Forlorn from his recent trials, Kilgo acknowledged how much he appreciated Bassett’s “kind and loving words” and stated that he could “never repay [him].” Perhaps the best news of this letter for Bassett, however, was that his new salary would be at $1,600. Bassett had perpetually complained about his salary that had started at $1,000 and was then raised a few years later to $1,200. His promotion, the new library, and his successes as a writer and teacher created positive momentum for Bassett that he would carry into the 1901-1902 academic year.

In July 1901 Herbert Baxter Adams died at the age of fifty-one. Adams had not only been Bassett’s teacher but his most reliable source of advice and encouragement since he had begun teaching at Trinity in 1894. Although there is no documentation of Bassett’s initial reaction to his mentor’s passing, he wrote to Adams’s replacement, John M. Vincent, declaring, “If any man ought to do honor to the memory of Dr. Adams it is I. No man was helped by him more than I. To none did his interest do more good. I had very definite notions that I wanted to do something when I went to Hopkins; but I was at sea.”\textsuperscript{132} Adams’s influence on Bassett was immeasurable, as was his friendship.

Bassett was not alone; he certainly had throughout the country supportive colleagues and peers by 1901. But, in a sense, without Adams he was back “at sea,” trying to maneuver himself as a historian and reformer of the South without Adams’s

\textsuperscript{131} Kilgo to Bassett, August 1, 1901, JSB Papers, LC. According to the letter Kilgo tried to hire a full-time economics professor but could not find one “of our standard.” Kilgo really seemed worn out in this letter and trying to “put on a good face,” asserting that despite all the controversy he was excited about the prospects at Trinity. It seemed that he thought his time is almost done at Trinity. For more on the Gattis-Kilgo Trials, see Porter, 77-84.

\textsuperscript{132} Bassett to Vincent, January 27, 1902, JSB Papers, LC.
stabilizing presence. He had relied on Adams both professionally and personally. When Bassett was wavering about his future at Trinity, Adams had provided the encouragement to persevere. When Bassett had become cynical and exhausted from the social conditions in North Carolina, Adams helped Bassett navigate his dual role as historian and influential citizen. “He taught me how to do the thing at hand, and to keep doing it. I feel that this has been of the greatest help to me,” Bassett wrote. “His warm interest in me after I left the university meant as much as anything else he did for me. I feel constantly the need for him.” He admitted to Vincent, “I fear I shall annoy you sometimes by writing to you in much the same way I used to write to him.”

Although Vincent did in fact become a frequent recipient of Bassett’s correspondence, neither he nor any other individual provided the same level of insight and encouragement as Adams had. His correspondence regarding his work and the conditions of the South now became far more scattered to various recipients. As the subsequent years, and most notably the start of Bassett’s newest project as the editor of a new “progressive” journal, would reveal, however, Adams’s death by no means slowed Bassett’s progress as a teacher or writer.

133 Bassett to Vincent, January 27, 1902, JSB Papers, LC.
Chapter 3: The *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 1901 – 1903

*Medicine for the South*

Bassett confronted several problems as an objective historian in North Carolina, most importantly the approach white supremacists were taking to the race question and the lack of historical scholarship. The *South Atlantic Quarterly* became his solution to both. Established in 1902, the SAQ was an ambitious journal that represented Bassett and, for that matter, Adams’s approach to using history as a means of reform. Troubled by the lack of historical scholarship produced in the South, Bassett took it upon himself to foster growth. Two years earlier he had taken a post as the North Carolina representative to the American Historical Association. Struggling not only with the political scene in North Carolina but also with the “little real historical interest” present in the state, Bassett sought to promote high-quality historical scholarship by first uniting students and professors throughout the state in a North Carolina chapter of the AHA. Hoping to gain greater support and interest, he had suggested new members from North Carolina, such as William K. Boyd, whom Bassett praised as being a man of “the new way of thinking in the South.”

Bassett realized, however, a chapter of the AHA could not alone fill the void of historical work in North Carolina, and he began to talk up publication of the *South Atlantic Quarterly* as a means of boosting the southern literary effort.

Central to the mission of the SAQ was to publish only articles by southerners.

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134 Bassett to Adams, April 3, 1899, JSB Papers, LC. Adams was secretary. Boyd was a student of Bassett’s who taught at Trinity Preparatory School before becoming an adjunct professor at Trinity College and then onto Columbia where he trained under William Dunning.
Bassett could have easily drawn in articles from northern intellectuals; but to carry out a mission of stimulating the amount of scholarship from the South, he required that all contributors must in fact be from the South. However, Bassett did not reject works of southerners, like Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, who now resided and worked in the North.\textsuperscript{135} Although articles primarily came from academics, Bassett also solicited submissions from journalists and businessmen. Ultimately the SAQ demonstrated the extent of Bassett’s growing intellectual connections.

There was more than enough support to make the journal a reality. One important backer was Vincent, Adams’s replacement as the head of the History department at Hopkins. Bassett described the \textit{South Atlantic Quarterly} to the new patriarch at Hopkins as “a new venture which some of my friends in this part of the world are about to launch.” Bassett had hoped that Vincent would seek contributions from Vincent himself and the “Hopkins men.”\textsuperscript{136} William E. Dodd of Randolph-Macon College also wrote Bassett informing him that the SAQ had drawn interest from various professors at Randolph-Macon. Dodd felt the journal would help bring together and facilitate an exchange of ideas among the “men who teach the ‘live subject’ in Southern schools.” Although the “live subject” could have several different interpretations, Dodd most likely was insisting that the study of history allowed for more effective understanding and decision-making about current salient and regional issues. Defensively, Dodd went on to

\textsuperscript{135}Philips, a native Georgian, studied with Frederick Jackson Turner at the University of Chicago before pursuing his doctorate at Columbia under William Dunning. In 1902 Phillips took a post teaching at the University of Wisconsin and continued to publish works on the American South. Dunning and H.B. Adams seem to be the two patriarchs in this network of history professors.

\textsuperscript{136}Bassett to Vincent, November 27, 1901, JSB Papers, LC. Vincent’s expertise was primarily in European history and even more specifically Switzerland.
explain his frustration with the notion that the study of history was often not given the same value to that of mathematics or Latin. Implicit in Dodd’s message was his hope that the SAQ in bringing together the “really industrious, active Southern men” would elevate the status of the field of history.  

As Bassett continued to garner support and contributions for the journal, he also began to communicate more specifically the aims of the SAQ. He compared it to The Sewanee Review, edited by William Trent, but claimed that the SAQ would also present articles about the “present social problems.” Through a journal that welcomed various viewpoints on controversial and current topics, Bassett felt the SAQ could become a forum for social reform. In his opening announcement, Bassett contended that the journal would “develop young men into writers” and thus boost the “literary effort” of the South. Emphasizing the need for contributors to have the “liberty to think,” the journal would possess a “spirit of honest tolerance.”

Despite his desire to nurture a journal that could prompt reform, he initially exercised caution when it came to the audience of the SAQ. Because the journal sought to address directly controversial issues with candor, Bassett wrote to Vincent that the Quarterly would “have to conform itself to the smaller audience of serious minded people of the South; but its readers will be people who can appreciate sober and instructive articles.” His desire to avoid serious public conflict in trying to limit the

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137 William E. Dodd to Bassett, November 1, 1901 JSB Papers, LC.
139 Bassett to Vincent, December 8, 1901, JSB Papers, LC. Bassett also mentioned at the end of this letter about the million dollars pledged to Hopkins (I think this is from Andrew Carnegie) and also $10,000 that Trinity’s library was gifted that JSB hopes to “do something with Southern history on the strength of it.”
readership of the *SAQ* to the intellectual elite certainly reflected Adams's mentoring of Bassett.\(^{140}\) As the journal quickly became well received it became obvious, however, that restricting the audience of the journal would be futile. Even before its first publication, Bassett received dozens of letters from individuals requesting a copy, including several newspaper editors.\(^{141}\)

It became quite clear that Bassett was on a personal mission to "boost the southern literary effort." Put more simply, Bassett felt southerners could mend many of their problems simply by reading and writing more good literature. In his first editorial Bassett stated that the *SAQ* hoped to increase "book-buying, book-reading, and book-writing" by "encouraging every honest literary effort."\(^{142}\) The first volume of the *SAQ* interwove masterfully articles that showcased historical writing by southerners while also presenting submissions that dealt directly with the contemporary conditions of the South.\(^{143}\) Bassett, as editor, wanted his new journal not only to expand historical scholarship produced by southerners but also serve as a forum for discussing issues relevant to the South. Although the journal was a platform for a diverse range of

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\(^{140}\) When Bassett was preparing lectures on the "negro" that he was going to give in Baltimore, Adams made sure that the lecture series was not open to the mass public.

\(^{141}\) The *Charlotte Observer* being one and also *The Smithfield Herald* whose editor, T.J. Lassiter wrote to Bassett offering free advertising in his paper to increase circulation of the *SAQ* which he called a "commendable effort." T.J. Lassiter to Bassett, December 17, 1901, JSB Papers, LC.


\(^{143}\) Jerome Dowd, "Child Labor," *South Atlantic Quarterly* I, no. 1 (January, 1902): 41-43. Bassett’s colleague, Jerome Dowd, professor of political economy and social science, took up the evils of child labor and their historical roots. A very short article, Dowd was not afraid to point the finger at several groups for not taking a more active stance in condemning the growth of child labor in the South. Amongst those culpable, Dowd cited "Southern pulpit and press" along with capitalists and parents. Asking if child labor was any different from "a refined form of cannibalism" Dowd urged the South to recognize and stop the practice or be prepared for a "mighty awakening." Dowd published in 1907 a book titled, *The Negro Races: A Sociological Study*. After Trinity he went on to become Professor at University of Oklahoma and he received degrees from University of Chicago and University of Wisconsin.
historical and contemporary issues, two issues, advancing the southern literary effort and carefully handling the "negro question," were thematic in the first several volumes.

Bassett's editorial, "The Bottom of the Matter" in the second number argued that the dearth of literature produced in the South was primarily due to the lack of demand. The chief aim of this editorial was to increase this demand by finding a way to "make people want to read." As Bassett often did, he began with a careful analysis of the problem. In order to identify the reasons for this lack of demand, Bassett categorized the approximated 19,000,000 residents of the former Confederacy into four groups: blacks, illiterate whites, farmers, and educated men. First, he explained that the "negroes" make up about a third of the population and for the most part do not read. Bassett predicted that "it will be a long time before they appear as buyers of books." The second group, illiterate whites, also provided no help in the demand for books. Bassett optimistically wrote, however, that these individuals, as a result of the improving education in the South, might eventually become "users of books." Next, as Bassett had emphasized in various points of the first number of the *SAQ*, he blamed the rural nature of the South for being conducive for "digging and plowing" but not reading. Bassett acknowledged that the North also had plenty of farmers, but pointed out that the prevalence of urban areas in the North—and their proximity to many northern farms—had substantially increased literacy rates. Finally, Bassett described the "college men and intelligent business men" of the South as having a surprisingly weak interest in books as well. He, however, gave no explanation or evidence of why this portion of the southern population did not have a

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stronger drive to purchase books. Bassett claimed that this group, some of whose members, of course, constituted the audience of the SAQ, was the immediate answer for increasing the demand and "greater appreciation of literature." According to Bassett, the other portion of the southern population, none of which would be reading his editorial, could allow for improvements in the more distant future. Again, Bassett's vision for reforming the South rested in the white intellectuals of the region.\textsuperscript{145} Dodd, who since the death of Adams had become one of Bassett's primary correspondents, commended Bassett's editorial suggesting that it be published in every North Carolina paper.\textsuperscript{146}

Bassett's own writing and conversations before the start of the SAQ demonstrated his desire to help guide the conversation in the South concerning the role of African Americans in society. Although it was not until the fourth publication that Bassett explicitly addressed the "negro question" in his own submissions to the SAQ, as editor he made sure that the journal presented several viewpoints on the matter. Bassett did this both through the "literary notes" section and including articles and book reviews from fellow southern writers. Even without necessarily providing his own commentary, the journal could fulfill his vision of addressing the "negro question" through thoughtful discourse.\textsuperscript{147}

Throughout 1902, the SAQ took on the race question. Robert Watson Winston, the President of the Durham Chamber of Commerce, provided an article entitled "An

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{146} Dodd to Bassett, April 28, 1902, JSB Papers LC.
\textsuperscript{147} One such example was actually the very first article of the journal: John C. Kilgo, "An Inquiry Concerning Lynchings," \textit{South Atlantic Quarterly} I, no. 1 (January, 1902). Kilgo's article traced the historical roots of lynching, calling the practice an act of "social insanity" and imploring that southerners act in a more rational and dispassionate manner in regards to issues of race.
Unconsidered Aspect of the Negro Question.”148 Winston claimed that blacks had succumbed to “idleness, vice, and impudence.” The solution was for blacks to do their “duty as a laborer and a domestic” for whites. He even suggested that President Theodore Roosevelt issue a public letter, to be framed and hung in the homes of blacks, insisting that blacks take on this subservient role. Winston contended that blacks had the ability to advance themselves economically, educationally, and morally, only if they performed their “duty.” However, Winston ended his article stating, “I voice but the true sentiment of the South when I wish for the negro all things good and useful, short of social equality. May wealth and contentment be his forever.” This sort of paternalistic rhetoric was emblematic of the ideology held by many southerners at the time. If blacks would know their role, both as laborers and social inferiors, then eventually they would become members of society that were not seen as a problem. Bassett’s own views shared similarities but took a distinctively different approach. Whereas Winston’s vision started with blacks doing their “duty,” Bassett thought the solution to the “negro problem” started with whites thinking and acting rationally.

Yet others, like Clarence H. Poe, the editor of The Progressive Farmer (Raleigh), thought the South’s problems could be solved through complete disfranchisement of blacks. Bassett included a review in the SAQ of Poe’s article “Suffrage Restrictions in the South.” Poe argued that if blacks lost the right to vote then two purely white parties would exist, thus reducing the fraud and violence that had become commonplace in elections. In the end, Poe believed that disfranchisement would result in not only a more

stable political scene but also a “fairer treatment” of blacks as they would not be resented and maliciously treated. Furthermore, Poe insisted that northern meddling in southern race relations would create only a greater chasm and cause more harm in the end to blacks. Bassett’s review does not suggest his viewpoints on disfranchisement. As of 1898 he was in favor of instituting educational qualifications, mainly literacy tests, for voting that would be applied to both whites and blacks. Bassett, however, did praise Poe for identifying, as Bassett put it, that the “great problem here...is not the negro’s problem, but the white man’s.” Bassett also applauded Poe for denouncing the fraudulent election system in North Carolina.

The “Literary Notes” section of each issue highlighted any commendable work that had recently been produced by southerners. But as Bassett’s review of Poe showed, the “Literary Notes” section also gave Bassett an opportunity subtly to inject his own views through reviewing the work of others. Another one of these notes discussed George Washington Cable, who since the 1880s advocated for better treatment of blacks. In a 1901 speech to a black audience in Boston, Cable argued that the solution for blacks, both southern and northern, was to migrate to cities. As his article on the “Early Virginia Trader” had done, Bassett used Cable’s speech to once again emphasize the need for the South to “build up towns in the manufacturing regions.” Bassett felt the South’s agrarian roots and dependence on farming stifled its intellectual potential as a region. “The solution of the problem of the South as a whole is the building up of city life,” Bassett

argued. Manufacturing not only provided economic benefits, but, in Bassett’s view, it would help develop cities that would also serve as intellectual communities. He contended that “towns furnish the nervous energy of society. They are the places where thought gets its stimulus. They are the seats of literature. No great literature was ever produced by an excessively rural people. The most hopeful sign in the South is the tendency to build up towns in the manufacturing regions.”

Durham, with its booming tobacco and textile industry and acquisition of Trinity College, certainly was emblematic of Bassett’s hope for other southern towns.

Bassett’s exploration of the “negro question” became central to the “Literary Notes” section. For example, in the first number Bassett directed his readers towards Booker T. Washington’s “The Future of the American Negro” and “Up from Slavery.” He also recommended W.H. Thomas’s “The American Negro” that contrastingly provided a “hopeless” view of African-Americans’ role in society.

Bassett was not endorsing the viewpoints of these books, at least not here, but wanted his readers to come to their own conclusions about race after reading various perspectives.

One of Bassett’s greatest supporters was Walter Hines Page, the editor of the prominent World’s Work, a progressive New York magazine. Bassett often directed SAQ readers to articles in the World’s Work that touched on southern affairs such as an article by Eugene C. Branson titled, “The Real Southern Question.” Although Bassett did not offer an opinion on the article, he urged readers to pursue Branson’s work, summarizing

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151 Ibid.
it by saying that southern reform should start with better educating the white rural southerners. Then Bassett pointed his readers also to Walter Hines Page’s recent article on Booker T. Washington in *Everybody’s Magazine*. Bassett proclaimed, “It is not only a just and readable estimate of one of the greatest men,” [i.e. Booker T. Washington] “who has lived in the South, but it is a thoughtful glance into the ever-abiding negro problem.” Bassett’s reverence for Washington was strikingly clear to the readers of the *SAQ*.

Much like the “Literary Notes” section, Bassett also provided a “Book Reviews” section that gave more comprehensive analysis of noteworthy books that had recently been published. Unlike the “Literary Notes” section, the books under review did come from only the South. Furthermore, Bassett relied heavily on others, including his students, to compose these reviews for the magazine.

In the second issue, Bassett included a book review of Thomas Dixon’s 1902 novel, *The Leopard’s Spots: A Romance of the White Man’s Burden- 1865-1900*. Bassett lambasted the novel: “it needs no student of Southern people to say that they are not ready to adopt Mr. Dixon’s remedy. It needs but little knowledge of the evolution of society to see that the remedy is an unscientific and impossible piece of social quackery.” To Bassett, Dixon’s work reflected the worst of the sensational, impressionistic appeals that whites southerners so often resorted to in connection with race. It depicted both

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153 “Literary Notes,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* I, no. 2 (April, 1902): 198. Page’s article is in the April 1902 issue of *Everybody’s Magazine*. Bassett made a similar statement in his November 1903 editorial but adds “with the exception of Robert E. Lee.” This comment ultimately was what sparked the controversy that became known as the “Bassett Affair.”

154 William K. Boyd being one example.

blacks and whites in a way that Bassett found completely ungrounded in facts or logical reasoning. Although, he had not publicly issued his own comprehensive solution to the race question, Bassett had begun to integrate his viewpoints in scattered portions of the SAQ.

The first volume of the SAQ was met with tremendous praise and interest in both the South and the North. In the Sewanee Review William Trent lauded the SAQ for “encouraging every branch of the literary effort” while keeping an “independent tone.” Trent reached out to Bassett as well, calling him a “well-known Southern historian and writer of current affairs.” Charles M. Andrews, a “Hopkins man” and at the time a historian at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, congratulated Bassett on his fine work in developing a “more vital literary development in the South.”156 Calling the SAQ an “experiment,” Andrews told Bassett that his efforts were being closely watched and supported by intellectuals throughout the country. The SAQ, according to Andrews, illustrated that there was “a great world south of the Mason and Dixie’s line, full of latent power and force, that only needs cultivation to show what it can accomplish.”157 William E. Dodd also congratulated Bassett for the opening volume and indicated that it was well received at Randolph-Macon.158 Praising the publication for generating “real investigation in the South and by Southern students,” Dodd stated that the SAQ provided

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157 Charles M. Andrew to Bassett, May ?, 1902, JSB Papers, LC.
158 Dodd to Bassett, February 6, 1902, JSB Papers, LC. Countless others also wrote Bassett to praise him for the SAQ. Some like Thomas M. Owen, editor of the soon to be started Gulf States Historical Magazine, wrote to see if Bassett would be willing to exchange journals. Owen to Bassett, May 29, 1902, JSB Papers, LC.
a much-needed forum for discussing contemporary issues.\textsuperscript{159}

Bassett himself even recognized the instant success that the \textit{SAQ} had achieved within both the northern and southern press. Stating that it was a product of the ""New South,"" Bassett used the Publisher's Announcement of the second number to quote several newspapers that were praising the \textit{SAQ}, including the \textit{New York Evening Post}, which viewed the publication as a ""disinterested, scholarly journal."" The word ""disinterested"" would have certainly pleased Bassett, who had emphasized the need for the journal to detach itself from prejudice. More local, the \textit{North Carolina Christian Advocate} of Greensboro also boasted about the \textit{SAQ} and the direction it was taking the southern literary effort.\textsuperscript{160}

As the journal continued to produce illuminating articles and submissions from southerners, many esteemed northern scholars publicly recognized Bassett's work. Walter Hines Page, Col. Thomas Wentworth Higginson (Cambridge, Massachusetts), Gaillard Hunt (Editor of \textit{Works of Madison}), William A. Dunning (Columbia), and Charles Foster Smith (Wisconsin) all publicly lauded the journal.\textsuperscript{161} These men had become not just readers of the \textit{SAQ}, but also frequent correspondents with Bassett himself. Undoubtedly Bassett reveled in this opportunity to forge relationships with like-minded northerners whose interests lay not only in the field of history but also in the

\textsuperscript{159}Numerous other letters came to Bassett both praising the \textit{SAQ} and asking for a subscription. Charles Lee Raper (Trinity graduate and at the time UNC professor), Guy Carleton Lee (Johns Hopkins professor), George Lincoln Burr (Librarian and History Professor at Cornell University, Frederick Moore (Vanderbilt), Miles Osborne Sherrill (North Carolina State librarian), H.G. Connor (Lawyer in Wilson, NC), W. Roy Smith (Barnard College in New York), C. Alphonso Smith (LSU), Francis Preston Venable (UNC President), T.N. Carver (Harvard), Franklin Riley (Mississippi Historical Society), and T.J. Lassiter (Editor of the \textit{Smithfield Herald}).

\textsuperscript{160}"Publisher's Announcement" \textit{South Atlantic Quarterly} I, no. 2 (April, 1902): 200. Praise also came from the \textit{Christian Advocate} out of Raleigh and the \textit{Dial} out of Chicago.

\textsuperscript{161}"A Southern Journal for the Whole Nation," \textit{South Atlantic Quarterly} II, no. 2 (April, 1903).
current conditions of the South. Bassett’s correspondence with these men revealed their admiration for the Trinity professor and their support for his efforts with the SAQ. Often their praise was accompanied with a vow of allegiance to the South. Charles F. Smith, a Greek and classical philology professor at the University of Wisconsin, proclaimed, “I am still a Southerner and interested in everything that promises to help the best Southern interests.”

Smith’s words took on almost an apologetic tone; he could only cheer from afar as those like Bassett tried to reform the region from within. Smith was one of many southern intellectuals who took up northern posts but still remained tangentially involved in southern affairs.

Bassett also exchanged letters with individuals who, though not southern by birth, had developed a strong interest in the region. Historian Frederic Bancroft, for example, became a frequent correspondent with Bassett. Bancroft’s letters, however, tended to shy away from meaningful dialogue about race relations and the current conditions in the South. Instead, his writing to Bassett showed far more interest in his own research and writing on southern history. Bancroft wrote Bassett often to inquire about sources in his research and writing on “life in the Southern States, 1860-1865.”

It was William Dunning, the prominent historian from Columbia University, who had emerged in 1902 as Bassett’s closest and most reliable northern connection. Dunning and Bassett’s communication revealed a mutual admiration for the work of the other. Bassett adamantly supported the possible appointment of Dunning to become the head of

162 Charles F. Smith to Bassett, November 22, 1902, JSB Papers, LC.
163 Bancroft to Bassett March 12, 1902, JSB Papers, LC.
the History Department at John Hopkins. Dunning even called Bassett an “incorrigible intriguer” when it came to Bassett’s role in advocating for Dunning’s hire at Hopkins. Dunning was offered the job but after months of deliberation turned down Hopkins to remain at Columbia. Dunning and Bassett frequently wrote to each other recommending students, asking about colleagues for other positions, and inquiring about possible research opportunities within southern history. Dunning applauded Bassett’s attempts to revive historical scholarship within the South.

His summertime stays in Washington, D.C., where he also experienced far greater racial equality, undoubtedly strengthened Bassett’s relationship with many of these northern intellectuals. Much of Bassett’s time there would be devoted to his own research and writing at the Library of Congress. A few scattered letters, however, indicate that Bassett would meet up with other historians and professors at “Round Table” conversations. Although little was documented of these gatherings and conversations, it can certainly be surmised that Bassett’s trips to D.C. further cemented his relationships with his northern counterparts, while also expanding his network of

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164 Dunning to JSB January 18, 1903, JSB Papers, LC.
165 Dunning to Bassett July 31, 1903, JSB Papers, LC.
166 Dunning to Bassett February 8, 1903, JSB Papers, LC. In this letter Dunning thanked Bassett for recommending a student to Columbia, told him that “Reconstruction in North Carolina is already appropriated,” and asked about Bassett’s plans for the New Orleans symposium.
167 It is important to note that as Dunning’s career unfolded he became known for his school of thought on the history of Reconstruction that depicted black southerners as children and vindicated white southerners in their role of discriminating and violently persecuting blacks.
168 Evidence of this comes from his frequent correspondence to his wife from Washington, D.C. during the summer months 1900-1903.
169 Bassett would often meet these individuals either at Library of Congress or the “Cosmos Club” which apparently was and still is a club for intellectuals.
contacts and supporters. These face-to-face interactions should not be forgotten in understanding Bassett’s relationship with Dunning, Bancroft, Smith, and a host of others.

Within this intellectual network of those interested in reforming the South, there were also, of course, those who still remained in the South. Many of the men who encouraged Bassett were his fellow colleagues at Trinity. Edwin Mims, William P. Few, W.H. Glasson, and Robert L. Flowers were all fellow Trinity faculty who supported and admired Bassett’s work as teacher and historian. John C. Kilgo, president of Trinity, was also a strong supporter of Bassett and frequently praised Bassett for all of his work. Additionally, Kilgo was outspoken when it came to challenging southern ideologies about race, education, religion, and politics. Finally, Bassett found a few like-minded southerners outside of Trinity’s campus who sought to approach the field of history and current affairs in an “objective” light. William E. Dodd, William Trent, and Frederick Moore of Vanderbilt all corresponded with Bassett frequently about the status of historical scholarship in the South.

Critical to Bassett’s connections in both North and South was his membership in the American Historical Association. Bassett urged J. Franklin Jameson, a founding member of the AHA, to create a permanent branch of the organization devoted to southern history. Jameson did not acquiesce to Bassett’s wishes but did assure him that southern history would receive attention at the upcoming annual conference at which Bassett and several others would present papers on the subject. From this conference,

170 January 6, 1902 Bassett received letter from Charles Haskins, secretary of AHA, stating that he has been appointed as a member of the General Committee. He had been a member of the AHA since 1894. JSB Papers, LC.
171 Stephenson, “John Spencer Bassett As Historian of the South,” 312.
Bassett and fellow southern historians engaged in serious conversations about better organizing themselves into a southern chapter. Dodd proposed that the “really industrious, active Southern men” establish an “interchange of ideas and plans.”\textsuperscript{172} David Y. Thomas, an Emory graduate and, in 1901, a doctoral student at Columbia under Dunning, also wrote Bassett suggesting that there be one central organization that united the various historical societies present in the South.\textsuperscript{173} Although this idea did not materialize during Bassett’s time in the South, Dodd and Thomas’s letters to Bassett did reveal the way in which history professors from the South, including Bassett, were developing a new sense of camaraderie.

This work and the AHA’s newfound emphasis on its role in guiding the teaching of history in the South culminated in a conference held in connection with the 1903 annual AHA meeting in New Orleans. This conference, on the “Study and Teaching of History in the South, Past, Present, and Future,” sought to bring together the most highly regarded historians in the South. Dunning, who had been placed in charge of the sub-conference regarding southern history in New Orleans, wrote on several occasions to solicit Bassett’s attendance and participation.\textsuperscript{174} The other southern historians who were invited to speak were William Dodd, Frederick Moore, Franklin L. Riley, and Thomas M. Owen. Riley was yet another Adams disciple who, following his graduate work at Hopkins, returned to his home state of Mississippi to teach and serve as editor of the \textit{Mississippi Historical}

\textsuperscript{172}Dodd to Bassett, November 1, 1901, JSB Papers, LC.
\textsuperscript{173}David Y. Thomas to Bassett, December 19, 1901, in Stephenson, “John Spencer Bassett As Historian of the South,” 313.
\textsuperscript{174}Dunning to Bassett Feb. 8, 1903 and March 9, 1903, JSB Papers, LC. This conference was being organized by the AHA and it appeared that Dunning was in charge of it. Dunning stated that Bassett would be one of six southern speakers.
Society Publications. Owen, who grew up in Alabama, helped to found the Southern History Association and went on to start and serve as editor to the Gulf States Historical Magazine in 1902. All of these individuals had praised Bassett’s SAQ. Although the AHA had brought them together, it was their commitment to reviving the study of history in the South that generated their natural proclivity to one another.

As the New Orleans conference drew nearer Bassett planned on speaking on “The Relation of History Teaching and Southern Political Ideals.” As it happened, Bassett never made it to the conference, as the conference coincided with his own public controversy surrounding his remarks in a SAQ editorial. Following the conference both Dunning and Dodd wrote to Bassett informing him that the conference had generated considerable excitement among southern members. Even without Bassett’s attendance, the meeting in New Orleans demonstrated the growing activism and cohesion of both southern and northern professors in seeking to reform how the field of history was approached and utilized within the South.

Of Bassett’s southern confidants outside the walls of Trinity, he became the closest with William E. Dodd, a young ambitious professor at Randolph-Macon. Dodd, after receiving his PhD from the University of Leipzig in Germany, had taken his position at

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175 Stephenson claimed he missed the conference due to a “severe illness.” See Stephenson, “John Spencer Bassett As Historian of the South,” 313. This is entirely possible, but considering the events of November and December it also seems likely that Bassett chose to remain out of the spotlight during this December conference.

176 Dunning to Bassett, January 6, 1904, JSB Papers, LC. In this letter Dunning critiques Dodd a bit for his pessimistic views on the conditions in Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Bassett also received a letter from Brevard Nixon, an attorney from Charlotte, North Carolina who had attended the conference and wrote optimistically about the direction the South and the nation: “This meeting was the strongest fact in history that the prejudice [of] the north against the south has breathed its last and that today we all stand together in one great united republic where the great minds on both sides come together in harmony.” Nixon to Bassett, January 3, 1904, JSB Papers, LC.
Randolph-Macon in 1900. New to the profession and unproven in the field of history, Dodd had his breakthrough moment in December of 1902, when he delivered a speech on Nathaniel Macon to the American Historical Association in Washington, D.C. Attending the speech, among others, were such prominent historians as Albert Bushnell Hart, J. Franklin Jameson, Andrew C. McLaughlin, and Bassett himself, Dodd’s “one sure friend in the profession.”

Bassett’s relationship with Dodd became increasingly meaningful as they both navigated the perilous waters of reforming the South. Bassett had told his Randolph-Macon friend, “Let us write history, and ... stir up the fellows—both of which you are already doing well.” Bassett saw in Dodd at least one fellow southerner who could help produce an “intellectually honest ‘scientific history of the South.’”

As Bassett’s reputation and network of supporters grew, so too did his influence. By 1903 Bassett was in correspondence with Gaillard Hunt, a trained historian then working at the State Department and serving as an advisor to President Roosevelt. Although Bassett’s letter to Hunt is not in the archives, Hunt’s reply allows us to reconstruct the content of Bassett’s initial letter, some of which had been shared with the President himself. Bassett had written Hunt for two apparent reasons. First, he wrote in defense of Senator Jeter C. Pritchard, the lone Republican representative from North Carolina who had become much maligned throughout the state ever since Democrats had regained power. Hunt assured Bassett that Roosevelt was publicly supporting Pritchard.

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177 Fred Arthur Bailey, *William Edward Dodd: The South's Yeoman Scholar* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 33. Hart was a history professor at Harvard and good friend to President Theodore Roosevelt. Jameson was a history professor at the University of Chicago. McLaughlin was a history professor at University of Michigan. Jameson and McLaughlin held important positions within the AHA following the Carnegie Gift.

178 Bassett to Dodd, [ca. August 1902], Dodd Papers, LC, in Bailey, 25.

179 Ibid., 37.
Second, Bassett had written Hunt about a “recent ‘bi-racial’ reception.” According to Hunt, Roosevelt attentively listened to Bassett’s words and was amazed by this recent reception. Hunt wrote to solicit Bassett’s help in publishing Roosevelt’s views on race relations in the North Carolina newspapers. Hunt asserted that Roosevelt “would never dream of attempting a social commingling of the races.” He then explained to Bassett the reasons: “The first reason is that he is a gentleman by birth, association and instinct; the second is that he wished to please the South and not to become a person odious to it.”

Bassett and Hunt would continue to correspond with each other throughout Bassett’s time at Trinity.

It was the *SAQ* and the AHA that had served as the primary threads connecting Bassett with these various southern and northern intellectuals. By 1903 Bassett was regarded as a serious historian and his journal served as a symbol for the potential of historical thinking in the South. Bassett even advertised the *SAQ* in 1903 as “A Southern Journal for the Whole Nation.”

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180 Hunt to Bassett, February 26, 1903, JSB Papers, LC. According to the letter, there was statement enclosed. However, no such statement exists in the JSB Papers.

181 Ibid.

182 *South Atlantic Quarterly* I, no. 1 (January, 1903): 106. The 1903 volume presented far more submissions from authors outside of Trinity. Of particular note were articles written by William H. Glasson, Joseph Alexander Tillinghast, William Preston Few, Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, Daniel C. Roper, and William E. Dodd. Dodd, in fact, was the only one to give any criticism of the *SAQ,* encouraging Bassett to solicit more articles from non-Trinity men.
“Objectivity” and Academic Freedom

As Bassett tried to bolster the field of history and promote a more constructive sort of thinking, two fellow southern scholars found themselves under trial in the summer of 1902 for their own forward thinking. Bassett’s newfound friend and ally, William E. Dodd, and Andrew Sledd, a professor at Emory College, faced their own respective controversies arising from their efforts to write “objectively” about the South’s problems. Both the Dodd and Sledd trials illustrated the growing hostility between the southern press and college professors.

When Dodd began the spring semester at Randolph-Macon he launched into a bold attack on Confederate veterans’ attempts to control historical scholarship, specifically textbooks. The United Confederate Veterans, Sons of Confederate Veterans, United Daughters of the Confederacy, and Grand Camp of Confederate Veterans of Virginia all had “devised an effective network through which they supervised the intellectual development of future generations.”183 Central to their cause was preventing northern meddling with textbooks used in history courses at southern schools. One such casualty of these Confederate societies’ influence was John Fiske’s American history textbook, which was banned from classrooms in Virginia in 1902.

Dodd wrote an article for the liberal, New-York-based Nation that described these acts of censorship and shed light on the special challenges of studying and teaching history in the South.184 The article’s primary focus was to illustrate that the study of

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183 Fred Arthur Bailey, William Edward Dodd, 34.
184 William E. Dodd, “The Status of History in Southern Education,” Nation LXXV, no. 1936 (August 7, 1902): 109-11. A few years later Dodd was still harping on the poor training southerners were
history in the South was undervalued and in need of serious reform. Echoing the cries of Bassett, Dodd identified the need for a renewed "historical spirit" in the South and for greater reliance on a "scientific" approach. Dodd outlined a number of problems the field of history faced, including the influence of Confederate veterans who censored books and obstructed "the advance of true historical studies." These veterans, Dodd lamented, were indoctrinating the southern youth with ideas that were biased and politically motivated, resulting only in increased feelings of sectionalism within the young students of the South. Dodd also called into question several specific ideas that Confederate organizations wished to spread: that the South was right to secede in 1861; that the Civil War was not about slavery; and so on.

A few months later Dodd took a more aggressive approach and directly confronted the Confederate organizations with articles in the *Richmond News* and *Richmond Dispatch*. Dodd argued that these societies should spend less time and energy trying to "expel the northern writer from the south" and instead work towards better training the public school teachers, increasing the endowments of colleges, and creating a university "where the verities of history both northern and southern might be taught."185

The reaction to Dodd's bold attack on the Confederate veterans was mixed. Many, including an anonymous Virginia professor, saw Dodd as a traitor who should not be trusted to teach the young men of the South. There was, in fact, pressure to dismiss Dodd from his post at Randolph-Macon. These denunciations, however, were countered by an

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outpouring of support for Dodd and his views. The editor of the *Richmond News* ardently supported Dodd’s cause to instill a more detached and evidence-based approach towards the field of history. Bassett also stood behind Dodd, whose article and ideas were in many ways an extension of Bassett’s own editorials in the *South Atlantic Quarterly*. In private, Bassett encouraged his Randolph-Macon counterpart to continue his crusade in developing the “scientific history of the South.” Publicly Bassett also defended Dodd in a letter to the editor of the *Nation*. Recognizing that most southerners had fathers who fought for the Confederacy, Bassett asserted that their entrenched loyalty to the Confederacy prevented “the apostles of new ideas” from renewing the “historical spirit” in the South. As Bassett cheered on his friend, Dodd emerged from the controversy with his job intact and with an elevated reputation for his willingness to speak out against the hagiography present in the South.

As Bassett and Dodd lobbied for more open and dispassionate discourse, another southern intellectual found himself bearing the brunt of the reactionary southern press. Andrew Sledd, a Latin professor at Emory College in Oxford, Georgia, was forced to resign after a series of attacks for his 1902 *Atlantic Monthly* article, “The Negro: Another View.” Like Bassett, Sledd was deeply troubled by the inflamed, violent, and irrational

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187 Bassett to Dodd, [ca. August 1902]. Dodd Papers, LC.
188 Of course, Bassett’s own father fought for the Confederacy. John S. Bassett, “The Study of History in the South,” *Nation* LXXV, no. 1939 (August 28, 1902): 169. This topic was also being addressed in substantial detail from the History Department at Vanderbilt University. Frederick W. Moore, a History and Economics professor, wrote Bassett telling him he would write an abstract for the *SAQ* based on his recent report, “Study and Teaching of History in the South.” Moore to Bassett January 23, 1903, JSB Papers, LC.
responses southerners had to issues surrounding race. In the first part of Sledd’s controversial article contended that the race question was a “national matter,” urging southerners to relinquish their sectional tendency of refusing help or insight from “outside sources.” At the same time, Sledd shunned northerners for suggesting social equality, a solution he called “undesirable and impossible.” In advancing this argument, Sledd relied on two “fundamental facts”: One, blacks were inferior to whites, their “inferiority is radical and inherent, a physiological and racial inequality that may, indeed, be modified by environment, but cannot be erased without the indefinite continuance of favorable surroundings and the lapse of indefinite time.” Like so many others at this time, Sledd thought that both religion and scientific evidence proved the prevailing racist sentiment among whites. Sledd’s second “fundamental fact” was that blacks still possessed “inalienable rights.” Here, Sledd certainly parted from the mainstream, but the idea was on its own not likely to be provocative enough to account for his eventual resignation. In fact, many southerners were calling for better protection of the rights of African Americans.

It was Sledd’s denunciation of lynching as murder that brought the roof down on him. Sledd had, in fact, witnessed a lynching first hand while traveling by train in Georgia. The conductor stopped the train so that all the passengers could watch as a mob

Dodd, and Bassett all shared certain similarities in their backgrounds. All were born in the South just a few years after the Civil War and all found themselves needing to exit the region for graduate experiences. Sledd did his undergraduate at Randolph-Macon before going to Harvard where he received a Master’s in Greek. Sledd then taught briefly at Vanderbilt before taking a job at Emory. Joel Williamson in Crucible of Race couples Sledd and Bassett together as two “Conservatives” who fought “Radicalism.” Williamson explains that very few of these “Conservatives” were bold enough to challenge “Radicalism” in a public arena. According to Williamson (259) it was not until 1915 when Conservatism had taken over and replaced this notion of “black as beast” with “black as child.”
of whites hanged, burned, and mutilated Sam Hose, a black man accused of murdering a white man and then sexually assaulting his wife. Influenced by this experience and from reading about other lynchings, Sledd blamed poor white southerners for these terrible acts of violence: “Our lower classes must be made to realize, by whatever means, that the black man has rights which they are bound to respect.” Furthermore, Sledd argued that cases of lynching, a practice defended as necessary to protect white women, were rarely actually a response to an accused rapist. Through the reform of the poor whites, according to Sledd, the “Southern problem of the Negro” would be solved. He urged northerners “not to elevate the Negro above his proper sphere,” while begging fellow southerners “not to debase him to the level of the brute.” Sledd’s belief that it was only “rednecks” or the lower class of southern society who were culpable for lynching and racial violence was a common misconception amongst progressives at the time. As many historians, like Leon Litwack, have noted, the majority of lynchings were not “crazed fiends nor the dregs of white society” but rather “ordinary and respectable people, animated by a self-righteousness that justified their atrocities in the name of maintaining social and racial order and the purity of the Anglo-Saxon race.” Scenes of a lynching often illustrated “well dressed men and women who...were presumably well able to read and write.”

Sledd’s article received very little attention until over a month later when Rebecca Latimer Felton, an influential Georgian and outspoken advocate for lynching, wrote a

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191 For more on this event, see Edwin T. Arnold, What Virtue is in the Fire: Cultural Memory and the Lynching of Sam Hose (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009).
letter that appeared in the Atlanta Constitution. Felton mercilessly attacked Sledd for his assertions about lynching. Felton, like so many other southern women, saw lynching as necessary to protect southern white women. Sledd, unapologetic for his article, told the newspaper, “Yes, I wrote the article, and I have nothing to retract or explain concerning it.” A few days later members of the Covington, Georgia, community burned Sledd in effigy. Soon Sledd faced pressure to resign, but initially remained resolute in his cause. However, in the end, Sledd decided it was in his best interest and Emory’s best interest to tender his letter of resignation. He wrote to his father-in-law, Warren A. Candler, who happened to be the head bishop in the Southern Methodist Church, expressing his anxiety: “I want to get away; I feel alien and wronged.” Sledd’s disappointment came not from the criticisms and pressure he felt from Felton and the general public but rather that Emory, and most notably President James E. Dickey, had failed to support his article and his right to academic freedom without fear of professional persecution.

Unlike Dodd, Sledd’s advocates were not nearly as vociferous or numerous. Many supporters, in fact, did not respond to the events at Emory until Sledd had already resigned. Among them was Bassett’s close correspondent, Charles F. Smith, who wrote

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194 Rebecca Felton in Atlanta Constitution, August 3, 1902, found in Ralph E. Reed Jr., “Emory College and the Sledd Affair of 1902: A Case Study in Southern Honor and Racial Attitudes,” The Georgia Historical Quarterly 72, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 473. For more on Felton, southern women, and the practice of lynching, see Crystal Nicole Feimster, Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

195 Based on several accounts, Felton’s letter and attack of Sledd could have also been motivated by a longstanding feud with Emory College and its leadership.


197 Sledd to Candler, August 16, 1902, as quoted in Reed, “Emory College and the Sledd Affair,” 484.
to the *Nation* to express anguish about the treatment of Sledd and Emory’s submissive stance in protecting freedom of speech. 198 Smith, insisting on his love and loyalty to his native South, urged other southerners not to allow such mob mentality to suppress the freedom of thought and expression.

Although we have no records of Bassett’s reaction to the “Sledd Affair,” he undoubtedly knew about Sledd’s article and his subsequent trials within the southern public and press. Bishop Candler and Emory were connected with Kilgo, Bassett, and Trinity College. Indeed, Candler wrote to his good friend and confidant, Kilgo, about the episode, suggesting that Felton had attacked Sledd on account of a “grudge” against Candler that Felton had harbored for years. 199 What is more, the “Sledd Affair” had been covered widely in the southern newspapers and became a frequent topic of conversation within scholarly circles. Booker T. Washington, for example, wrote several letters, including one to Bliss Perry, the editor of *Atlantic Monthly*, in support of Sledd, claiming optimistically that his conduct revealed “that Southern men of influence and standing are beginning to speak out, and they will do so more and more in the future.” 200 Even the editor of the *News and Observer*, Josephus Daniels, wrote condescendingly about Sledd: “Whenever a scholar, who lives in the atmosphere of books and college life, begins to discuss the Negro problem, the chances are nine of ten that he will put his foot in it.” 201 Daniels’s sentiment was emblematic of journalists throughout the South, who felt a

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198 Charles F. Smith, “Professor Sledd and Emory College,” *Nation* LXXV, no. 1943 (September 25, 1902): 245.
199 Warren Candler to John C. Kilgo, August 13, 1902, photocopy in Candler Papers, quoted in Reed, “Emory College and the Sledd Affair,” 473.
200 Washington to Bliss Perry August, 23, 1902. Washington also exchanged letters with Francis Jackson Garrison, the son of the famous abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, about the events at Emory.
growing rivalry with college professors and intellectuals who sought to challenge social mores of the time.

Both Dodd’s fight with Confederate veterans and Sledd’s skewering in the southern press clearly illustrated that reform-minded southern scholars worked in a hostile environment. And yet professors like William P. Trent, Andrew Sledd, John S. Bassett, and William E. Dodd all sought to use scholarly journals and their status as professors to elicit reform in the South. As he had demonstrated in Trent and Dodd’s respective trials with the southern press and public, Bassett was a strong advocate for professors to be able to express their views without fear of losing their job or having their institution blamed for those viewpoints. His next editorial in the *South Atlantic Quarterly* was a direct attack on the methods employed by southern journalists.

“*The Reign of Passion*”

Bassett’s editorial, “The Reign of Passion,” which appeared in the October *SAQ*, marked a defining moment in his attempts to improve the South. Revealing a confluence of evolving ideas about southern reform, the article also signaled an emboldened Bassett and a determination to challenge the southern press. Southern journalists who wrote inflammatory articles, shamelessly and maliciously attacking individuals were supporting a “Reign of Passion” rather than engaging in thoughtful debate about the issues or ideas themselves. He cautioned his readers: “Almost unconsciously we have long ceased to battle for ideas. We have made our appeals to feeling, perhaps shrewdly, because we
have realized that it is has been easier to reach feelings, than the judgments, of the mass of Southern voters."\(^{202}\) Bassett once again expressed frustration with the newspapers’ handling of political issues in North Carolina and the South. His article was specifically in response to a “certain prominent newspaper” and its recent report of a convention of an unnamed party in an unnamed state.

Why did Bassett take intentional measures to keep the main subject of his article anonymous? At first glance, it would seem that Bassett did so simply out of caution. Trent, Kilgo, Sledd, Dodd, and others had all fallen victim to this “reign of passion,” and their articles were not even attacks on a newspaper. However, Bassett provided several direct quotes from the newspaper itself that allowed readers to discern that he was referring to the Raleigh News and Observer. In not directly naming the newspaper, though, Bassett cleverly was practicing what he preached: Southerners should be debating ideas and issues through thoughtful discourse rather than \textit{ad hominem} attacks on individuals, institutions, newspapers, or political parties.

Bassett described the methods employed by the “widely-read” newspaper as possessing a “spirit of contemptuous vituperation.” The newspaper did not address the “views of its adversaries” but instead attacked them “personally and individually.” According to Bassett, the newspaper degenerated into calling individuals names like “old moss backs,” “revenue doodles,” “bung smellers,” and “pie hunters.” Bassett carefully explained the recent articles were not new or uncommon but rather symptomatic of a

“serious condition” that afflicted the South.²⁰³

Bassett then devoted the second part of his editorial to detailing the historical roots of this “condition,” starting with the early eighteenth century and moving all the way into the start of the twentieth century.²⁰⁴ These historical forces produced an environment, according to Bassett, in which journalists and politicians were better served in appealing to the “feelings” of southerners rather than “reason.” Bassett therefore argued, “Passion has come to dominate political ideas in the South,” and as a result southern politics was marred by a “decay of statesmanship.”²⁰⁵

Bassett connected this “reign of passion” to the “negro question” and issued a call to action:

It [the race question] has hardly been an appeal to the reason of the people, but rather an appeal to their feelings. Consciously or unconsciously it has bred race hatred and then fattened on it. It has made white men distrust negroes and negroes distrust white men. In the inflamed condition of public opinion which has resulted from it, charity is forgotten. If either the negro or the white man could now suddenly forget his passion and meet the opposition of the other in a spirit of tolerance, he would exhibit a degree of great mindedness rarely seen in the earth.²⁰⁶

This “spirit of tolerance” and desire for a more objective approach to social and political issues had been evident throughout Bassett’s writing on the South. Also embedded in Bassett’s words was his contention that the roots of racial strife originated in the politicians and journalists who pandered to the passions of the masses. As early as 1898

²⁰³Ibid., 301.
²⁰⁴According to Bassett, in the eighteenth century the majority of Southerners came to rely on the “landed aristocracy.” The lack of influence of the lower class and the complete power of the upper class created a system in which the masses yielded a political system dominated by landholders. The Revolutionary War “modified” but did not fundamentally shift power in a significant way. In the 1830s through the 1850s the “common man” gained greater representation and a “fuller share in government.”
²⁰⁶Ibid., 307.
Bassett had condemned the race-baiting politics that he saw developing in North Carolina. This “reign of passion” placed the “honest and intelligent well wishers of a new spirit in political life” in a predicament: they had to choose between two political parties, neither of which possessed leadership that represented their views. Bassett certainly saw himself as one of these men.  

Despite these complaints Bassett’s analysis offered a conciliatory message to the Democratic Party, although not referencing it by name. He stated that his article should not be seen as an attack on the “dominant party in the South” explaining that Democrats, despite their good intentions, had reached the strategic conclusion that “they could win their fight if they made the negro question the basis of their campaign.” He even praised the ways in which these leaders protected black schools from proposed cuts in funding. Bassett’s empathetic words for the Democratic Party were used to highlight the fact that it was the “reign of passion” that had caused these men to “tolerate, and even justify, political fraud.” Additionally, succumbing to passion “helped preserve the South’s provincialism; it has produced a one-sided press; it has made it possible for the South to be ‘Solid’.” To Bassett, the *News and Observer* represented narrowness and partisanship. Finally, the “reign of passion” had “pauperized the intellects of her statesmen—for it is true that men who do not have to battle for their ideas against able opponents do not have the capacity of forming vigorous ideas.” Bassett’s emphasis on this “battle of ideas” was apparent throughout the editorial. According to Bassett, intellectuals who carefully

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207 Bassett wrote to Hunt some years later while in North Carolina he had voted Democratically locally and Republican nationally. Bassett to Hunt, March 29, 1909 found in Porter, 116.

thought through the issues, not fiery orators who simply knew how to cater to the masses, should be the ones wielding power.

Following his conciliatory message to Democrats, Bassett moved to the final phase of his editorial, a call for action. He asserted that for “forty years before 1860 the whole life of the South shaped itself into the pro-slavery tendency. During that time politics came more and more to be dominated by the slave-holding classes and inflamed by sectional passions.” Again Bassett saw how dangerous the political landscape became when one group, in this instance the Democrats, seized all political power. He continued, “For forty years since 1860 Southern life has been thrown on a new basis of labor.” Although still primarily rural, “there has been radical change in the industrial basis of life” and led to an upward trajectory of towns where factories exist. In these towns “schools are better, men are more energetic, and ideas more cosmopolitan.” This atmosphere, according to Bassett, created a “divergence in political views” where people could engage in healthy public discourse about important issues. Calling the politics more “balanced,” Bassett ended with the optimistic sentiment that a “sounder political life” would in turn lead to “general progress.”

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209 Ibid., 309.
"Two Negro Leaders"

Herein lie buried many things which if read with patience may show the strange meaning of being black here at the dawning of the Twentieth Century. This meaning is not without interest to you, Gentle Reader; for the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.210

W.E.B. Du Bois’s 1903 jeremiad The Souls of Black Folk presented a peculiar dilemma for Bassett. As a long-standing supporter of Booker T. Washington, Bassett endorsed industrial training for blacks, agreed with black disfranchisement, and concluded that whites were socially and intellectually superior to blacks. Du Bois openly condemned all of these views, along with Washington’s submissiveness in giving up “political power...insistence on civil rights...[and] higher education of Negro youth” in order to “concentrate all their energies on industrial education, the accumulation of wealth, and the conciliation of the South.”211 Despite these words running in sharp contrast to Bassett’s previously held views and admiration of Washington, he could not deny the intellectual aptitude of Du Bois or the masterful work that he had produced. The Souls of Black Folk forced Bassett to reexamine his racial ideology. This reexamination materialized in Bassett’s 1903 SAQ editorial, “Two Negro Leaders.” Although Bassett demonstrated no reduction in his own racism, he did acknowledge the advancement of a portion of African Americans while also briefly suggesting that social equality, although essentially impossible to achieve, would be the only way to truly solve the race question.212

In his evaluation of Washington’s and Du Bois’s contrasting visions of improving

conditions for your race, Bassett attempted to blend the two leaders’ ideas as a route to racial progress. Outlining first Washington’s leadership, Bassett extolled the “Great Accommodator” for emphasizing economic progress through industrial training. Seeking improved race relations, Washington urged his followers to relinquish the quest for political power and social equality. Initially Bassett questioned whether Washington’s leadership and black disfranchisement had in fact produced actual gains in the previous twenty years for blacks or race relations in general. Then Bassett backtracked, suggesting that Washington’s call for peace was good even “if it does not secure its object.”

The article went on to praise Washington’s nonconfrontational approach, contending that patience and self-control on the part of blacks might eventually “find willing response in the ears of a few brave Southern people who do not love the crude animalism of the passion wrought masses.”

Despite his admiration for Washington, Bassett favorably described Du Bois’s opposition to both industrial training and Washington’s conciliatory measures. Central to Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* was his imagery of a societal “veil” compelling blacks to view themselves as “being a problem.” The “veil,” as defined by Bassett, was “the fact that the negro is everywhere made to feel that he is unlike other people, and that there is something which shuts him out of the world of other people.” Du Bois’s sketch of racial prejudice “makes us feel what an awful thing it is to be in America a negro and


\[214\] Ibid., 271-72.

\[215\] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 2. Du Bois also uses the term “double-consciousness” to illustrate the complexities and hardships of being black.
at the same time to be a man of culture.” 216 Less educated blacks, according to Bassett, were still affected by the “veil” but to a much lesser degree. Bassett then asked his readers: “And as for us, who are a divinely appointed superior race, how much do we do to render the burden lighter to either the one or the other?” 217 In accepting white supremacy, Bassett’s question epitomized the type of attitude and ideology that created this “veil” in the first place. Bassett’s paternalistic feelings towards blacks claimed that they had a problem and it was the job of whites to help reduce this problem. Du Bois, on the other hand, called for whites to repair the damages they had wrought on blacks: “The South ought to be led, by candid and honest criticism, to assert her better self and do her full duty to the race she has cruelly wronged and is still wronging.” 218

Ultimately Bassett’s analysis of The Souls of Black Folk and his evaluation of Washington and Du Bois reflected his own muddled approach to the race question. On one hand, Bassett applauded industrial training as he believed it was necessary and the best option for ninety percent of the black population. He acknowledged, however, that the “exceptional negro” or what Du Bois referred to as the “Talented Tenth,” should have the opportunity to pursue higher education. 219 According to Bassett these “men of great moral weight and men of broad character” would become the leaders of the African-American race. Bassett’s comments revealed a certain degree of his evolving ideology: until this article, he marginalized the role of blacks as leaders to their own cause.

217 Ibid., 270.
219 Bassett, “Two Negro Leaders,” 271; Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk, 105. “Here, then, is the plain thirst for training; by refusing to give this Talented Tenth the key to knowledge, can any sane man imagine that they will lightly lay aside their yearning and contentedly become hewers of wood and drawers of water?”
Despite his reverence for Du Bois and *The Souls of Black Folk*, Bassett came to a dispiriting conclusion: "It [*The Souls of Black Folk*] is a plea for soul opportunity, and it bears the evidence that its author while he was writing realized the hopelessness of it all. It deals with a most important phaze of the negro question, a phaze which must be reckoned with in the final solution of it, if we ever have any solution of it." Bassett's somewhat cryptic words implied that the race question could not be solved until blacks were not seen, by whites or blacks, as socially inferior. This "final solution" to Bassett, however, was "hopeless." Was it "hopeless" because Bassett thought the white southerners would not let this happen? Or because blacks were inherently inferior? Both? To the reader of "Two Negro Leaders" answers to those questions were not clear. Social equality was a concept that even most of Bassett's intellectual network considered foolish and not worthy of discussion.

Bassett concluded his editorial with an attack on those who dehumanized blacks and refused to acknowledge their potential as a race. He directed his reader's attention to a book, *The Negro a Beast, or In the Image of God*, which had sold widely and received favorable reviews.²²⁰ Its author, Charles Carroll, tried to use the *Bible* and science to prove that blacks were "beasts" who were "created with articulate speech and hands, that he may be of service to his master – the White man."²²¹ Outraged by this "stupid book" and even more so by the favorable southern reaction it had received, Bassett questioned how a "beast" could possibly produce a work like *The Souls of Black Folk*. But Du Bois

²²⁰ Charles Carroll, "*The Negro a Beast,*" Or, "*In the Image of God*" (St. Louis: American Book and Bible House, 1900).
²²¹ Ibid.
not only represented a problem to the "blacks as beasts" argument; the Harvard graduate's intellect also challenged and shifted Bassett's own views. Bassett was beginning to consider black agency and leadership. This ten percent of intelligent blacks, Bassett granted, should have the opportunity of higher education. Although hardly calling for universal suffrage, Bassett was, as his review of *The Souls of Black Folk* revealed, beginning to grapple with the concept of social equality as he had never done before.

Bassett's editorial struck a chord with several of his correspondents from the North. Albert B. Shaw, in his own journal *The American Monthly Review of Reviews*, publicly applauded the *SAQ* and called Bassett's analysis, "the saner Southern view on the race question, and appeals from the 'crude animalism of the passion-wrought masses' to the saving remnant of Southern chivalry and justice." Charles Forster Smith privately commended Bassett's views on Du Bois and Washington, stating that he had grown more in favor with Du Bois despite regarding Washington as one of his "heroes." Perhaps building off of Bassett's own commentary on social equality, Smith injected his own take: "The North as well as the South has gone a step too far in admitting the white man's claim to supremacy, doing the Negro some injustice." Bassett's own views, even those shared in his recent editorial, underscored this sentiment of white supremacy that Smith called into question. Bassett's shifting ideology had opened up consideration to the idea of social equality, even if he saw it as implausible to the near future. *The Souls of Black Folks*


\[223\] Charles Forster Smith to Bassett, July 18, 1903 JSB Papers, LC.
Folk, Bassett’s editorial and private correspondence, newspapers, and scholarly journals all illustrated that the “negro question” now drew obsessive attention throughout the nation.

Although Bassett devoted ample time and writing to the race question, his main passion and where he wanted to place most of his focus was on his own research and writing on historical topics. In fact, he spent the majority of the summer in 1903 in Washington, D.C., researching Andrew Jackson. He was in the beginning stages of what would become his seminal work, *Life of Andrew Jackson*. But as Bassett tried to focus on his own work that summer, the race question was intensifying throughout the South and many of Bassett’s fellow intellectuals solicited his thoughts and writing on the issue.

Albert Shaw wrote to Bassett inviting him to author a review of Dr. Lyman Abbott’s article, “The Race Problem in the United States.” Abbott’s article addressed the elevated tensions and complexities of race relations in the South. Explicit in Abbott’s analysis was the notion that blacks were inferior and that improved race relations could arise only as a result of changed actions and mindsets among whites. He asked his readers, “What are the duties which these sixty millions of whites owe to these ten millions of blacks?”

Bassett also received news of a controversy involving Booker T. Washington. While Washington was traveling, he and his large group, stopped in Hamlet, North
Carolina to dine and stay at a hotel. Because of the size of his group, the hotel chose to place Washington and his fellow African Americans in the main room and move the white patrons to a side room. This led to a public uproar led by Josephus Daniels who wrote an editorial titled, “Did Booker Crowd Out Whites?” Daniels warned his readers of the dangers of encouraging blacks and even blamed the Hamlet Incident on the fact that President Roosevelt had dined with Booker T. Washington a few years back in the White House. The engendering of such overconfident attitudes, according to Daniels, was the reason why misbehaving blacks found themselves “dangling at the end of ropes.” Bassett, both as an ardent supporter of Washington and a growing rival with Daniels, opposed how the blatantly partisan *News and Observer* covered the Hamlet incident.

Troubling news also came from Mississippi where James Vardaman, an extreme white supremacist and outspoken supporter of lynching, had been elected governor. Feeding off racial hatred, Vardaman unabashedly maintained that African Americans had no right to education, were not entitled to vote, and should never hold political office. Vardaman targeted Roosevelt’s views on race, calling the President a “coon-flavored miscegenationist.”

Vardaman’s campaign and his election as governor were noticed well beyond Mississippi. James Wilford Garner, a native Mississippian and student of William Dunning, wrote a letter to *The Outlook*, in which he painted a grim picture of the political situation in Mississippi. Garner outlined Vardaman’s campaign, highlighting the new

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228 James W. Garner, “A Mississippian on Vardaman,” *Outlook* 75, no. 2 (September 12, 1903): 140. A large contingency of Mississippians were still fuming over Roosevelt’s appointment of Minnie Cox, an African-American woman, to the postmaster general position in Mississippi.
governor’s belief that government should not allow blacks to vote, hold office, or even use state or federal money for their education. According to Garner, Vardaman not only supported lynch law but felt that blacks were created by God to be “burden-bearer[s].” Garner’s mentor and colleague, William Dunning pessimistically wrote Bassett: “My information from Miss. as to the negro problem is disheartening. The radicals are on top apparently and are pushing a policy in respect to lynching and schools that will surely lead to trouble.” Calling Vardaman “the most hot head[ed] of them all,” Dunning lamented the harmful effects his election would have on the state. Dunning insisted that Mississippi and the South as a region desperately needed “sober and sane men- men with some knowledge of the north.” Like Bassett, Dunning was appalled by the race-baiting politics that rampantly enflamed the South. Furthermore, Dunning suggested that white southerners needed some northern influence in order to think in the detached and objective way that would yield a more stable and legitimate political and social state.

Bassett was one of these so-called “sane and sober” southerners and thus was encouraged to test out the race question through his SAQ editorials. Bassett had written Dunning following the aftermath of Hamlet incident wondering how he might use the SAQ to address the race question more aggressively. Emboldening his southern friend, Dunning responded, “The sane men of the South must not hide away and say nothing at such a time as this. If they cannot have things as they wish, they must at least exert what influence they can against the radicals. It will never do to despair.” Dunning, dismayed by the recent developments throughout the South, charged Bassett to use his journal to

229Ibid., 139.
voice the more rational and objective views that Dunning and Bassett held in regards to
the race question.

Charles F. Smith had also given Bassett similar guidance earlier that summer. Reiterating
the significance of the race question, Smith observed, “The negro question is
the biggest you all have to deal with and you need to be both brave and wise in handling
it.” Smith praised the work of the SAQ and encouraged Bassett to continue fostering
growth in the “young leaders of thought” strongly urging his southern friend “Stay there
and do it.” This once again highlighted the substantial difficulties scholars like Bassett
faced by remaining in the South. They were seen as the “ground troops” for reforming
the region, whereas Smith, Dunning, Bancroft, and others could only encourage from
afar. Unlike Herbert B. Adams, these men were not nearly as cautious in their counseling
of the Trinity professor.

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230 Charles Forster Smith to Bassett, July 18, 1903, JSB Papers, LC.
Chapter 4: Bassett Wages War, 1903-1904

“Stirring up the Fires of Racial Antipathy”

An emboldened Bassett took to his pen and produced his next editorial, “Stirring up the Fires of Racial Antipathy.” For the historians who have discussed John Spencer Bassett, their focus often revolves around the aftermath of this article. Before considering the aftermath, however, it is imperative to first evaluate and analyze the article itself. This October 1903 editorial represented a continuation of Bassett’s evolving racial ideology, highlighting several of his steadfast views on race relations since the Wilmington riot. In other respects, however, “Stirring up the Fires of Racial Antipathy” marked a more aggressive and frank handling of the race question. Bassett’s views on the “negro question” were not static. This article illustrated how his views had, in some regards, subtly shifted, and in others, fundamentally changed altogether. Ultimately, his controversial editorial would stand as a watershed moment not only in his career but also in his racial ideology and attempts to act as “physician” to the South.

The primary objective of Bassett’s editorial was to generate discussion on the race question. His editorial explored the causes of racial strife while both implicitly and explicitly suggesting ways in which race relations could be handled more effectively. Hidden behind Bassett’s attempts at reform and his racial ideology there existed various contradictions and tensions within the editorial itself. On the one hand, the editorial acknowledged black progress, blamed white men for the racial hatred, insisted that the problem was chiefly political, and hinted at a solution via an undefined form of equality.

On the other hand, Bassett identified regression in African Americans, explicitly claimed white superiority, took his own race most seriously, and declared finding a solution to be hopeless. Many of these views had materialized in some form in two of his previous editorials, "The Reign of Passion" and "Two Negro Leaders." This editorial, however, was far more direct in its mission to dissect the race question and spark debate.

Towards the end of the editorial, Bassett admitted that he had "no solution for the negro problem."²³² He conceded that writing articles and giving speeches would not solve the race question. The problem was too entrenched into the national consciousness, too steeped in historical forces, and too complex for him to solve through the stroke of the pen. This pessimistic tone had no doubt been somewhat shaped by the hopelessness Bassett spied in *The Souls of Black Folk*.²³³ Bassett, predicting an increase of lynchings and 'outrages', claimed that the "conflict will be fiercer in the future than in the present."²³⁴ Nevertheless, the article still explored the problem and identified ways in which it could be at the very least managed and, perhaps one day, fully resolved.

Implicit in the very term, the "negro problem," was the presumption that all African Americans were of the same ability and worth to society. Stating that there were two extremes within the African-American population, Bassett argued that the lower class of the race had slipped into patterns of "idleness and shiftlessness." This had been a result of freeing blacks of inferior intellectual and moral capability from the master, who had kept

²³²Ibid., 305.
²³³Bassett wrote in "Two Negro Leaders" "*[The Souls of Black Folk]* is a plea for soul opportunity, and it bears evidence that its author while he was writing realized the hopelessness of it all." See page 272.
²³⁴John S. Bassett, "Stirring up the Fires of Racial Antipathy," 305. By "outrages" Bassett was referring to events like the Hamlet Incident where reactionary southern journalists and Democrats created hysteria following any sort of racial episode.
in check the “lowest tendencies of the negro.” Bassett offered very little guidance as to how the South would cope with this segment of the population.

Yet it was upper-class blacks, not the poor, who created the ultimate crisis, Bassett believed. He urged his readers to acknowledge the power of the “upper-class negro,” who had flourished since emancipation. African-American advances in education and “economic conditions” made them “too intelligent” and “too refined” to simply accept their “place” in the Jim Crow South. “He demands a better place,” Bassett wrote and “will some day seek to wipe out” the system that makes him feel inferior. After reading Souls of Black Folk, Bassett had become much more vocal about his belief in black leadership. He wrote, “Some day the negro will [be] a great industrial factor in the community; some day he will be united under strong leaders of his own. In that time his struggle will not be so unequal as now. In that time, let us hope, he will have brave and Christian leaders.” Even here, Bassett predicted that blacks would elevate themselves into a better economic situation. This demographic of the black population, however, created a completely different problem for whites: their advancement had bolstered the efforts of white supremacists. Essentially, Bassett argued that African-American progress did not solve but rather intensified the race problem.

Even though Bassett acknowledged black progress, he continued to emphasize the role that whites played in solving the problem and showed no retreat from his overt racism. He openly declared that “the duty of brave and wise [white] men,” as the superior

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235 Ibid., 299.
236 Ibid., 300-301.
237 Ibid., 305.
race was “to seek to infuse the spirit of conciliation into these white leaders of white men.” He then asked his predominantly white male readers, “Shall they [white males] also be beasts, like the dull-faced black men who stand over against them? Is the white man not superior to the black man—superior in mind, superior in opportunity, superior in obligation to do acts of charity?”

Bassett’s patronizing and racist words underscored his belief that a change in race relations primarily started with white men. The role of whites, according to Bassett, was to reach out to their inferior black brethren and help guide them to become more valuable citizens. This sentiment, after all, had been pervasive throughout Bassett’s wrestling with the race question.

Beyond the agency of blacks and the patronizing role of whites, Bassett claimed “the negro problem is, and has been for a long time, a political matter.” Tracing the historical roots of racial antipathy and its role in politics, the Trinity professor suggested that the previous five years had seen a “notable increase in the general opposition to the negro.” Critical to Bassett’s analysis of the problem was that the “antipathy is not mutual.” Whites hated blacks but blacks did not hate whites. This white animosity towards African Americans, according to Bassett, began when the first slave arrived in America in the seventeenth century and then slowly started to divide the nation when the Constitution was written: “It [racial antipathy] appeared in the great constitutional convention of 1787, when certain Southern States spoke darkly of the future in case they should not be allowed to import slaves.” Hostility over race produced a “political

238 Ibid., 305.
239 Although not as clearly stated or as developed with evidence, Bassett had essentially made this same claim in his “Reign of Passion” editorial in 1902.
question” that sparked secession and then the Civil War.\textsuperscript{241} This belief certainly put Bassett at odds with mainstream southerners who chose to remember the Civil War as being about states’ rights and protecting the southern way of life.

Bassett’s desire to reform the memory of the “Old South” did not stop there. He argued that northerners and southerners possessed a completely misguided notion of how blacks had behaved prior to the Civil War. The “imaginations” of current writers and the “emotional memories of most Southern women and some Southern men” falsely conceptualized antebellum blacks as being a “benign old man or gracious old ‘mammy,’ a guardian of the family children.”\textsuperscript{242} These invented memories romanticized the “Old South” and, to many southerners, justified slavery as actually profiting blacks whom freedom had made lazy, morally depraved, and ultimately useless to the South. Instead, Bassett asserted that ninety percent of blacks before the Civil War worked in the field. Thus an assessment of race relations and the progress of the African-American race should compare the “field hand,” not the “benign old man,” with the “new negro.” From this comparison, Bassett argued, a more accurate view of the progress or deterioration of the race could be surmised.

Beyond the historical back-story to race relations, Bassett also recognized that the race question had taken on a different role within politics. He asserted that the “negro question” had in recent years become the weapon of the Democratic Party “as a means of winning votes” and restoring power following the populist movement.\textsuperscript{243} Democrats

\textsuperscript{241}Ibid., 301.
\textsuperscript{242}Ibid., 300.
\textsuperscript{243}Ibid., 302
seized the issue and appealed to the masses by raising fears of "negro domination." Every racially tinged piece of news had become fodder for white supremacists rallying against the Republican Party. Bassett used two examples regarding Booker T. Washington to illustrate this point. The first example involved Washington's visit to dine at the White House with President Roosevelt, an event that Democrats had shamelessly attacked in order to win support and denounce the Republican president. Next, Bassett thoroughly ridiculed a "certain emotional and 'yellow' newspaper" for its coverage of the recent Hamlet incident, in which allegedly Booker T. Washington and other prominent blacks "forced" white patrons out of the main dining hall. 244 The newspaper that Bassett did not name was of course the News and Observer. Bassett later credited the Hamlet incident as a factor contributing to his decision to write "Stirring up the Fires of Racial Antipathy".

Recounting the "Bassett Affair" in 1911 to Charles Francis Adams, a former Union colonel and reputable historian, Bassett described how irritated he had been with the southern press. Newspapers as "intelligent moulders of public opinion ought to seek to calm rather than raise the feeling that the [Hamlet] incident aroused." Bassett then explained his role: "I concluded that it was my duty, as an editor of a calm and enlightened journal, to raise my protest, and the result was an editorial...." 245

The race question, according to Bassett, was "awaking a demon in the South." Denouncing the common "erratic impulses," Bassett claimed, "Each race seems to be caught in a torrent of passion, which, I fear, is leading the country to an end which I dare

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244 Ibid., 303.
245 Bassett to Charles Francis Adams, November 3, 1911, JSB Collection, Duke.
not name." Basset throughout the article spoke of this imminent conflict, though he admittedly could not predict as to whether it would come in the form of a political, social, or military struggle.

Bassett’s grappling with the idea of social equality also proved messy. After all, he overtly claimed that whites were superior to blacks. And yet his praise of the “upper-class negro” led him to conclude that blacks would not stop fighting until they eliminated the “badge of inferiority” that currently hung over them. Towards the end of the article he more directly addressed this elusive idea of equality. Before doing so he first outlined a few solutions others had provided regarding the race question. One idea was to set up a black republic in the Philippines. Another idea, that of Hinton Rowan Helper, was to “…fossilize them [blacks] beneath the American sod.” Calling these solutions untenable, Bassett then injected his own take:

The only solution reserved for us is the adoption of these children of Africa into our American life. In spite of our race feeling, of which the writer has his share, they will win equality at some time. We cannot remove them, we cannot kill them, we cannot prevent them from advancing in civilization. They are now very weak; some day they will grow stronger. They are now ignorant and passion-wrought; some day they will be wiser and more self-restrained.

Bassett’s words managed to be patronizing and yet still remarkably optimistic and realistic about black agency.

But what did Bassett actually mean by equality? The article itself offered very little

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246 Bassett, “Stirring up the Fires of Racial Antipathy,” 304.
247 Ibid., 301.
248 Ibid., 304. Bassett in his article “Anti-Slavery Leaders of North Carolina” had written in detail about Hinton Rowan Helper and his book *The Impending Crisis*. Bassett had also exchanged correspondence with Helper in 1898.
249 Bassett, “Stirring up the Fires of Racial Antipathy,” 304.
elaboration, but Bassett would later provide further insight in an interview with President Kilgo. When asked what he meant by equality Bassett responded, “I mean merely this, that the time will come when the negro will have a due proportion of wealthy, educated, prosperous, and civilized individuals, just as the other peoples of the world have.” Emphasizing financial advancement, Bassett continued, “Some day they will live in good houses, wear good clothes, have good schools, good churches, and be especially conservative and reliable citizens.” Guarded in his response Bassett then clarified, “This does not mean, nor did I intend that it should mean, that there will be social mingling of the races.” Bassett envisioned black progress resulting in a sort of economic equality but vehemently upheld the conventions of segregation. He could not foresee “social mingling” happening in the next two hundred years, stating that “social changes move very slowly.” When asked about social equality Bassett responded, “It was not in my thought. I do not think that anyone who knows me would believe that I meant to advocate anything of that kind. Between the two races is a wide gulf, and I should be the last man to try to bridge it. I had no thought of social equality in mind. I was thinking of the industrial and civic outlook of the negro race.”

Bassett’s comments, however, must be taken with a degree of skepticism, as this was a staged interview that sought to quell the uproar against his article. His comments about Du Bois in his “Two Negro Leaders” editorial and his analysis of the “upper-class negro” indicated that there was not such a “wide gulf” between the “talented tenth” and whites. Ultimately, Bassett’s elaboration on

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250 Manuscript recounting November, 1903 interview done between Kilgo and Bassett, Box 3, John C. Kilgo Records and Papers, University Archives, Duke University. At the end appears a note by William K. Boyd dated (June 1, 1910) stating that Kilgo was the reporter.
this murky idea of “equality” further promoted his progressive view of African-American agency while also asserting that there would always be a divide between the two races.

Even though Bassett directly claimed to have no solution, his article still essentially offered one: remove racial hatred and let blacks win their own equality. Black progress, according to Bassett, was occurring and would continue to do so. Nevertheless, he remained convinced that the historical forces and current social and political structure made this simply a hopeless solution, and thus no solution at all. Whites would not relinquish hatred and the more capable blacks would continue to fight for better conditions, and thus the race question would persist indefinitely. So Bassett urged his readers to at least understand this “great social force” and approach the race question with a measure of detachment. In doing so, Bassett wrote optimistically that perhaps a “spirit of conciliation shall come into the hearts of the superior race” and thus, if not solve, at least deescalate the volatile racial strife.

In analyzing Bassett’s editorial one cannot overlook the infamous sentence that provoked the ensuing controversy: “Now Washington is a great and good man, a Christian statesman, and take him all in all the greatest man, save General Lee, born in the South in a hundred years; but he is not a typical negro.”251 Understood in the context of the article itself, the statement seems intended to clarify that in evaluating African-Americans, even the “upper-class negro,” Booker T. Washington should not be seen as a “product of the negro race.” He was an “exceptional man,” but only on account of the “philanthropic intervention of white men.” Bassett contended, in other words, that

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251Bassett, “Stirring up the Fires of Racial Antipathy,” 299.
Washington was an outlier, and that reformers should not use Washington as an example representing the entirety of the African-American race. Considering Bassett's emphasis on dispassion and "scientific history," however, this comparative statement seemed both senseless and against the historian's better judgment as there was no objective way to prove it. So why then did Bassett insert such a seemingly unnecessary and potentially inflammatory statement about Washington's greatness? Once again, Bassett's account written eight years later offers some answers.

In early September of 1903 Bassett's mother died. Bassett told Charles Francis Adams that his mother's death coupled with the start of the school year had left him "in a rather exhausted state of mind and body." Bassett claimed to have written the article "as well as [he] could" but also admitted to writing it in "great haste." Further proof of this can be seen in the fact that the article contains some typos, a characteristic atypical of most of Bassett's writing.

The Booker T. Washington statement, however, as Bassett acknowledged later, was not a mistake but rather a calculated attempt to provoke a reaction from the southern press. According to Bassett, he was about to send the article to the printer but worried that it would "have the same fate as the others, i.e., fail to be noticed." Bassett, frustrated that his previous articles were not receiving more attention in the South, wanted the southern press to take notice of this article. The SAQ, after all, was intended to spark open fruitful discourse amongst southerners. In recounting his thought process, Bassett explained that his "Two Negro Leaders" article had "aroused comment in the North as

\[^{252}\text{Bassett to Charles Francis Adams, November 3, 1911, JSB Collection, Duke.}\]
most of the other articles did; but none of them could get a notice in the Southern papers. I was disappointed; for it was not to reach the North but the South that I was working. I came to feel that the only way to be heard by my own people was to say something very striking, and the opportunity soon came." He made statements in a similar vein when he wrote Edwin Mims: "I had written several articles which were calculated to make people think, but the papers would not notice them. I felt that they did not want a discussion. I put in the Lee reference to make them take notice. I remember well how, when it was written, I looked lovingly at it and remarked to myself, 'I guess that will wake them up.' As a waker it was eminently successful." 

Bassett, in fact, had made a similar statement about Washington’s greatness in the SAQ in 1902: "It is not only a just and readable estimate of one of the greatest men," [i.e. Booker T. Washington] "who has lived in the South, but it is a thoughtful glance into the ever-abiding negro problem." According to Bassett, he had also discussed his admiration for Washington with his good friend, Frederic Bancroft, who "agreed with me." Bancroft’s “extensive research into the life of the Old South makes him worthy of all confidence on this subject.” Therefore, Bassett stated that his comparison of Lee and Washington was “not a sudden thought,” even if “[p]utting it into the article, however, was sudden.”

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253 Bassett to Charles Francis Adams (Lincoln, Massachusetts), November 3, 1911, JSB Collection, Duke. This represents part of a statement that Bassett wrote as an account to the Bassett Affair.
255 “Literary Notes,” South Atlantic Quarterly 1, no. 2 (April, 1902): 198. Page’s article appears in the April 1902 issue of Everybody’s Magazine. None of the historical accounts of the “Bassett Affair” recognize that he actually made this statement.
256 Manuscript recounting November, 1903 interview done between Kilgo and Bassett, Box 3, John C. Kilgo Records and Papers, University Archives, Duke University.
And yet a few weeks after the article was published, Bassett even backtracked from this statement when interviewed by President Kilgo. Bassett explained that by “greatest” he merely meant that Washington had overcome the most in order to “achieve success.”

Bassett’s own admissions confirm that, with respect to the line about Washington, he had intentionally deviated from his standard practice of writing detached, dispassionate, and “scientific” history, so that he could take a stand as a provocative reformer. He made an entirely subjective statement that was impossible to support with evidence in hopes of inducing a reaction from southern newspapers. Bassett later asserted, “I remember well how when I had written it I said to myself: ‘I hope they will notice that!’ I thought it might lead to criticism from editors and other sensible people, calm and intelligent discussion, which I should have welcomed....”

**Trial with the South**

PROFESSOR BASSETT SAYS NEGRO WILL WIN EQUALITY.

He Also Says Booker Washington Is, ‘The Greatest Man, Save General Lee, Born in the South in a Hundred Years.’

SOUTHERN LEADERS SLANDERED—

Dire Predictions of a Coming Conflict Between the Races—Struggle Will Go on as Long as One Race Contends for Absolute Inferiority of the Other.

DARE NOT NAME END.

Running this headline, Josephus Daniels and the *News and Observer* certainly took “notice” of Bassett’s editorial. The “Bassett Affair” has ample primary and secondary documentation. Collections at Duke University Archives including: “Bassett Affair”, John Spencer Bassett, John C. Kilgo, and James H.
article, often placing in all capitals any sentences or phrases that were likely to strike his readers as especially provocative or blasphemous. Daniels’s own editorial called Bassett’s article the “most remarkable of a decade.” He denounced Bassett as being a “freak,” traitorous to the South for showing such contempt for the “attitude of nine-tenths of the Southern people.” Defending the Democratic Party, Daniels alleged that Republicans had originally made the race question a part of politics, whereas white supremacy campaigns had restored government in North Carolina through “revolution.”

For the next six weeks, papers throughout the South wrote daily on the controversy at Trinity. Most would follow the lead of the News and Observer, condemning Bassett’s editorial and often calling for his resignation. Despite Bassett’s intentions to spark reasoned debate about the race question, all that he ended up sparking was a barrage of insults against Bassett himself, President Kilgo, and Trinity College. Based on his “Reign of Passion” editorial, however, Bassett should have predicted this sort of reaction from Southgate Papers. All have letters, newspaper articles, and memoirs that give several different vantage points on the Affair. The best secondary source on the Bassett Affair is Earl Porter’s Trinity and Duke, 96-173. Porter uses the Affair to as a seminal moment in the institutional life of Trinity College as it grew into Duke University. For Porter, the Bassett Affair, above all else, underscored Trinity’s uniqueness and progressive leadership that led to this stand for academic freedom and thus boosted the reputation of the private Methodist college. Garber in John Carlisle Kilgo, 239-286, provides a detailed account, especially in the reactions of newspapers from around the state, with the primary aim of showing how President Kilgo was the ultimate target of Daniels and the North Carolina press. Finally, Josephus Daniels’s “I am Hung in Effigy” chapter in his autobiography Editor in Politics, 427-438, provides an account from the side of the News and Observer editor. This section of my thesis will certainly draw on all of these primary and secondary sources but will ultimately look at the Affair from the eyes of Bassett himself. For a more detailed account of all the events and perspectives on the Bassett Affair see the sources mentioned above.

Southgate Papers. All have letters, newspaper articles, and memoirs that give several different vantage points on the Affair. The best secondary source on the Bassett Affair is Earl Porter’s Trinity and Duke, 96-173. Porter uses the Affair to as a seminal moment in the institutional life of Trinity College as it grew into Duke University. For Porter, the Bassett Affair, above all else, underscored Trinity’s uniqueness and progressive leadership that led to this stand for academic freedom and thus boosted the reputation of the private Methodist college. Garber in John Carlisle Kilgo, 239-286, provides a detailed account, especially in the reactions of newspapers from around the state, with the primary aim of showing how President Kilgo was the ultimate target of Daniels and the North Carolina press. Finally, Josephus Daniels’s “I am Hung in Effigy” chapter in his autobiography Editor in Politics, 427-438, provides an account from the side of the News and Observer editor. This section of my thesis will certainly draw on all of these primary and secondary sources but will ultimately look at the Affair from the eyes of Bassett himself. For a more detailed account of all the events and perspectives on the Bassett Affair see the sources mentioned above.

As several of the secondary works suggest, there was a noticeable divide in how the eastern and western parts of North Carolina perceived the Bassett Affair. For the most part, Bassett’s supporters came from the west in regions that the black population was low. The most hostile reactions came from the east where black populations were significantly higher. According to several sources only four state papers, outside of Durham, supported Bassett through the crisis.
the southern press. The attacks were personal and malicious. The *News and Observer* called Bassett a “fungous growth” and later repeatedly wrote his name as “bASSett.” Several papers, including the *Wilmington Weekly Star* questioned Bassett’s mental sanity. The *Greenville Eastern Reflector* derided Bassett for having a “measly mind” and called him a “spectacular viper.” The *Tarboro Southerner* imaginatively claimed that Bassett was “more mouth than brains” and had “shown himself to be the greatest ass of the world since the equestrian performance of Balaam.” *King’s Weekly* referred to him as a “slobbering negrophilist” who should go work at Tuskegee or be sent to Liberia. This is only a small sampling of the sort of personal attacks on Bassett, which were pervasive not only in North Carolina but throughout the entire South.260

Beyond the diatribes aimed at Bassett personally were also genuine fears that his article would lead to strained race relations and potential violence from black “beasts.”261 The *Statesville Landmark* asserted that Bassett’s “calculated” article would “create race antagonism, and do much harm.” Even outside North Carolina, newspapers like the *Norfolk Virginian Pilot*, insisted that Bassett’s article would “stir up evil passions and foment unrest among a negro population that already makes life, property and the sanctity of white womanhood insecure throughout a very large proportion of the black belt.”262 A banker from nearby Wilson and a member of Trinity’s Board, John F. Bruton, confirmed the hostility towards Bassett’s article felt in the eastern part of the state as well as the authentic anxieties it had caused. Writing to James H. Southgate, president of the Board,

260 For all of these newspaper quotes, see Garber, 244-255.
261 For greater insight into these genuine fears of southern whites, see Martha E. Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).
262 Garber, 249-250.
Bruton demanded Bassett’s dismissal while also seeking to communicate the “true conditions throughout the east.”

They [People in Durham] do not know what we have gone through in the recent past. The dangers which have threatened our homes on account of the negro are not relegated to forgetfulness by any means—every published declaration like those of Dr. Bassett quickens the pulse of the black man which is observable by their demeanor on our streets and in other public places. Our women are afraid to be left alone even in the day time in sparsely settled communities and in towns they dread to be left alone at night. It requires superior finesse to avoid trouble with the negroes in our eastern towns day in and day out—and following a period like the one established by the publication of Dr. Bassett’s article, white men must be more than careful to avoid ruptures. Labor becomes disorganized, and the spirit of arrogance and a reckless indifference to consequences becomes almost unbearable.263

Bruton’s letter typified many of the fears and sentiments prevalent throughout the eastern parts of North Carolina and the South. Central to these anxieties was a feeling that southern women were the targets of “black beasts.” “Ruptures” like that of Bassett, according to Bruton, sparked chaos and unrest in the already tenuous economic and social conditions. Bruton, anticipating the rejoinder that his words might be perceived as a “politician’s speech,” claimed that he spoke the “plain unvarnished truth.” In his judgment, the Board members could not “jeopardize the College in our efforts to save him.”

Perhaps no document, though, better highlighted the anxieties over race and overall feelings of animosity towards Bassett and his “heretical” article better than the seven resolutions passed by the Smithfield Methodist Church. Just sixty miles southeast of Durham, the congregation held a special meeting to discuss the Bassett controversy. The

263John F. Bruton to James H. Southgate, November 14, 1903, James Southgate Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University (hereafter Southgate Papers, Duke).
first two resolutions condemned Bassett’s article as being “calculated,” “evil,” and “unjust to our southern institutions, and southern sentiment,” while also being “compromising and humiliating to southern Anglo-Saxon manhood and womanhood.” Four of the remaining resolutions focused on how Bassett, if retained at Trinity, would tarnish the school’s reputation irreparably, as he was “not a suitable and satisfactory model, after which to mould the sentiments and develop characters of our sons.” This led to the ultimate, and final resolution: “[W]e hereby earnestly petition and request the Board of Trustees to dismiss him without delay.”

The most interesting of these resolutions, however, was the fifth, which illuminated the sense of betrayal that southerners felt from Bassett’s analysis of southern history. His elusive take on equality and clear attempts to identify racial strife as primarily the fault of Democrats and the southern press were certainly central to the controversy. But what so many of his critics, including the Smithfield Methodist congregation, regarded as most reprehensible was the “attitude hostile to southern traditions and southern ideas.” Bassett had “utterly ignored the great men of the South, military, civil and religious.” The invectives hurled at Bassett and the excessive focus on the Booker T. Washington statement displayed the sensitivity white southerners felt towards their history and former leaders. Bassett, after all, knew that this seemingly unimportant comparison of Washington to Lee would arouse this deeply imbedded passion southerners had for their heritage. To the Smithfield Methodists, Bassett’s editorial was “not in harmony with

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264 Resolutions passed by the M.E. Church, of Smithfield, North Carolina. In regard to Prof. John S. Bassett, of Trinity College November 11, 1903, enclosed in a letter from W.M. Sanders and W.A. Edgerton to James H. Southgate, November 12, 1903, Southgate Papers, Duke.
history” and “hurtful to the best interests of our people, moral, social, educational, and religious.” Bassett’s iconoclastic version of southern history made him a prime target of a people so proud and defensive of their heritage and past.

Although far more inflammatory and hostile, this anonymous individual was voicing a fairly similar message as that of Josephus Daniels and much of the southern public: you betrayed the South and you should now leave. On November 3, Bassett found this note under his door:

You ought to be run out of N.C. and if things don’t change you will, a mob should lynch you for your contempt, you better go to Booker Washington College, you Son of a Bitch! you better get out of Durham at once, Fair warning, L.A.C. Nuff Said.265

Other letters, though less threatening, were also disheartening for Bassett. N.M. Jurney, a member of Trinity’s Board of Trustees, was disappointed, writing, “May God save Trinity from any more such unwise utterances.”266 Another letter from a W.H. Borden, a “life-long friend” of Bassett’s father and family, wrote to tell Bassett that he and others in Goldsboro were “very sad” about Bassett’s article.267

Pressure continued to mount against the silent Bassett, Kilgo, and Trinity College. Booker T. Washington wrote to a close friend, “Bassett’s article has stirred up a hornet’s nest in the South.” Still, Washington was encouraged, stating: “There is one thing, however, that is becoming more and more noticeable, and that is the serious people in the South give very little attention to these foolish newspaper criticisms of such a man as

265 Anonymous (L.A.C.) to Bassett, November 3, 1903, JSB Papers, LC.
266 N.M. Jurney to Bassett, November 2, 1903, JSB Papers, LC.
267 W.H. Borden to Bassett, November 2, 1903, JSB Papers, LC. Borden was the president of the Goldsboro Furniture Manufacturing Company.
Bassett.\textsuperscript{268} Despite Washington’s optimism, however, many followed the newspapers.

Bassett sought solace in some of his friends outside of Trinity. He regretfully wrote Walter Hines Page, who served as one of Bassett greatest allies during the controversy, stating that he wanted to “run off to some quiet and unobserved haven.” Yearning for a place where he could just write and research, Bassett lamented his actions: “I cannot believe that nature made me to wage war.”\textsuperscript{269} Conflicted as to what to do, Bassett also told Page, “I don’t want to abandon my critical spirit I have used, nor do I want to give them a chance at me on mere details. I think they will continue to howl at me.”\textsuperscript{270} Bassett and Dodd also exchanged several letters throughout the conflict. Dodd even had faculty and students at Randolph-Macon sign a resolution expressing support for Bassett.\textsuperscript{271}

Bassett broke his silence to the public with an interview published in the \textit{Durham Herald}. Claiming that a newspaper reporter had conducted the interview, it was actually Kilgo who asked the questions and then sent the interview to the newspaper.\textsuperscript{272} Bassett unequivocally refuted any belief in “social equality,” while also qualifying his Booker T. Washington statement. He claimed that by “greatest” he meant the “capacity to break

\textsuperscript{268}Washington to Timothy Thomas Fortune, November 7, 1903, BTW Papers. Washington was in route to Washington, D.C. for a conference on “How to Solve the Race Problem” put on by the National Sociological Society. Jesse Lawson, \textit{How to Solve the Race Problem: The Proceeding of the Washington Conference on the Race Problem in the United States} (Washington, D.C.: Beresford, Printer, 1904). The Conference was held from November 9-12, 1903 “under the auspices of the National Sociological Society.”

\textsuperscript{269}Bassett to W.H. Page, November 7, 1903, in Porter, 125.


\textsuperscript{271}Bailey, \textit{William Edward Dodd}, 39. Surprisingly there is no documentation of correspondence between Bassett and Dunning during November. This is a bit hard to believe considering their frequent correspondence and the fact that Dunning had told Bassett to pursue the race question with his next \textit{SAQ} editorial.

\textsuperscript{272}\textit{Durham Morning Herald}, November 8, 1903.
over fearful impediments and achieve success.” His high regard for Washington was a “private opinion, from which I readily admit that other people may positively differ.” Bassett did not tell the public that he intentionally inserted the statement in hopes of causing controversy, an admission he later made in private. Hoping to convince the public that he was in fact a proud native white southerner, he added, “As a student of history, I am acquainted with the South to some extent, and never dreamed of undervaluing the character and work of any man.” Furthermore, as a professor, he desired to “inspire [the young men in the South] to gather up and preserve our own history, and to do what I could towards giving the South a literature worthy of her people.” Finally, Bassett tried to disassociate both himself and the SAQ from Trinity College. Bassett took full responsibility as editor of the journal and asserted that his article reflected his own private views, claiming, “I did not consult with anyone about it. I am myself responsible for it.”

If anything, Bassett’s interview simply added fuel to the fire. The following day, the News and Observer ran an editorial titled “Professor Bassett’s Explanation Needs Crutches.” The Charlotte News ridiculed Bassett for being not only foolish but also cowardly. Even privately, individuals like John F. Bruton, criticized Bassett’s interview as consisting of “feeble utterances in explanation, brought forth too by the prodding of a newspaper correspondent.”

Though initially supportive Frederic Bancroft’s subsequent letters revealed that he
was not aware of how volatile the situation had become. Bancroft had spoken about the
article with both Dunning and William K. Boyd, Bassett’s former student who was then
studying under Dunning at Columbia. Bancroft told Bassett that he and Dunning were not
in agreement with “that deadly yet really unmanly sentence” concerning Booker T.
Washington’s relative greatness. Bancroft chastised Bassett for being so “careless.” Both
Bancroft and Dunning felt that the substance of the article was worthwhile but that the
execution was “crude.” “And now you are famous,” Bancroft teased. In the end,
Bancroft advised Bassett to “Laugh it off” as the whole controversy was merely “funny”
and would pass.276 Three days later, however, Bancroft wrote Bassett apologizing for not
recognizing the seriousness of the controversy at hand. Still encouraging Bassett to not
“take it too seriously,” Bancroft recommended that Bassett “move back from the front of
the (negro) stage.”277 “Feel innocent,” Bancroft urged the embattled professor, “but don’t
do it again or even mention the subject.” This message certainly must have felt like a
betrayal to Bassett, as Bancroft, Dunning, Smith, and other northern intellectuals had
previously encouraged him to take up the race question boldly.

As the weeks passed the press expanded the controversy to encompass Trinity.
Josephus Daniels, a longtime rival with President Kilgo, the Dukes, and Trinity College,
imaginatively told his readers that the “pathway of free and untrammeled thought in the
Department of History at Trinity is lit by the steady glow of the trust cigarette.”278
Another newspaper ridiculed Trinity’s perceived image as a “northern institution” calling

276 Bancroft to Bassett, November 8, 1903, JSB Papers, LC. A watermark has made a portion of
this letter very hard to read.
277 Bancroft to Bassett, November 11, 1903, JSB Papers, LC.
278 News and Observer, November 27, 1903.
it the Chicago University of the South and “a nursery of freaks” that had been “tobacconized, Kilgoized and republicanized with a Duke for a ruler.” Thus “we can probably look on the jabberings of this idiot with less contempt.”

Webster’s Weekly echoed similar sentiments: “Duke’s money has made it possible for Trinity’s teacher of history to fling defiance in the face of Southern ideals and call on the young men of the South to forsake the faith of their fathers and worship the shrine of the negro.”

Bassett even recalled that the “onslaught” was being shifted away from him and onto the college. Most of his friends remained resolute in their support of him, but others who still supported Bassett believed that Trinity “could not stand the brunt of the attack and that I should go.”

When Bassett learned that the Board of Trustees meant to discuss his fate, he wrote to Board President James H. Southgate, stating that if the Board requested a resignation that he would without hesitation “comply with their wishes.”

Bassett, although still confident in his right to academic freedom, had become weary of the damage that the controversy was causing the college. In writing this letter of (potential) resignation, Bassett also was able to unload the burden onto the Board. In fact, with the exception of his interview with Kilgo published in the Durham Herald, Bassett was more of a bystander to the entire episode then he was an active participant. Any sort of public action in his defense, as Bancroft had told him, would most likely have only fueled the fire. As for the opinions at Trinity, Bassett seemed confident in his colleagues, President

279 Lenoir Topic, quoted in Garber, 251.
280 Garber, 248.
281 Bassett to Charles Francis Adams, November 3, 1911, JSB Collection, Duke.
282 Bassett to Southgate, November 16, 1903, Southgate Papers, Duke.
Kilgo, and many of the Board members.

A few days after offering to resign, Bassett wrote an uncharacteristically emotional letter to Kilgo. Earlier in the afternoon Kilgo had met with the faculty to show a full endorsement of Bassett and to speak in favor of his retention at Trinity. Bassett told Kilgo, “Now I will say that I love you, first because you have loved me, and secondly because you are lovable, because you are the one man of all my acquaintance with college and university men, and with others, who has been the perfect combination of mind and heart and soul.” Calling Kilgo a “steadfast friend,” Bassett’s affectionate words also reflected a sense of impending doom for both him and Kilgo. “We may go together,” Bassett wrote, and “if not that, we shall have a long trial together.” Acknowledging the uncertainty of the situation, Bassett continued, “Some day I shall put into permanent shape the things which now are passing around us. Then you shall be vindicated. We can afford to wait. We are on the side of the future man. They can never make the world forget that we were not afraid of them.” Finally, Bassett ended his letter with an invitation to Kilgo for manly commiseration: “You also always seem so strong that you do not seem to need my help, you must some times get lonely. If so command me. I’ve got some cigars left over from the southern teachers—Come and smoke them. And if my cold heart will not warm you let me sit and look at you as you smoke—and I will be content.” Bassett’s heartfelt words and uncharacteristic letter perhaps reflect how out sorts he was during this unrelieved time of anxiety and doubt. Being under such public and private scrutiny certainly brought out insecurities that Bassett usually did not possess or at least did not reveal.
The days leading up to the Board meeting saw unrelenting press coverage and an outpouring of communication to Bassett, Southgate, and other individuals with influence. Although the *News and Observer* and the majority of the southern press strengthened their attacks, this twelve-day period functioned also as a time for all of Bassett’s supporters to rally in defense of the embattled professor.

Outside of Trinity, support for Bassett galvanized as it became clear that Trinity might dismiss him. One notable defender came from Columbia University. Bruce R. Payne, a Trinity alumnus and graduate student at Columbia’s Teacher College, sent a petition to Southgate, signed by seventeen Trinity alumni who at the time were at Columbia. The esteemed Trinity alumni offered three “facts” that ought to be considered while deciding Bassett’s fate. One, Trinity College had recently “enjoyed a national reputation as a place where liberality of thought and scholarly ideals are cherished.” Two, because of this reputation, alumni were able to secure positions and degrees at “larger universities,” a point that was clearly underscored by the sheer fact that the seventeen Trinity graduates who signed the petition were all now at Columbia. Three, and finally, “we believe the removal of Professor Bassett, a well known scholar, on account of one unfortunate utterance, would seriously impair this distinctive position the College enjoys.” The attitudes presented from Columbia were also echoed, although in small numbers, by Trinity alumni at Harvard and Yale.

Southgate heard from many others who also urged him vehemently to retain

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283. Telegraph from Edward L. Conn (*City* Editor) to Southgate, November 19, 1903, Southgate Papers, Duke.
Bassett. The school's former president, John F. Crowell, wrote a forceful letter insisting that Trinity "not yield to the mob-spirit which calls for the surrender of scientific conviction."\textsuperscript{286} One of the Trustees, Jacob A. Long, a lawyer from Greensboro and a self-proclaimed "full-blooded-southern-confederate-democrat" wrote to Southgate contending that the controversy had been blown out of proportion. Long recalled that there was once a time when "a man could not say publicaly [sic], that he favored the emancipation of slaves" but that now it was unacceptable for someone to favor "putting [blacks] back into slavery." Long also briefly weighed in on the discussion about equality: "No sane man will contend that the negro will ever be the equal of the white man—but the negro is now entitled to equality in treatment before the law—forty years ago he had only the right to live." This was one of the very few letters that did not completely disavow Bassett's views on race. Long insisted that Bassett keep his job and "let the friends of Trinity stand still and the tempest will spend its fury in a little time."\textsuperscript{287}

No individual from the North was more active or influential in Bassett's defense than Walter Hines Page. The prominent writer and former Trinity student became intensely involved with the controversy at Trinity. His power and connections as the editor of the \textit{World's Work} also meant that the affair received significant coverage in the North. During November, Page wrote Benjamin Duke persistently, hoping to push Trinity's financial patron to Bassett's side. Page impressed upon Duke the importance "that a professor from Trinity College should be allowed to hold and to express any

\textsuperscript{286}Garber, 265.
\textsuperscript{287} Jacob A. Long to Southgate, November, 20, 1903, Southgate Papers, Duke. Southgate heard from another Board member, R.A. Mayer of Charlotte, North Carolina. Mayer, like many of those who wrote to Southgate, did not agree with Bassett’s article but was "heartily in favor of his being retained as a member of the faculty." R.A. Mayer to Southgate, November 30, 1903, Southgate Papers, Duke.
rational opinion he may have about any subject whatever; for this, of course, involves the question of freedom of speech.” 288 Retaining Bassett would be a “splendid vindication” for Trinity. Ten days later, when Bassett had offered his resignation, Page wrote Duke once again. “I hope that he will not be permitted to resign—will not be driven out on the cry of ‘nigger.’ Trinity must stand, as you stand, for free thought & free speech. It will give the college a world-wide good reputation for courage if it withstands this cry & keeps Bassett. God help us all to a little courage—don’t you say so?” 289 This was a tremendous opportunity for the Dukes and Trinity, Page wrote a few days later, to “show the whole world that there is at least one institution in the South & North Carolina that is free.” Acknowledging some of the obstacles, Page wrote: “What is a great college for? Isn’t its main purpose to be a place for absolute freedom of thought & speech?” Towards the end of the letter Page referenced the 1902 Sledd Affair and demanded that Trinity not follow the same path and let the “fools” win and think that they “own the State.” 290

Despite some initial uncertainty, the Duke family ended up supporting the retention of Bassett. Although Ben Duke was the family’s main voice at Trinity, James “Buck” Duke, his brother, also weighed in on the matter: “This man Bassett maybe has played the fool and oughtn’t to be on the faculty, but he must not be lynched. There are more ways of lynching a man than by tying a hempen rope around his neck and throwing it over the limb of a tree. Public opinion can lynch a man, and that is what North Carolina

290 Ibid.
is trying to do to Bassett now. Don’t allow it. You’ll never get over it if you do."\(^{291}\)

Ben Duke cancelled many of his plans in New York at the end of November in order to stay in Durham and be present for the meeting of the trustees in which he voted to retain Bassett.\(^{292}\)

Within Trinity, the students and faculty also organized in support of their venerable colleague. H.C. Satterfield, president of the student body, sent Bassett a letter on November 20 declaring that the student body government passed resolutions “without a dissenting vote” in support of their beloved professor, even begging him to withdraw his letter of resignation.\(^{293}\)

William Garrott Brown, the prominent southern writer and historian, was on campus throughout November. With Brown’s help, William Preston Few and the entire Trinity faculty drafted a statement to be presented in the Board’s meeting. Like many of the other appeals, this statement stressed that the “real issue” was academic freedom. Conceding that Trinity might lose students and “friends” by retaining Bassett, the faculty expressed its firm sense that “[m]oney, students, friends, are not for one moment to be weighed in the balance with tolerance, with fairness, and with freedom.” Enthused, the faculty continued, “This college has now the opportunity to show that her campus is undeniably one spot on Southern soil where men’s minds are free, and to maintain that


\(^{292}\)Porter, 130.

\(^{293}\)H.C. Satterfield to Bassett, November 20, 1903, JSB Papers, LC. Other accounts, like E.C. Perrow’s Memoir, attested that an overwhelming majority were in support of Bassett. E.C. Perrow Memoir transcribed from diary December 1, 1903 sent in letter from Perrow to B.E. Powell (Duke University Librarian), June 10, 1958, Bassett Affair Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University (hereafter B.A. Collection, Duke). Also, see S.B. Underwood letter to the editor “As Students Saw the Matter: The Bassett Affair from the View Point of a Trinity Student” *Elizabeth City Tar Heel*, January 7, 1904, found in Bassett Affair Collection, Duke.
the social order of the South need not be shielded from criticism because it has no reason to fear it, because it is not too weak to bear it.294

The faculty's support for Bassett's did not stop there. Each faculty member individually tendered a letter of resignation and turned it in as a sealed envelope to Kilgo only to be opened if Bassett was dismissed. Even Kilgo prepared a letter of resignation. Surprisingly, these letters of resignation were not used, or even meant to be used as leverage and were kept a secret from the Board of Trustees.295 As to why Kilgo and the faculty chose to keep these hidden remains somewhat unclear. Garber argues that the faculty wanted the Board to come to a decision in support of academic freedom based on the case itself and not the possible threat of losing Trinity's entire faculty. Still, the formalized statement supported unanimously by the faculty served as a clear message to the trustees that dismissing Bassett would come at the cost of opposing the faculty.

Bassett continued to receive letters of measured support from various historians. In fact, Bassett was reaching out to friends to help him find a job when and if he was dismissed from Trinity. Ulrich Bonnell Phillips wrote, "I am very sorry to learn of your being persecuted for your frankness and I shall await the outcome with solicitude. It requires a great deal of optimism sometimes to maintain one's faith in the steady progress of opinion in the South. I had hoped that Trinity would encourage men to think and speak their thoughts."296 The most candid communication, however, came once again from Bancroft. Insisting that Bassett withdraw his letter of resignation, Bancroft sensed that

294 "A Statement by the Faculty of Trinity College," Kilgo Papers, Duke.
295 Garber, 268
296 Phillips to Bassett, November 27, 1903, JSB Papers, LC.
Bassett had no chance if the Board of Trustees was given an easy way out of the situation. He worried that Bassett was not using his "habitual judicial state of mind" and advised the Trinity professor to not "do anything important without consulting someone that will take a cool view." Pessimistically, Bancroft predicted that Kilgo and the faculty would "bend as the wind blows." "Academic independence is a dream," Bancroft wrote, "and freedom, North as well as South, means liberty to say whatever will not arouse the ire of the benefactors or patrons of the college."297 Although there was certainly truth in his statement, Bancroft was out of touch with the situation at Trinity, and he certainly did not know that Kilgo and the faculty had voiced unanimous support for Bassett.

When the Board met at 8:00 pm in the Washington Duke Building on December 1 Bassett's fate was completely in the hands of the twenty-five trustees present. Most were influential businessmen, a few involved in politics, and nine were ministers. Although Bassett certainly had many vocal supporters, there were also several men who emphatically wanted him dismissed. There were also, of course, members whose views going into the meeting were not altogether clear. Many feared that Fumifold Simmons, North Carolina Senator and Trinity trustee, would persuade and intimidate other Board members into dismissing Bassett. Simmons, a Trinity alumnus and powerful orator, had become the champion of the Democratic Party and "White Supremacy Campaign" in North Carolina. Simmons even announced that he was "going to Durham to fight [his] last battle for White Supremacy."298

297 Bancroft to Bassett, November 27, 1903, JSB Papers, LC.
298 Robert Lee Durham, a member of the Board, provided one of the most detailed accounts of the happenings on December 1. He visited Simmons that morning to "find out exactly how belligerent he was." Durham was actually a supporter of Simmons and recounted how he served as a "commissioned officer in
After initial proceedings, President Kilgo was brought in to deliver a speech, after which Board members would debate the issue among themselves. Students had assembled around the building, filling the hallways, basement, and even the roof in an attempt to listen to the proceedings. In so doing, the students created enough noise that one of the trustees implored Kilgo: "Why don't you go out there and stop those boys from disturbing us!" To this Kilgo responded, "It is not my business to stop them and if I were one of them, I'd be right out there doing the same thing. This is their institution you men are trying to wreck." Kilgo gave what was perceived by many to be a powerful speech with "unsurpassed eloquence" on how Trinity must stand for academic freedom.

Following Kilgo’s speech, Southgate read the faculty statement as well as many of the letters that he had received throughout November. The majority of these statements were, like the one from the Trinity alumni at Columbia, in favor of retaining Bassett. For the next several hours the trustees debated the decision in painstaking detail. As it became clear that the majority was in favor of retaining Bassett, Southgate put forth a motion that a committee be assembled to draw up a proposed resolution. There were several attempts to block this motion, but the committee finally passed it and Southgate adjourned with two others. When they returned, they issued a resolution that had actually

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the White Supremacy Troops” to keep to a minimum the number of blacks who registered to vote while also not being summoned by the federal courts. During this meeting Simmons clearly indicated that he would argue that Bassett should be dismissed “for the good of the College.”


300 Garber, 269.
been prepared beforehand by William Few and William Garrott Brown.\textsuperscript{301}

Before voting, many members insisted that an additional statement be made, so as to ensure the public that Bassett was not a proponent of social equality. Some trustees, like Southgate, regarded such a step as unnecessary and counterintuitive, but after lengthy discussion, a handwritten addendum was added: “We state as a fact that Professor Bassett does not believe in, nor does he teach social equality, and we have confidence in him, both as a man and a teacher.” At 3:00 in the morning, seven hours after the trustees had convened, the Board voted eighteen to seven in favor of retaining Bassett.

The campus erupted into celebration when they learned of the Board’s decision. A group of students rushed to Bassett’s house to wake their beloved professor, where he delivered a short speech.\textsuperscript{302} Students then reassembled, built a bonfire, and hung two effigies of Josephus Daniels. The students’ actions sparked yet another controversy that once again hinged around freedom of expression. In an utterly bizarre turn of events Daniels and the \textit{News and Observer} condemned the burning of the effigies as an infringement on Daniels’s freedom of press and speech.\textsuperscript{303} Even the \textit{New York Times}, which had been following the events at Trinity intently, could not help but identify the hypocrisy of the Raleigh newspaper and wondered how “intelligent men” could possibly possess such “absurd” notions.\textsuperscript{304} Bassett, of course, had been asking similar questions in

\textsuperscript{301}This, along with several other accounts, suggest that Southgate and others had a strong inclination as to how the Board would vote before the meeting even took place. Accounts, like that of Henry A. Page, Walter Hines Page’s brother, and member of the Board, however, suggest that some Board members sensed that Bassett would be dismissed.

\textsuperscript{302}Bassett to Charles Francis Adams, November 3, 1911, JSB Collection, Duke.

\textsuperscript{303}\textit{News and Observer}, December 4, 1903.

\textsuperscript{304}“A ‘Free Press’ in North Carolina” (editorial), \textit{New York Times}, December 5, 1903, quoted in Garber, 281.
his “Reign of Passion” editorial at to how the southern press operated.

“In the weeks that followed, news of the events at Trinity spread. Bassett received countless letters from people throughout the country, many of whom he did not know. The majority of these letters congratulated him for withstanding the “onslaught” and expressed excitement at the precedent that the controversy had set in terms of academic freedom. Very few of these letters, however, reflected any sort of new thinking or discussion about race relations. Likewise, most newspaper articles centered on academic freedom and very little attention was spent on the primary objective of Bassett’s article: to dispassionately discuss the race question. This is not to say that the subject was altogether ignored. One letter echoed Bassett’s own sentiment that the race question would not “be properly and permanently settled” because of “ignorance, prejudice, and unwise methods.” This individual lamented that “northern reformers” only made matters worse by not considering the role of southern whites in their ideas of reform. Jasper C. Massee, a Baptist minister in Raleigh, wrote to Bassett stating that he had heard far too

\[\text{305 Quote of Southgate during the proceedings found in E.C. Perrow Memoir, B.A. Collection, Duke.}\]
\[\text{306 Within the “Bassett Affair Collection” at Duke are well over a hundred photocopies of newspaper clippings from the entire nation in reaction to the Bassett Affair. It was not limited to the East Coast as many of these clippings are from Oregon, California, Utah and other western states. As far as I can tell everyone of these papers outside of the South celebrated the events at Trinity as a victory for freedom of speech. Most southern newspapers stood behind the }\text{News and Observer}\text{ maintaining an indefensible argument that “Prof. Bassett is entitled to his views on this subject” but “is not the proper person to teach Southern youth.” }\text{Richmond Times-Dispatch, December 7, 1903 quoted in }\text{Asheville Citizen, December 8, 1903.}\]
\[\text{307 Y.H. Bates to Bassett, December 5, 1903, JSB Papers, LC.}\]
much about “southern ideals,” “sentiment,” and “traditions” and not enough about Jesus Christ. Massee believed that there was a “Christian Southern conscience” that would eventually lead to a better solution to the race question.\textsuperscript{308}

Throughout December, Bassett remained relatively silent corresponding only with close friends. Bancroft congratulated Bassett for making it through the controversy, jokingly telling Bassett that he had recently drank “some of the best sweet cider ever made” even “better than either Lee or Booker T. ever drank!”\textsuperscript{309} Much of his personal outgoing and incoming correspondence during December concerned the upcoming AHA conference in New Orleans that Bassett and other southern historians had given great attention to throughout 1903. It was the first time since the inception of the AHA in 1884 that the annual meeting would be held anywhere south of Washington, D.C. Furthermore, the conference would have a symposium specifically on the “Study and Teaching of History in the South, Past, Present, and Future.” In November Bassett had written Dodd encouraging him to tone down his paper for the AHA and admitting: “I don’t know what I shall say, and if I could get out of it I should say nothing at all.”\textsuperscript{310} Originally he had planned on delivering a paper titled, “The Relation of History Teaching and Southern Political Ideals.”\textsuperscript{311} Bassett, much to the disappointment of Dodd, Dunning, and others, canceled his plans to travel to New Orleans on account of “a severe attack of rheumatism.”\textsuperscript{312}

Following the conference Dunning and several others wrote Bassett informing him

\textsuperscript{308}Jasper C. Massee to Bassett, December 22, 1903, JSB Papers, LC.
\textsuperscript{309}Bancroft to Bassett, not dated but likely mid-December, 1903, JSB Papers, LC.
\textsuperscript{310}Bailey, 39.
\textsuperscript{311}Stephenson, “John Spencer Bassett As Historian of the South,” 313.
\textsuperscript{312}Bailey, 39.
that the conference had generated great excitement among southern members.\footnote{Dunning to Bassett, January 6, 1904, JSB Papers, LC. In this letter Dunning critiques Dodd a bit for his pessimistic views on the conditions in Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Bassett also received a letter from Brevard Nixon, an attorney from Charlotte, North Carolina who had attended the conference and wrote optimistically about the direction the South and the nation. “This meeting was the strongest fact in history that the prejudice [of] the north against the south has breathed its last and that today we all stand together in one great united republic where the great minds on both sides come together in harmony.” Nixon to Bassett, January 3, 1904, JSB Papers, LC.} Even with Bassett absent, the meeting in New Orleans demonstrated some momentum in the agency and cohesion of both southern and northern professors to reform how the field of history was approached and utilized within the South. Dodd was also pleased with the conference but was willing to identify the enormous challenges that he and Bassett faced. Dodd fretted that there were no teachers present from the Carolinas and only two from Virginia whereas there were forty-three from Chicago and over a hundred from New York City.\footnote{Dodd to Bassett, January 26, 1904, JSB Papers, LC.}

Dodd prepared a paper, “Some Difficulties of the History Teacher in the South,” for the meeting. Discouraged by the conditions, Dodd once again attacked Confederate societies and proclaimed that high school history teachers taught that the “South was entirely right...in 1860 and that slavery was not the cause for which its people were contending.”\footnote{Bailey, 39.} Dodd then articulated to his audience the message that he and Bassett had been voicing for years, “Our grand confederate camps fear what they call ‘false history’” adding that they set up “history committees to keep watch and put out of the schools any and all books which do not come up to their standard of local patriotism.” Referring to Bassett, Sledd, Trent, and his own recent trials, Dodd then asserted that to “speak out boldly” would “destroy one’s usefulness; to remain silent is out of the question for a
strong and honest man; and to follow the smooth via media means failure to influence anybody or anything.” Dodd’s words brought to mind Bassett’s own path during his time at Trinity. Bassett tirelessly wrote articles that were intended to influence southern thinking but felt his efforts were inconsequential. As a result, he felt compelled to embolden his actions and words but was subsequently catapulted into a month-long tempest that nearly resulted in his dismissal from Trinity College. Following the controversy, Bassett was forced to reassess how he might still reform the ways in which southerners viewed race and history. In the immediate wake of the Affair, Bassett’s silence in the press, his decision not to publish an article by Booker T. Washington in the SAQ, and his absence from the event in New Orleans all seemed to indicate that he was trying to stay out of the spotlight.

This retreat though was temporary. As the months passed since the controversy Bassett showed that he was not content to keep his views on reform silent from the public. In the April number of the SAQ Bassett published Dodd’s AHA paper.316 Fittingly this led to yet another heated controversy this time aimed at Dodd for his aggressiveness towards former Confederates. In response to the disparaging attacks on Dodd, Bassett wrote “The Task of the Critic” in the October number of the 1904 SAQ.317 This article, however, was in response to much more than just Dodd’s trials with the public. The main subject of the article was the “critic” whose “unconventional thinking” made him a natural “traitor to the South.” Given Bassett’s own history and writing, this

editorial reads as a defense of his own actions as a critic of the South.

"The critic stands for change," Bassett asserted, and was "dissatisfied with some of the things which he sees around him." "He may be a man of education who has run far ahead of the actual state of thought in his community" but he should not be "afraid" to voice his views to the public. Bassett landed on his ultimate defense of both himself, Dodd, and other southerners who insisted upon challenging conventional southern opinion:

The critic is born to wage war on the conservative. He is a tester of conservatism, putting it to a defence of itself. He watches for its weak places and strikes through them as skillfully as he can. He lops off the excrescences which conservatism breeds on the body of society. He gives the exercise to the minds of the masses which serves to awaken them from lethargy. He stimulates and serves society, even though he may at times go farther than it seems prudent to go.318

Still seeing himself as a "physician" to the South, here Bassett was in essence eulogizing his actions of waging war against the conservative. To Bassett "conservatism" was an ideology of playing to prejudice of the "masses of people whose power of abstract reasoning is limited." Furthermore conservative thought "appeals to their feelings with greater effect than to their logical faculties." Bassett even boldly proclaimed that "defenders of conservatism" did not "hesitate to draw religion to its support, telling the people that God has ordained the things which are." All of this resulted in conservatives launching "furious personal attacks" on the critic and going to great lengths to silence the voice of the critic. To Bassett, this made the conservative a "painful clog on the progress

318 Ibid., 298.
of thought” and “social reforms.”

Bassett acknowledged that the critic was also subject to “wrong-doing.” In an attempt to counter conservative thought he could often exaggerate evils or present inaccurate views in hopes of eliciting change. Perhaps referring to “Stirring up the Fires of Racial Antipathy” Bassett wrote, “Sometimes he is carried away by the enthusiasm of battle to rush against lines which he would not in his quieter moments essay to storm.”

The critic should at times put aside his “bitterness” and instead “make demonstrations of love.” Drawing on this point Bassett then cleverly claimed that “[p]erhaps the only perfect critic the world has seen was Christ.” The “true critic” was a sanctified one who always remained “loyal to truth.” Bassett saw his own crusade against southern conservatism as being a noble undertaking that simply sought to bring out the truth.

\[319\] Ibid., 299.
\[320\] Ibid.
Conclusion

During and following the 1903 Affair, Bassett gained a national reputation as an iconoclastic southern intellectual. In October of 1905 President Theodore Roosevelt visited Durham and Trinity College as part of his southern tour and called a meeting with Bassett before delivering a speech in front of Trinity’s campus. Bassett recounted his meeting with the president by declaring that he encouraged Roosevelt not to “say anything in approval of the Bassett incident” as it “might not be properly understood by some of the papers.” But both he and Roosevelt agreed that the speech should center on the “aims of the college” and celebrate Trinity as “being a place for freedom of thought.” When Roosevelt took to the platform in front of Trinity’s campus to speak to the 15,000 who had gathered, he observed: “You [Trinity] stand for all those things for which the scholar must stand if he is to render real and lasting service to the State. You stand for Academic Freedom, for the right of private judgment, for a duty more incumbent upon the scholar than upon any other man, to tell the truth as he sees it, to claim for himself and to give to others the largest liberty in seeking after the truth.”

Although not directly mentioning the Bassett Affair, Roosevelt’s words certainly were congratulating Trinity College for its decision in the 1903 controversy. With Bassett, Josephus Daniels, and Furnifold Simmons all on the platform from which Roosevelt gave

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321 John S. Bassett, Diary entry October 19, 1905, JSB Papers, LC. Surprisingly, President Kilgo had actually tried to persuade Bassett not to meet with Roosevelt as he thought Bassett’s presence and meeting with Roosevelt would cause another uproar against Trinity College and “put President Roosevelt in an embarrassing position.” Bassett, however, argued that he had already been in contact with the President and that it would be “discourteous” to simply not show up. This decision apparently came with a cost as Bassett commented on how Few, Kilgo, and other faculty gave him “cold stares” upon his return.

322 Quoted in Porter, 143.
his speech this must have been a somewhat awkward moment for the men who had
grown to be such rivals.\footnote{323}

Despite his growing reputation as a historian and southern progressive, Bassett
began to think differently about his own calling. He sensed that his “scientific” approach
to history and current issues was simply not going to be accepted in the South in the near
future. Furthermore, the intellectual environment and lack of a well-stocked library meant
that his ambitions as a historian could not be fully realized in the South. Even though the
Hopkins’ trained historian was also supposed to be a social critic, Bassett was more
drawn to writing history than social reform. So when Bassett was contacted about two
possible job openings in the North he saw an opportunity to pursue his natural calling as a
historian.\footnote{324}

On May 30, 1906, Bassett wrote to President Kilgo to tell him that he would be
resigning his post at Trinity.\footnote{325} Graciously Bassett thanked Kilgo for all of his support
and kindness stating that after great deliberation he had decided, “another field of duty
calls me.” Bassett accepted a position as history professor at Smith College, an all-
women college in Northampton, Massachusetts.\footnote{326} He later joked with his good friend,
William E. Dodd about the irony that he, “the son of a confederate soldier,” managed to

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\footnote{323} Image of Roosevelt giving speech can be found at:
http://library.duke.edu/uarchives/exhibits/academic-freedom/bassettaffair.html
\footnote{324} At first Bassett was pursuing a job at Yale, but this position ended up not opening up. See
Porter, 156.
\footnote{325} Bassett to Kilgo, May 30, 1906, JSB Papers, LC.
\footnote{326} Bassett to President Clarke Seelye (of Smith College), May 30, 1906, JSB Papers, LC.
find himself “teaching the daughters of union soldiers the true story of the civil war and reconstruction.”

Bassett was conflicted about his decision to leave Trinity. Consulting his good friend, Walter Hines Page, Bassett wrote the influential editor after failing to meet him in person in New York: “In which field can I do the most in realization of the talents with which nature has equipped me? Is this to be done in the South, or in the North?” Bassett wrote often about the role that “nature” played in his decisions. It was Page, in fact, who he had written during the controversy: “I cannot believe that nature made me to wage war.” By 1906 Bassett had come to the conclusion that the North provided the best environment for him to pursue his natural skills and calling as a historian. Knowing that Page would insist that Bassett remain in the South, Bassett defended his potential departure by stating that what he enjoyed most and what he wanted to focus on was the “writing of history.” This endeavor required a good library, and according to Bassett, the South had no library that rivaled those in New England.

Central to Bassett’s decision, however, was not just the lack of resources but his sense that the South was simply not yet ready for a “scholar” or “writer of serious books.” Bassett believed that the South would eventually become more conducive to intellectual progress, even crediting his own work with the SAQ as a means of expediting the process. But that time was not soon enough and he was not willing to wait around for

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327 Bassett to Dodd, April 28, 1907, Dodd Papers, LC, quoted in Bailey, 40.
328 Bassett to W.H. Page, Nov. 7, 1903, Page Papers, found in Porter, 125.
329 Smith College, for example, had 160,000 volumes whereas Trinity’s recently revamped library only had 40,000. See Porter, 156.
the region to remedy its intellectual deficiencies. For him, the “quiet and stimulus” of Smith College made it ideal for his personal ambitions as a researcher and writer.\textsuperscript{330}

Bassett relayed a message consistent with the one he sent to Page as to why he was leaving to various other friends and correspondents. Charles L. Coon, an educator and reformer from Charlotte and close correspondent with Bassett, wondered whether or not Bassett was leaving to escape the pressure and public scrutiny that had been levied by Josephus Daniels. Bassett indicated that he certainly did not enjoy the “attacks of the rulers of passion” but that ultimately his decision came down to where he could do his best work as historian.\textsuperscript{331} A year later he wrote to his good friend Charles Francis Adams, “In 1906 I removed to Massachusetts, entirely of my own will. I have long wished to write history, and I was conscious that the stress of social reform took too much time from that pursuit.”\textsuperscript{332} It seemed as if Bassett knew that he would not be able to resist his instincts to “wage war” on conservatism if he remained in the South. Therefore, he had to remove himself altogether.

A year later Bassett’s explanation changed. He wrote to William K. Boyd, his former student and at the time history professor at Trinity, that another contributing factor to his departure was a growing fear of dissension amongst the faculty at Trinity College. He sensed that Kilgo would not remain President for much longer and Bassett simply did not want to be around for the turmoil that would follow. Even with this explanation, Bassett once again emphasized that he “merely wanted a peaceful atmosphere” where he

\textsuperscript{330} Bassett to W.H. Page, Nov. 7, 1903, Page Papers, in Porter, 125.
\textsuperscript{331} Bassett to Charles L. Coon, June 19, 1906, JSB Papers, LC.
\textsuperscript{332} Bassett to Charles Francis Adams, November 3, 1911, JSB Collection, Duke.
might do his work as a historian.333

Bassett recognized that he was abandoning the like-minded southerners who needed him. Claiming that he had done his part in the “fight for liberalism,” Bassett wrote Coon, “I console myself that there are many of your type who will stay here and cause the banner to wave.”334 Standing in sharp contrast with Bassett’s assertions of retiring from social reform, he contended, “If I were financially able I should go back South and write my history there in the land where there is the opportunity of glorious combat.”335 Though not altogether clear, “glorious combat” most likely meant the fight with southern journalists on the race question and revising southern history. Written a year after his departure from the South, Bassett perhaps still felt a certain obligation to fight the forces of southern “conservative” thought.

Because of his opposition to conservatism, Bassett had certainly felt alienated from the majority of white southerners. He was employed at Trinity College, played an active role in discussing the social and political conditions of North Carolina, and called himself time and again a “loyal southerner.”

But where he was most at home and comfortable was in a group of colleagues and fellow intellectuals who were spread across the country. This started with Herbert Baxter Adams but expanded throughout the years to include influential historians like Albert B. Hart, Walter Hines Page, Frederic Bancroft, Ulrich Phillips, William Dunning, Oswald Villard, and Woodrow Wilson. His wife later recounted, “No man alive ever enjoyed

334 Bassett to Charles L. Coon, June 19, 1906, JSB Papers, LC.
335 Bassett to Charles Francis Adams, November 3, 1911, JSB Collection, Duke.
more keenly intellectual intercourse with his fellow beings in the clubs and societies to which he belonged than did this historian."\textsuperscript{336} Bassett was a southerner, but he was also a national scholar. It was in this group of peers that he found a shared value system revolving around "objective" thought and "scientific history." As Robert Dallek recognized, Bassett and these "liberal" and "nationalistic" historians urged the South to abandon its provincialism and integrate "into the national pattern of life."\textsuperscript{337}

This intellectual network and his training at Hopkins compelled Bassett to influence how southerners approached their own history. His views and methodology often were in direct opposition to the romanticized, "Confederate-Brigadier" style of history. For a region so utterly obsessed and sensitive about its history, primarily slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction, Bassett’s attempts to change the historical record made him a target of the southern press and a majority of southerners. With the exception of William E. Dodd and a handful of other historians, he was one of the few trained historians who, while residing in the South, sought to reform southerners’ memory of their own past.

Ultimately, the \textit{South Atlantic Quarterly} was Bassett’s solution to the problems he saw facing the South and his greatest attempt to promote a more liberal way of thinking about the past and present. In the spring of 1903 he wrote Benjamin Duke explaining his ambitions for the journal: "I have always felt that the best way and surest way to extend our influence among intellectual people is for the persons connected with the college to produce literature. It is for that reason that the \textit{South Atlantic Quarterly} was founded;

and it is for that reason that I have rejoiced so much when you have added endowment to
the college and increased the library facilities. My hope is that we shall collect here at
Trinity a fearless set of writers who shall lead this part of the nation into a sound
intellectual life.”

Central to both the mission of the SAQ and Bassett’s identity as a “scientific”
historian was his desire to lead discussion of contemporary problems plaguing the South,
most notably the race question. In some respects, Bassett did not differ in his views from
mainstream southern opinion. He vehemently and consistently asserted that whites were
superior to blacks. He supported, although initially with some hesitation, the
disfranchisement of black voters. Even with his boldest statements about the race
question he disapproved of the “social intermingling of the races” and supported the Jim
Crow system of segregation. In 1911, Bassett conceded, “I have never been able to
divest myself entirely of the inborn Southern feeling that a negro is not to be treated as a
white man.” This inherent racism was clearly something Bassett struggled with
throughout his time at Trinity and even into his years tucked away in the North at Smith
College.

But his racial ideology also possessed subversive elements. Following the
Wilmington Race Riot he became acutely interested in “the history of the negro.” It was
his approach to the race question that so clearly distinguished him from his fellow
southerners. He turned to history and “objective” thought as a means of reforming views

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338 Bassett to B.N. Duke May 6, 1903, B.N. Duke Papers, Duke, as quoted in Garber, 140.
339 Bassett to unnamed editor, June 11, 1909, JSB Papers, LC.
340 Bassett to Charles Francis Adams, November 3, 1911, JSB Collection, Duke.
on race. Through a more accurate and detailed understanding of slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the history of African Americans, white southerners would be able to confront the volatile race question with greater perspective. Bassett maintained that this change of approach would not ultimately solve the race question but positive steps would be made if people simply understood the origins of racial antipathy. In 1905 he wrote the influential publisher, writer, and political activist, Oswald Villard expressing the role that the history of slavery played in the contemporary racial issues facing the South.

The white people of America brought the negro here for the good of their own pocket-books. To reap gold in dollars out of fields of tobacco and cotton they undertook to put up with his barbarism. They probably did not see how the inferior leaven could leaven their own life. If they had seen it they might not have refrained from the opportunity. They thought that slavery would keep barbarism down; but they didn’t understand that side of the problem either and now they are coming to realize how they lost in the whole transaction. They don’t now realize that it is going to take an immense amount of patient training and a long period of development before the effects of the old inferiority are wiped out of the negro race.341

Beyond Bassett’s own racial ideology and message of patience, his words to Villard illustrate the centrality of using history to help grasp the South’s current conditions. This sort of method could not have been a finer example of Herbert B. Adams’s teaching and the motto that was plastered on the walls of the Hopkins history seminar classroom: “History is past Politics and Politics are present History.”342

Even though Bassett’s philosophical approach to the race question was consistent, his actual solutions were complicated and evolving. An ardent supporter of Booker T. Washington, Bassett watched as lynchings, disfranchisement, and other Jim Crow

341 Bassett to Villard, November 17, 1905, JSB Collection, Duke.
measures became more commonplace in both North Carolina and the South. With the start of the *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Bassett expanded his racial ideology as he familiarized himself with W.E.B. Du Bois and read more closely the analysis of others on the race question. Not only did he show a genuine care for the advancement of African Americans, but he also became far more hopeful about racial progress. Convinced that ten percent of the population would uplift the rest, for Bassett the race question had become not simply a southern white male problem. Instead it was a national problem that both races would play a part in trying to solve.

Following the 1903 Affair, his class sizes became noticeably larger as did enrollment at Trinity. Later, he reflected optimistically that his controversial editorial, “Stirring up the Fires of Racial Antipathy” had helped to “clear the atmosphere to some extent with regard to the negro question.” The Bassett Affair, he contended, encouraged the “influential minority” who had remained silent before but were now more willing to publicly voice the “saner position” on the race question. Bassett hoped that, if nothing else, his trials with the southern press had created “a steady and wholesome growth of dispassionate discourse.” “Public sentiment” had shifted as Daniels’s “failure” demonstrated that North Carolinians were becoming a bit leery with the reactionary press. Thus the incident had forced the “radicals” to take a “milder attitude” in “cultivating the anti-negro spirit.”

Bassett earnestly believed that his work as a historian and teacher could engender substantial changes in the South’s path to intellectual, social, and political progress.

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343 Bassett to William K. Boyd, October 11, 1908, JSB Collection, Duke.
Although his editorials in the SAQ were broadcasted to a much larger audience, it was often in his work with his students that his efforts as a reformer were best revealed. Bassett appreciated that his role as professor gave him an opportunity to influence some of the brightest young men in North Carolina. In this sense, Bassett thought he could replicate what Herbert Baxter Adams had created at Hopkins: a breeding ground of ambitious young scholars trained to promote liberal ideals. Bassett often wrote of the “sacrifice” that he and his students needed to make in order to write the history of North Carolina and “reconstruct historical truth” in the process. In one of his final articles to the Trinity Historical Society, Bassett encouraged his students to remain steadfast to their calling as historians: “We must be willing to sacrifice for history. We must be willing to sacrifice time, comfort, and money. Results will not come of themselves, let us love never so well. We must have a willingness to put our shoulders under the burden till they pain us from its heaviness.”

Bassett then insisted upon how influential and valuable they could become to southern society. “We historians,” Bassett proclaimed proudly, “have an advantage over all other people. We get the last word at everybody. And we are a clannish set. We love to preserve the memories of our brethren.” Asserting that historians controlled memory and thus they possessed power, he then enlisted his Trinity students to follow his lead. He asked, “Would you like to join the ranks, and insure that our successors will write you down among the immortals? You need not hesitate.”

Bassett’s words revealed his deep conviction that history, and thus historians, were

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345 Ibid., 8.
important to society. Furthermore, he saw himself as a patriarch to these young students, hoping that his training of them would spark a movement of new historians who would adopt the same methodology and progressive thinking that had made him such a noteworthy southern historian.

And yet, by 1906, Bassett had become impatient as to the rate of progress. At thirty-eight years old he sensed he could not fulfill his own ambitions as a researcher and writer while remaining in the South. A few years after Bassett’s departure from Trinity and the South, William K. Boyd wrote Bassett to ask him if he had regrets about leaving. To this Bassett unequivocally responded, “Candidly, No.” Although he missed the “courteous and well bred people” and the climate, Bassett maintained that the intellectual environment of the Durham and the South could not rival that of Northampton. Bassett had concluded that in the South a historian could be an “antiquarian” but it was nearly impossible to be a “historian in a cosmopolitan sense.” Again Bassett highlighted that his aims as a national historian required being free of regional prejudice. Furthermore Bassett insisted that the South had not matured enough in its “scholarly thinking” stating, “All the impulse to stir up something leads to a stage of achievement which a cultured community ought to have passed a generation ago.”

Despite all of Bassett’s writing and pioneering efforts as a historian, his name has always been most recognized for the 1903 controversy. Trinity College and Duke University would continue to celebrate the Bassett Affair as a landmark moment for their institution and academic freedom. In 2003, Duke held a centennial celebration of the

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346 Bassett to William K. Boyd, October 11, 1908, JSB Papers, Duke.
event, highlighted by a speech by Duke historian, William Chafe. Calling the Bassett Affair one of the finest moments of Duke’s history, Chafe claimed that the Trustees decision to keep Bassett was a “resounding affirmation of civil liberties, supporting the values that lie at the heart of our intellectual community, and a courageous protest against those who would use nationalism, patriotism, and the ‘Southern,’ way of life as a basis for quelling dissent and open inquiry.” Emphasizing freedom of speech Chafe concluded, “With the Bassett Affair as a precedent, let us find the same courage, boldness, and integrity that our predecessors displayed a century ago.”

The Bassett Affair, however, meant something much different to Bassett himself. Although a critical moment in Bassett’s life, the Affair was part of a much larger narrative. His story was interwoven into a complex tapestry of political and social conditions that faced Trinity College, North Carolina, and the South as a whole. His article “Stirring up the Fires of Racial Antipathy” represented his attempts to change how southerners viewed their own history while also challenging their views on race. The historical record demonstrated that these attempts had begun long before 1903 and would continue well after. His feelings of alienation from fellow southerners had also begun before 1903; the controversy merely highlighted the wide gap between his way of thinking and much of the white South. His decision to move to Smith College was primarily a result of Bassett feeling a greater calling to pursue his research and writing of

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history, a pursuit he thought unattainable in the library-deficient and intellectually insipid South.

Throughout his time in the South, John Spencer Bassett adopted a dual role as historian and reformer. Bassett's overarching message to his students and fellow southerners was that they think more critically about their past and present. He urged southerners to relinquish their sectional prejudices and employ the same sort of objective thought that had become so central to his own value system as a trained "scientific" historian. In one of his final editorials in the SAQ, the embattled southern historian and progressive charged his native South to challenge "conservative" thought: "This Southern country belongs to us who live in it. It is ours to improve; and as we improve it, so we measure our own greatness or our own littleness. Shall we of all people be those among whom self-examination and self-criticism shall have no place?"348 As far as Bassett was concerned "self-examination" and "self-criticism" were the starting point in which the South could begin to solve its problems and reconcile itself with the larger nation.

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Vita

Robert Spencer Dicks

Robert Spencer Dicks was born in Athens, Georgia. After graduating high school from Athens Academy in 2001, he enrolled at the University of Richmond, receiving a B.A. in History in 2005. He then took a job teaching history and Latin at Hampton Roads Academy in Newport News, Virginia.

In August 2008, Mr. Dicks returned to the University of Richmond as a graduate student in the Department of History. Focusing on southern history and biographical studies, the author began to explore primary sources associated with John Spencer Bassett. What he found was a collection of correspondence, published works, speeches, and newspaper articles that helped construct an intriguing narrative of this iconoclastic southerner.

Spencer now resides with his wife, Kristen, in Durham, North Carolina, where he teaches American history and coaches basketball at Trinity School of Durham and Chapel Hill.