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THE BINGHAM FAMILY: FROM THE OLD SOUTH TO THE NEW SOUTH AND BEYOND

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After reading *Gone With the Wind* in early 1937, Robert Worth Bingham, American Ambassador to Great Britain and son of a Confederate veteran, reacted effusively to Margaret Mitchell's classic novel. He exclaimed:

> I do not thank you for "Gone With the Wind" — I bless you. . . . I know every phase of it all; the poverty and the pride, the gentility, the gracious manners, the romance, the preservation of dignity and high and generous humanity in rags and semi-starvation.[1]

If Mitchell's epic synthesized the popular 1930s interpretation of the Civil War and Reconstruction, to Bingham it meant much more. He believed the book exonerated the history of his father's generation and vindicated his own behavior. Here was no rabid racist of the Tom Watson variety. In his public life Bingham epitomized the best of the southern ethos of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He fought against political corruption in the Progressive Era as a young lawyer, mayor, and judge in Louisville, Kentucky. After purchasing the Louisville *Courier-Journal* in 1918, he continued his crusade against Kentucky's Gothic political system until his death in late 1937. Moreover, he led the effort to develop a nationwide system of farmer cooperatives in the early twenties.[2]

Bingham never transcended his southern background of the

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1 Robert Worth Bingham to Margaret Mitchell, 16 February 1937, Robert Worth Bingham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress [hereafter cited as Bingham Papers].

2 William E. Ellis, "Robert Worth Bingham and Louisville Progressivism,

North Carolina Piedmont variety. As a child and as a young man, he internalized the myths and legends of the Old South, Civil War, Reconstruction, and New South eras. The forces of family and culture, time and place profoundly influenced the reactions and the lives of all the Binghams. They reflected and amplified the most outstanding features of southern life and history for a century and a half.

Within the context of the southern environment, the Bingham School served as focal point of the family for over a century. Three generations of Binghams controlled the school from its founding in the 1790s to its closing in the late 1920s. William Bingham, a Scots-Irish Presbyterian minister from Northern Ireland and educated at the University of Glasgow, arrived at Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1789. He immediately took up teaching duties and soon opened his own school. Over the years the Bingham School moved several times, from the Wilmington area to Hillsborough and several other locations in Orange County, then to Mebane, and finally to Asheville on Bingham Heights overlooking the French Broad River.[3]

William James Bingham, born in 1802 in Chapel Hill during a brief time when his father William taught Greek and Latin at the University of North Carolina, took over the school in 1826 and continued the directorship until his death in 1866. The Bingham School prospered in the years before the Civil War, moving to "Oaks," a rural setting on the western fringe of Orange County in 1845. Just before the war began, enrollment often exceeded one hundred students and the school charged higher rates than those of similar schools for its services. The school maintained a rigorous classical curriculum stressing Greek, Latin, mathematics, and history. From the beginning, the Binghams emphasized quality education, discipline, and hard work.[4]

1905-1910," *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, 54 (April 1980): 169-96; Ellis, "Robert Worth Bingham and the Crisis of Cooperative Marketing in the Twenties," *Agricultural History*, 56 (January 1982): 99-116.

3 Robert Worth Bingham to George Bingham, 7 March 1933, Bingham Papers.

4 Ernest B. Goodwin, "The High Schools of Orange County" (M.A. thesis,

Living in a slave state, the Binghams settled into the southern institutional pattern of slaveholding. While the family would not have been considered wealthy, they did occupy the upper middle-class status of many slaveholders in the mid-nineteenth century North Carolina Piedmont. From 1840 to 1860 the number of slaves owned by William James Bingham increased from ten to fourteen. The slaves served as a vital source of labor around the school and tended the crops that provided a good deal of the food set before the students. Typical of many southern families, a "mammy" tended to the needs of the younger children of the Bingham family. The wealth of the family increased substantially from $3556.00 in real estate value in 1850 to $9,000.00 in 1860. Apparently, the family venture of combining slavery and agriculture with their school proved to be profitable.[5]

However, like many southern families in the antebellum period, the Binghams never quite reconciled themselves to the institution of slavery. William James became interested in the early anti-slavery societies and, after that avenue closed in the South, he joined the colonization movement. For many years he supported the ideals of the Whigs, Orange County being a Whig stronghold. The schoolmaster's two sons, William (1835-73) and Robert (1838-1927), matured in the immediate pre-war period, conforming to basic southern ideals of race, class, and society.[6]

Another institution played an important role in the life of the Bingham family. The close connection of four generations of Binghams with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill overshadowed all other influences on the family except perhaps for the general cultural setting of the South. After the first William Bingham taught at the university from 1801 to 1804 (earning the nickname "Old Slick," because of his baldness),

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University of North Carolina, 1927), 6-7; Bennett L. Steelman, "Robert Bingham," *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 157-58.

5 *1840 Census*, North Carolina, Orange County, 212; *1850 Census*, North Carolina, Orange County, 219; *1860 Census*, North Carolina, Orange County, 11; Bingham to Mitchell, 16 February 1937, Bingham Papers.

6 James Barry Bingham, *Descendants of James Bingham of County Down, Northern Ireland* (Baltimore: Gateway Press, 1980), 47-83.

three successive generations of Bingham men attended the school. They always joined the Dialectic Literary Society, one of two such groups on the campus. William James graduated with honors in 1825; his sons William and Robert followed in his footsteps in 1856 and 1857. Both immediately joined their father as teachers at the Bingham School.[7]

The university and the surrounding Orange County community offered an educational, if not intellectual, stimulus to the development of the Bingham School. Many Bingham graduates attended the nearby university and, in a sense, the Bingham School served as an exclusive preparatory school for the University of North Carolina. Before the Civil War and the eventual decline of private schools, institutions like the Bingham School competed for students and financial survival. The proximity of Bingham to the university naturally brought a close relationship, and it was not unusual for Bingham graduates to sweep top honors in the graduating classes at the university. Many "Bingham boys" of the antebellum period praised the school for its "stern discipline and rigorous examinations," all of which more than prepared them for their college training.[8]

With the first rumblings of secession in 1860, the Binghams, like most of their fellow North Carolinians, supported the Union. Although Orange County contained a substantial number of slaveholders, the county gave John Bell, the Constitutional Union Party candidate, a clear majority (52%) in the 1860 presidential election. Moreover, John C. Breckinridge, the Southern Democratic candidate, carried the state by only a slight margin. Governor John W. Ellis, an advocate of secession, did not push firmly for joining the new Confederate States of America until

7 Archibald Henderson, *The Campus of the First State University* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1949), 43; Steelman, "Robert Bingham," 157-58.

8 Jeffrey J. Crow and Robert F. Durden, *Maverick Republican in the Old North State: A Political Biography of Daniel L. Russell* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 3; Ruth Blackwelder, *The Age of Orange: Political and Intellectual Leadership in Northern Carolina, 1752-1861* (Charlotte: William Loftin Publisher, 1961), 117; Peter Mitchell Wilson, *Southern Exposure* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1927), 29-32.

after the war started. Momentum for secession built slowly in the state, but after Virginia left the Union it was only a matter of time until North Carolina followed suit. Before the North Carolina legislature called for a convention on 1 May 1861, Governor Ellis ordered seizure of all federal property in the state. By the middle of the month a special convention severed ties with the Union by repealing the ordinance that had made North Carolina a part of the United States in 1789.[9]

The Binghams also committed themselves to support of the Confederacy, an agonizing choice for old Whig William James, who was then nearing sixty years of age and in declining health. But once the decision had been made, the Binghams gave everything they had to the cause of the Confederacy. They kept the school open throughout most of the war, accepting Confederate money up to the end and taking in produce to make ends meet. Robert organized a company of men and mustered into the North Carolina 44th Regiment. When he marched off to war he left behind a young wife, Delphine Louise Worth, and an infant son. William accepted more responsibilities for running the school, received a Colonel's commission in the Confederate Army, and turned the Bingham School into a military facility. Young cadets received their first training as officers at the school and most went into military service upon graduation. Although the school took on the appearance of a military encampment with older students patrolling the countryside around Oaks, William did not alter the classical curriculum. He not only stressed Latin and Greek studies but also continued work on textbooks and published one volume during the war.[10]

While William James and his eldest son struggled to keep the Bingham School functioning, Robert, from nearly the time he enlisted, found himself involved in one hazardous position after another. After only a minimal amount of training the 44th Regiment moved toward the North Carolina coast. Beginning there,

9 Blackwelder, *The Age of Orange*, 174, 180; William S. Powell, *North Carolina: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 126-33.

10 Wilson, *Southern Exposure*, 29-32; Blackwelder, *The Age of Orange*, 122-23, 154; Bingham to Mitchell, 16 February 1937, Bingham Papers.

the experiences of young Robert read much like the ordeal of a romantic Lost Cause hero in a late nineteenth century novel.[11]

In its first major independent engagement, the 44th, comprising four hundred men under the command of Colonel George B. Singletary, boldly moved to within twelve miles of Washington, North Carolina, on the coast. Colonel E. E. Potter's 24th Massachusetts Regiment, part of General Ambrose E. Burnside's invading Union force, marched to meet the threat. On 5 June 1862 the superior Union numbers, supported by artillery, blasted through a makeshift barricade erected by the Confederates at Tranter's Creek. After the death of Singletary and several other men, the 44th retreated. Surprisingly, the Union commander did not pursue his advantage, and Captain Robert Bingham, in command of Company G, and his fellow southerners slipped away.[12]

Bingham's next major engagement with the Union army proved to be less fortunate as the 44th moved to support the Army of Northern Virginia. When General Lee took his forces northward, maneuvering around Washington, D.C. into Pennsylvania in late June 1863, an eighty man contingent of the 44th Regiment, including Bingham's company, received orders to protect four vital railroad bridges over the South Anna and Little rivers. Loss of these bridges would sever Lee's lines of communication with the Confederate capital in Richmond. However, the Confederate lines were thinly spread over the area. Bingham's company took up position at one of the bridges.[13]

On 26 June the 11th Pennsylvania Cavalry with support of two companies of California troops and artillery, in all over twelve hundred men, moved against the Confederate lines. The federal assault on the bridge commanded by Lieutenant Colonel T. L. Hargrove bogged down because of the strong defensive

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11 Bingham, *Descendants of James Bingham*, 53-55; The Philanthropic Society Records, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, contains a picture of Robert Bingham in his Confederate uniform.

12 John G. Barrett, *The Civil War in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 125-26.

13 Robert Bingham to Henrietta Bingham, 14 March 1923, Robert Bingham Papers, Southern Historical Collection.

position of the rebel forces. Unable to move the enemy from the bridge, the northern commander sent a large detachment across a ford on the river, encircling the bridge's defenders. At that moment, Bingham's company protected another bridge four miles upstream. When he heard the clash of battle, he led his men in an attempt to support the beleagured force at the distant bridge. Just as they reached the defensive position of Hargrove, the federals launched a full cavalry charge. Three times Union horsemen charged across open ground, taking heavy losses from Bingham's men, "most of whom," their commander observed, "could knock a squirrel out of the highest tree in the woods." Nevertheless, the northern forces finally overran the rebel lines. After nearly wiping out Hargrove's command, the northerners turned their superior numbers against Bingham and his men. Surrounded by a vastly superior army and with the bridge in flames, Bingham surrendered his company.[14]

The young North Carolinian's experiences as a prisoner of war proved to be as exciting and dangerous as his army life in combat. During over seven months of imprisonment, he kept a diary in which he recorded his innermost thoughts. Foremost in his mind were his wife, "Dell," or "wifie," as he regularly called her in the diary, and his infant son. He also reacted daily to the hazards of prison life including problems of food, clothing, lice, boredom, fear, sickness, depression, and general housekeeping.[15]

In one of the first entries in the diary he carefully explained his feelings about surrender, firmly convinced that he had had no choice but to give in. Relinquishing his sword to the Yankee commander did not trouble him nearly as much as giving up his favorite revolver, a gift from his father. When he yielded his side arm the full weight of defeat settled on him; a defeat not just of his military unit but also of his faith in the invincibility

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14 Bingham, *Descendants of James Bingham*. 53-55.

15 P. T. Penick, *A Memorial of Mrs. Robert Bingham* (pamphlet, 1886 in the North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), n.p.; Typescript of "Robert Bingham Papers, Addition, 2 volumes, Diary of Imprisonment during Civil War," Southern Historical Collection, I, 1-9 [hereafter cited as "Bingham Diary"].

of southern arms. This lingering doubt about winning the war continually crept into his later diary entries.[16]

Generally, he took the prison experience like a "good soldier," often praising particular kindnesses of Union soldiers. However, the physical and mental strain of imprisonment did bring out some rather hard reactions, which are understandable under the circumstances. For example, when told that he and several other officers at Fort Norfolk, Virginia, prison would be hanged in reprisal for the imminent executions of some Union officers in Georgia, his spirits sank and the diary entries became maudlin and melancholy. Even the elation of eventually finding that these rumors were unfounded only hardened a deep suspicion of northerners. "The Yankee nation is the most infamously mean race that blights God's green earth," he wrote, "and daily does the wisdom of our separation from them become more and more apparent." As if that was not sufficient damnation of the Union soul, on several occasions he witnessed, firsthand, and commented on Yankee women watching Confederate prisoners bathing, unclad, in lakes and streams. "How different are northern females from ours," he asserted, for they "came out and looked at us, using opera glasses." Or, after having his spirits rise and fall with rumors of prisoner exchange, perhaps his anti-northern sentiments are best illustrated by this terse statement: "No body knows a Yankee til he is a prisoner." It should be added, however, that knowing some Yankees did facilitate getting U.S. currency to buy needed supplies. Money and packages from northern friends and relatives added immeasurably to his comfort and general health while in prison.[17]

To survive psychologically, Bingham read whenever materials became available; unfortunately, many of the books reminded him of his wife and family. Writing letters also proved to be a painful experience. He took up a vocation to pass the time, carving buttons and jewelry out of gutta-percha (a semihard latex material) and selling them to other prisoners, the guards, and

16 "Bingham Diary," I, 3.
17 Ibid., I, 8, 12, 14-17, 88.

some northern civilians. Religion played a key role in his prison experiences; indeed, it filled an important need throughout his life. He often mentioned that he relished hearing old-fashioned evangelistic sermons in prison, no doubt reinforcing his belief in the righteous cause of the South and giving meaning to his imprisonment. While Robert never quite called northerners instruments of the devil, he would have allowed them a place in God's world far below the pristine southland. Like many southerners he looked for God's direct intervention in the clash of arms. When he heard of Confederate battle reverses, he questioned his faith, but always returned to assurances that the South would prevail in the end.[18]

Under harsh conditions at Fort Norfolk and later at Johnson's Island on Lake Erie, Bingham lived with the constant fear of serious illness. He fell ill on several occasions with chills and high fever and made it a point of daily ritual to take quinine whenever available. Weather conditions added to his discomfort as temperatures varied from over one hundred degrees in summer to winter-time freezing cold. Through it all he kept his health and sanity. Though he lost nearly as much weight as he did respect for his northern adversaries, he survived an ordeal that broke or killed many men.[19]

One of the most bitter and vivid accounts in the diary illustrated Bingham's orthodox southern racial views. When a company of blacks came to guard the Johnson's Island prison, he took this as "an intended insult" inflicted by the Yankees on defenseless southerners. He did not need further reinforcement of his southern views of race, having adopted in his youth the idea of racial superiority of whites. [20]

After nearly losing hope for exchange, Bingham, with a stroke of luck, took the place of a Confederate soldier who became too ill to be transferred. Sadly, he came home to a heartrending tragedy. In early March 1864, he returned to find that his infant

18 Ibid., I, 12-13, 70; II, 27-28, 44.

19 Bingham, *Descendants of James Bingham*, 53-57.

20 "Bingham Diary," II 87; Bingham to Mitchell, 16 February 1937, Bingham Papers.

son, James Worth Bingham, born shortly after his last trip to Oaks, had died. His wife also had been seriously ill and suffered from poor health for the remainder of her life. Deteriorating conditions around Oaks after mid 1863 contributed to these problems. Medical aid and food supplies ran short as the war moved closer. Union sympathizers, known as Red Strings, sometimes harassed the school boys and, at Christmas vacation 1864, the school closed forever at the Oaks location. [21]

The Binghams at home had become so destitute by this time that Robert had to borrow money from Jonathan Worth, postwar governor of North Carolina and uncle of his wife, to outfit himself with clothing for his return to the battlefield. Joining the remnants of the 44th North Carolina Regiment, he immediately became involved in the last campaigns around Richmond and Petersburg. At the latter battleground, he commanded a company near the point where an underground explosion opened the "Crater." He survived that scene of carnage and then retreated along with the rest of Lee's tattered Army of Northern Virginia toward the eventual surrender point at Appomattox Courthouse. Along the way he successfully moved 250 men across a stream to the final bivouac of Lee's forces. Like most of the other officers and men of this once grand army, Bingham reacted emotionally to the surrender and Lee's farewell to his troops. Finally, "lousy, ragged, hungry and barefooted" he returned home to the uncertain future of the South that became Reconstruction.[22]

The Bingham School also entered a new era by moving to a site one mile east of Mebaneville, now Mebane, in Alamance County just a few miles north of Oaks. After being closed for several months during construction of buildings, the school reopened in late 1866. William James, in declining health for years, died before the opening of the new facilities. He should be

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21 Bingham to Mitchell, 16 February 1937, Bingham Papers; Wilson, *Southern Exposure*, 31-32; Bingham, *Descendants of James Bingham*, 57; "Bingham Diary," II 91-92.

22 J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, ed., *The Correspondence of Jonathan Worth* (2 vols.; Raleigh, 1909), I, 330; Henry Steele Commager, *The Blue and the Gray* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1950), 1016; Bingham to Mitchell, 16 February 1937, Bingham Papers.

credited as one of North Carolina's educational pioneers, developing the Bingham School into the premier private school in the pre-Civil War era. Though the tragedy of the Civil War left a bitter legacy to be faced by his sons, he bequeathed to them a tradition of educational excellence.[23]

Building a new school would have been difficult under any circumstances, but it proved particularly hard in the immediate postwar era. The Reconstruction Era has been much debated by historians. The period is, indeed, difficult to assess without lapsing into present-minded comparisons with the "Second Reconstruction" initiated by the 1954 Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education. No attempt will be made to interpret Reconstruction in the broadest sense but rather to place the reactions of the Bingham family to postwar conditions and stresses in the context of that era. How did the Binghams see themselves in relation to their state, the nation, the black race, and their cultural milieu?[24]

No one could have gone through the wartime experiences of Robert Bingham without harboring some resentment. The prison diary entries indicated that he would be thoroughly disposed to oppose the Radical Republicans and even the more moderate northern and southern reformers. A dead first son, a wife with delicate health for the remainder of her life, the harassment of the school by the Red Strings, and his father's death so soon after the war influenced Robert to oppose strongly the Republican-led Reconstruction efforts in North Carolina. Moreover, Robert Worth Bingham's letter to Margaret Mitchell in 1937 indicated that even a later generation of southerners were still "unreconstructed" and preferred to believe the legends about the Old South, Civil War, and Reconstruction.[25]

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23 R. D. W. Connor, William K. Boyd, and J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, eds., *History of North Carolina* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1919), VI, 185; Bingham, *Descendants of James Bingham*, 57-58; Hugh Lefler and Paul Wager, eds., *Orange County, 1752-1952* (Chapel Hill: The Orange Printshop, 1953), 324.

24 *Asheville Citizen*, 21 November 1921, 19 November 1933; *Greensboro Daily News*, 26 December 1948.

25 Bingham to Mitchell, 16 February 1937, Bingham Papers.

Robert Worth Bingham
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The Holdens and Tourgées and the Saunderses and Turners dominated the headlines in the sometimes bloody confrontations between Republicans and Conservatives (prewar Democrats) in Reconstruction Era North Carolina. The activities of lesser figures like the Bingham brothers, however, spelled the difference between success and failure for the reform ideas of the Republicans. The adjoining Piedmont counties of Orange, Alamance, and Caswell proved to be the pivotal areas in deciding the fate of the Republican program. Conservatives in these counties, aided by

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the violent spectre of the various groups associated with the Ku Klux Klan, presented a united front against Republican political control and the quest for racial justice. The Bingham brothers took part in this movement, joining one or more of the local Klanlike associations. While the extent of their participation is not known, William became one of over sixty Alamance countians indicted in 1870 in the effort of Governor W. W. Holden to crack down on Klan activities. Eventually, a judge dismissed the indictments. Even less is known about the Klan connections of Robert, but his son could recall late in his own life: "My earliest memory is of clutching my mother's skirts in terror at a hooded apparition, and having my father raise his mask to relieve me."[26]

While murders, whippings, and other atrocities occurred in several North Carolina counties, "Alamance eclipsed the rest," in the words of Allen W. Trelease. Local Conservative officials, many of whom belonged to the Klan, made little effort to curtail the violence. Republican Governor Holden and Judge Albion W. Tourgée, a native Ohioan who initially settled in Greensboro in 1865 to edit a newspaper, tried to bring peace to Alamance and the surrounding counties in the late 1860s. The leaders of Klan groups, if not the entire membership, came from "the local establishment and were well regarded." The Bingham brothers exactly fitted this profile as did other prominent North Carolinians who led the Klan. Colonel William L. Saunders of Chapel Hill headed the state Klan organization along with Josiah Turner, editor of the Raleigh *Sentinel.* The Klan aimed its violence against white Republicans or any black person who cooperated with the Holden administration, carrying out a calculated program of bloody intimidation.[27]

26 *Trial of William W. Holden* (3 vols.; Raleigh: Sentinel Printing Office, 1871), III, 2537-47; Bingham to Mitchell, 16 February 1937, Bingham Papers.

27 Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 192-200; Richard L. Zuber, *North Carolina During Reconstruction* (Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, 1969), 25-27; Otto H. Olsen, "The Ku Klux Klan: A Study in Reconstruction Politics and Propaganda," *North Carolina Historical Review,* 39 (July 1962): 353-55.

Sustained Klan violence centering in Alamance County contributed to the end of Republican control in North Carolina. With the election of 1870, the Conservatives swept into a majority of county and state offices. The combined efforts of Governor Holden and Judge Tourgée could not bring about successful prosecutions of Klan members. Their crusade not only failed, but it soon led to the impeachment and dismissal of Holden. Conservatives, with the Klan lurking ominously just beneath the surface of public life, resumed control of the state and decided the place of blacks in their new regime long before the alleged Compromise of 1877 officially ended Reconstruction in the South.[28]

The essential role of the Klan in returning the old ruling class to power in North Carolina raises several important questions. Why did the best men of southern white society participate in atrocities under the banners and hoods of the Klan? More specifically, why did the Binghams take part in such activities? After all, here were men who held positions of leadership in the Southern Presbyterian church and who presumed to lead in the education of the region's young men. How could they condone or participate in such violent acts and, apparently, never have second thoughts about the means used for the rest of their lives? Was W. J. Cash right, after all? Did the Binghams and thousands of others like them react instinctively without anticipating the consequences of their actions?[29]

The Binghams certainly thought about their actions. They willingly participated in organizations and activities outside the law because they and many southerners like them believed that they followed higher laws: those of racial supremacy and the preservation of southern mores. While they had lost the war, they were determined not to lose their status as overseers of southern life. Losing the war made them more determined to

28 Powell, *North Carolina,* 161-62; Lefler and Wager, *Orange County,* 112-22.

29 Otto H. Olsen, *Carpetbagger's Crusade: The Life of Albion Winegar Tourgée* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), 156-57; W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941), 102.

regain control of government. In the end, murder of innocent victims became pardonable if the South retained self-rule. The violence of war and unsettling postwar conditions brought out the worst in the best of men. As far removed in time as 1937 and in the distant chair of the American ambassador in London, the son of Robert could rationalize the behavior of his father, combining myths of the Old South, Civil War, and Reconstruction into a united historic view.[30]

As the Conservatives and their Klan adjunct inexorably worked their way toward a return to power in North Carolina, the Binghams, settled near Mebane, reopened their school. William took over as chief officer of the school when his father died and Robert settled into the academic life. Having taught only briefly at the school before the war, Robert deferred to his brother's judgment on school matters. William provided strong leadership as well as the reputation of a widely-known classical scholar. On one occasion he challenged educational policies at the university at Chapel Hill. Just after the war he complained that the University of North Carolina, because of the disruption of the southern educational system in wartime, competed with his school for older students who should first go to an academy like Bingham rather than directly into college. Certainly, President David L. Swain had difficulty keeping the University of North Carolina open. The university did close briefly in the early seventies, after becoming the center of a power struggle between Governor Holden and the Conservatives. Overall, the Binghams supported their alma mater. Robert spoke in behalf of reopening the university at a meeting of the state board of education in 1873, but the school did not reopen until 1875. Both institutions survived the Reconstruction Era and settled into their accustomed roles in the eighties.[31]

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30 Olsen, "Ku Klux Klan," 360-62.

31 Robin Brabham, "Defining the American University: The University of North Carolina, 1865-1875," *North Carolina Historical Review*, 57 (October 1980): 437-38; J. G. De Roulhac Hamilton, *Reconstruction in North Carolina* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1964; original edition, 1914), 626-27.

Family life for the Binghams also returned to some stability. Though Robert's wife, Dell, apparently suffered from chronic health problems, she bore four more children, of whom Robert Worth, the only son to survive to adulthood, is of special concern to this study. Rob, as he was known to school friends, became a constant source of pride to his father. Students at the school in the seventies recalled often seeing the father and son on horseback riding about the school grounds.[32]

With the death of William Bingham in 1873, Robert, using his military title of major, assumed full charge of the school. While financial problems nearly brought ruin in the early 1870s, by the mid 1880s the Bingham School could boast of facilities that included the first gymnasium for a school of its type in the South. About this time Bingham again became a military school, with Robert being given the rank of colonel in the state militia. Enrollment expanded and usually exceeded one hundred and fifty students. Bingham made a few concessions to current trends. The school fielded highly competitive athletic teams, on one occasion in 1884 defeating the University of North Carolina in baseball. But Colonel Robert never allowed any of these innovations to get in the way of the pursuit of academic excellence. He took a personal interest in each cadet, enforced discipline with a stern hand which often held an instrument of punishment, and agonized over poor student performance. His concern about the welfare of students is illustrated in the following understated admonishment mailed to a parent. The colonel described the miscreant as one who "does not endanger his health by close application," being "none too studious." Moreover, Bingham students faced dismissal for such violations as lying, cheating on examinations (the school had an honor system), drunkenness, hazing younger students, and gambling. A notation in the Bingham School ledger declared that one student was "excluded for general worthlessness" while another was asked to leave because

32 Bingham, *Descendants of James Bingham*, 58; Bingham to Mitchell, 16 February 1937, Bingham Papers; M.C.S. Noble to Robert Worth Bingham, 24 February 1933, Noble Papers, Southern Historical Collection.

of a "too weak mentality." The school demanded academic excellence and personal discipline from its students. Bingham also reflected the general thoughts of educated southerners. For example, a listing of declamations for the 23 April 1880 exercises included three of four topics on subjects of deep and continuing southern concern: "Let Us End Sectional Strife," "Southern Chivalry," and "Adieu to the Confederacy."[33]

Colonel Robert played a prominent role in the New South era. During this period Rob grew into manhood, went off to study at the University of North Carolina and the University of Virginia, taught briefly at the Bingham School, and finally moved to Louisville in order to pursue a law career. Before leaving his native North Carolina, he absorbed the values of the South, both old and new. The colonel personified this synthesis to his son. Both men were part of a larger movement of ideas and culture and each embodied the typical reactions of two generations of southerners to the idea of the New South.[34]

The New South, according to the interpretation of Paul M. Gaston, began as a "creed," or reaffirmation of southern potentiality but ended as a "myth," in which southerners rationalized success for their dreams of material advance. As part of this mental construct, southerners developed their own peculiar ideas about the history of their region and the nation. Moreover, this historical consensus reinforced southern provincialism, contributed to the institutionalization of racism, and strengthened the hold of the Lost Cause on the southern mind.[35]

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33 Raleigh *News and Observer*, 10 September 1882; Robert Bingham to Kemp P. Battle, 5 September 1874, Battle Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection; Henderson, *The Campus of the First State University*, 248; *Greensboro Daily News*, 7 January 1940; Bingham to J. A. Bryan, 29 May 1880, C. S. Bryan Papers, Southern Historical Collection; "Bingham School Order of Exercises," in the Bryan Papers; Bingham School Ledger, 1890-1919, Southern Historical Collection.

34 Steelman, "Robert Worth Bingham," *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, 158-59.

35 Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 9; F. Garvin Davenport, *The Myth of Southern History: Historical Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Southern Literature* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967), 4-7.

Colonel Robert's contributions to the New South as creed and myth came primarily through his intense activity in the educational affairs of North Carolina. However, his views of race and history predetermined almost any response to practical matters, whether in education, politics, or economic affairs.

Bingham's record on education issues consistently flowed from combining the New South creed with Old South mores. He did not view public education as competitive with his school and urged local, state, and federal support for public schools. Like many North Carolinians, he expressed shame that his state led the nation in illiteracy. When the Blair Bill became a public issue in the mid 1880s, Bingham assumed a nationalist stance and came out for its adoption. Passage of the bill would have divided excess public funds among the states for education. Of course, the race issue complicated any discussion of the bill in the South. The colonel from Mebane entered the debate early, speaking before the National Education Association in 1884 in support of the Blair Bill. While he admitted to the poor state of public education in North Carolina, he blamed the victorious North for freeing the slaves, requiring their education, and then not providing money for this purpose. But in bold letters he declared that the races must "BE DEALT WITH SEPARATELY," ostensibly asking for educational equality for blacks but in reality relegating them again to inferior status.[36]

The Blair Bill did not pass Congress. North Carolina fell back on its own resources and, with the leadership of men like Bingham, pushed for expanded educational opportunities. He participated in several successful movements that upgraded North Carolina education, including: adopting a county option tax bill for education, building a college for industrial education, developing a state school for women, and passing a compulsory school law. All of these projects fitted well the concept of the New South

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36 Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., "North Carolina and Federal Aid to Education: Public Reaction to the Blair Bill, 1881-90," *North Carolina Historical Review*, 40 (October 1963); 469; Robert Bingham, *The New South* (pamphlet, 15 February 1884, in the North Carolina Collection), 10-14.

and all became part of the North Carolina educational system before 1900.[37]

Bingham not only expressed the views of many New South advocates, in a broader sense he typified the attitudes of most southerners, and not a few northerners, on the subjects of the Civil War, Reconstruction, and race around the turn of the century. By that time, the New South creed had hardened into a myth in which southerners falsely believed that they had made great strides in their attempt to overtake northern industrialization.[38]

The colonel followed the lead of other, better-known, writers and propagandists in developing the southern apologetic for slavery, racism, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. His audiences included meetings of educators and politicians, and he published articles in *Harper's* and *North American Review* and in pamphlet form. He was persistent, if not original, in defending charges of treason against the South. In a speech to a graduating class at Chapel Hill he boldly exclaimed: "We protest against our legal withdrawal from the union being called rebellion, we protest against having our children and grandchildren taught from histories, written by our military antagonists and by our sectional and our political enemies, that their fathers were rebels and traitors." Maintaining that the South seceded only by the right of "LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT," he asserted that only the Teutons totally understood self-rule. The Anglo-Saxon branch of that group, according to Bingham, best practiced local autonomy. More importantly, he proposed that southern opposition to Reconstruction and the success of readjusters, like himself, proved the inevitability of Anglo-Saxonism in the United States. In his own time he witnessed the nation "drifting away" from the "basic principles of Anglo-Saxon self-government." "The South's great mission" in the future would be leading the

37 Gatewood, "North Carolina and Federal Aid to Education," 488; Raleigh *News and Observer*, 9 May 1927; David Alexander Lockmiller, "The Establishment of the North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts," *North Carolina Historical Review*, 16 (July 1939): 284.

38 Gaston, *The New South Creed*, 190-203.

United States back to its "higher plane" or idealistic Jeffersonian democracy.[39]

Furthermore, Bingham stressed that southerners in 1861 did not follow a course unknown in American history. Many Americans in both North and South had debated the nature of the Union and the implications of secession before the Civil War. As proof he cited use of William Rawle's *Constitution of the United States* at West Point during the time that Davis, Lee, and other secessionists studied there. This textbook, Bingham explained, did not rule out secession as a legitimate expression of states' rights. Finally, secession may have been "unbusinesslike and illogical," but, according to this unreconstructed rebel, it did not represent either immoral, illegal, or treasonable behavior.[40]

All the foregoing would have been academic and of little practical consequence if it had not been that these views were correlative to white supremacy and the disfranchisement of blacks and the institutionalization of racism in the South. Moreover, many northerners concurred and adopted the ideals of the Lost Cause, including the acceptance of Lee as a heroic figure.[41]

Bingham expressed the attitudes of many southerners on turn of the century racial affairs. Like many of his generation he voiced relief that the institution of slavery had been lifted from the backs of both races. In fact, he proposed that blacks gained the most, having been elevated from a state of "savagery." He suggested:

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39 Robert Bingham, *The Fifty Years Between 1857 and 1907, and Beyond* (pamphlet, 3 June 1907, North Carolina Collection), 6, 10; Bingham, *Secession In Theory, as the Framers of the Constitution Viewed it; Secession as Practiced and as Sustained by the United States; Secession as Attempted by the Confederate States* (pamphlet, 13 October 1908, North Carolina Collection), 4; Bingham, *The Status of the South in the Past; the Decadence of that Status; Its Restoration* (pamphlet, 14 December 1904, North Carolina Collection), n.p.

40 Bingham, *Secession in Theory*, 23, 29; Bingham, *Some Sectional Misunderstandings* (pamphlet, reprinted from *North American Review*, September 1904), 8-11; Bingham, *The Fifty Years Between 1857 and 1907*, 6.

41 Thomas L. Connelly and Barbara L. Bellows, *God and General Longstreet: The Lost Cause and the Southern Mind* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 73-81.

> All are agreed that slavery had lasted as long, probably, as it was beneficial to the black man, and as long as the white man could stand it without losing strength; that the white man was emancipated rather than the black.[42]

Without apology he acclaimed the control of whites over blacks in the South."Our discrimination against the negro [*sic*] politically and socially is race instinct," he explained, "which is minimized in the North on account of the very weak 'solution'," i.e., the South obviously had a proportionately larger number of Negroes than the North. For this reason, he stressed that southerners had more experience in dealing with blacks and, therefore, greater knowledge of race relations. He added his views of how blacks might be brought into the mainstream of American life. Negroes could be schooled in democracy only after they had been disfranchised. Then they could be trained and "become fit by degrees for full citizenship," eventually receiving the "right of suffrage." After all, Bingham charged, did the current situation in the new American dependencies of Hawaii and the Philippines differ much from white control over blacks in the South?[43]

Yet Bingham in nearly the same breath could claim that "I have always loved the negro [*sic*] and I shall never cease to love him. My father and mother reared seven children in a slave woman's lap. She loved us better than her life. We loved her next to our parents." While this statement may sound like the apology of a typical white southerner justifying the development of post-Civil War segregation, Bingham was not being inconsistent, given his background. Undoubtedly, he loved the slave woman. Wars, lost and won, are given meaning by those who fight or live through them. If Bingham mythicized the Old South, secession, and the Civil War, he could do no other and continue to live with the memories of the pain and suffering of the war. Adoption of the Lost Cause became consistent with the struggles

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42 George B. Tindall, *The Ethnic Southerners* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 233; Bingham, *Some Sectional Misunderstandings*, 5-6; Bingham, *An Ex-Slaveholder's View of the Negro Question in the South* (pamphlet, reprinted from *Harper's*, July 1900), 5.

43 Bingham, *Some Sectional Misunderstandings*, 12-14; Bingham, *An Ex-Slaveholder's View*, 8.

of Reconstruction and the return of white rule in the South. All became part of his historical view of himself, his race, his section, and his nation. More importantly several generations of southern young men came under his influence, absorbing the value system of their schoolmaster, which they, in turn, carried into adulthood.[44]

After a disastrous fire destroyed several buildings at the Mebane school location in 1890, Bingham decided to move to a location that could provide better fire protection. He chose Asheville and moved there in 1891. On a hill high above the French Broad River, he built what would become the last Bingham School. The physical plant of the school contained more buildings and refinements than at any of its previous sites, and fees for the school continued to be higher than at any other private academy in the state. Perhaps as a consequence, enrollment dropped to an annual average of one hundred students. Bingham educated young men from the best families of North Carolina, but, as public education gained strength, the number of private schools dwindled. In effect, Colonel Robert's efforts in behalf of public education bore fruit, but eventually led to the demise of his own school. He continued to direct the school into the World War I era. The infusion of large sums of money by Robert Worth in the early 1920s could not keep the school open, and it closed just after the death of Colonel Robert at the age of eighty-eight in 1927. Two years later the University of North Carolina dedicated Bingham Hall in honor of Colonel Robert Bingham.[45]

At least two North Carolina literary figures took prominent notice of the life of Bingham. If he exemplified the chivalry, sense of honor, and devotion to the Lost Cause of his generation, to another North Carolinian, novelist Thomas Wolfe of Asheville, he epitomized something much different. Wolfe could have taken

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44 Bingham, *An Ex-Slaveholder's View*, 8.

45 Charles Lee Raper, *The Church and Private Schools of North Carolina* (Greensboro: Josiah J. Stone, 1898), 76-84; Asheville *Citizen-Times*, 19 November 1933; Robert Worth Bingham to S. R. McKee, 25 January 1923 and Bingham to W. R. Cobb, 23 October, 13 December 1924, Bingham Papers; Henderson, *The Campus of the First State University*, 281.

a teaching position at the Bingham School upon his graduation from the university at Chapel Hill. His refusal symbolized a desire to break with what he considered to be the stultifying past of his region. In *The Hills Beyond* he immortalized his impressions of Colonel Robert Bingham, apparently using the headmaster as the prototype for the character Theodore Joyner. To Wolfe, Joyner represented all the pretentiousness and shallowness of the professional Confederate veteran. Joyner supervised a neo-Confederate military school on "Hogwart Heights" and, like Bingham, was given to making speeches about the great accomplishments of the antebellum South and the heroism of the Civil War.

One of Joyner's sons, Gustavus Adolphus "Silk" Joyner, bears a striking resemblance to Robert Worth Bingham. Both leave the school environment, take law degrees, and become successful apart from the Old South milieu of their fathers. Walter Hines Page, ambassador to Great Britain during World War I and an alumnus of the Bingham School, demonstrated a more ambivalent attitude toward his alma mater and its headmaster than did Wolfe. As a critic of the New South mentality, Page blamed the Lost Cause romanticism of southerners like Bingham for the lack of general progress in the South in the late nineteenth century. In one of his famous "Mummy" letters written in 1886, he cited Bingham as one of the more enlightened citizens in a culturally moribund state. Twenty years later after forsaking the South and winning success in the publishing world, Page only thinly disguised the Bingham character in his autobiographical novel, *The Southerner*. Much like Wolfe's Colonel Joyner, Page's Colonel Graham exemplified nearly all that a progressively-minded southerner should abhor, but in the end he could find something positive about the influence of his old teacher. In summing up his experience at the Graham School, the fictitious Nicholas Worth declares that:

> My hearty Colonel, it was a narrow segment of life that you moved in and marched us over in those years of guns and drums and paradigms and Presbyterianism. I recall with a smile and yet with affection your amusing pomp and your martial precision. But you

> stood erect; and that is a pleasant memory in a world where I have since seen men cringe.[46]

The real Colonel Bingham and his literary counterparts could be faulted for their obeisance to the absolutist mentality that existed within the Old South-New South ruling class. This narrow perspective blinded them to the exigencies of the postwar southern environment in the late 19th century. Yet Bingham's efforts in behalf of the education of all North Carolinians should receive just praise. As the South struggled with important social, economic, and political questions around the turn of the century, more progressive leaders like Bingham meliorated conditions, particularly in education, that could have been much worse. He represented the best of the New South era, admittedly a period in which the rhetoric of boosterism far exceeded the realistic potential of the region. Moreover, he helped educate hundreds of young southerners who provided more enlightened leadership than even their mentor could provide.

If Colonel Robert did not alter his attitudes over the course of his life, those of his son demonstrated both continuity and change. As the Civil War generation gave way to its postwar descendants, the legacy of the Old South remained strong yet not immutable.

Robert Worth Bingham followed the family tradition by entering the University of North Carolina after his graduation from the Bingham School in 1888 just before reaching his seventeenth birthday. Like his father and grandfather before him, he joined the Dialectic Literary Society, took part in debates, and developed

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46 Floyd C. Watkins, *Thomas Wolfe's Characters* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), 151-53; Wolfe, *The Hills Beyond* (New York: Harper and Row, 1941), 60-87; C. Hugh Holman and Sue Fields Ross, *The Letters of Thomas Wolfe to His Mother* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), 7; Bruce Clayton, *The Savage Ideal* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1972), 44; Nicholas Worth, *The Southerners* (New York: Doubleday, Page, and Company, 1909), 37, 41, 56; Burton J. Hendrick, *The Training of An American: The Earlier Life and Letters of Walter Hines Page: 1855-1913* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1928), 23-25, 114-15, 176-81; John Milton Cooper, Jr., *Walter Hines Page: The Southerner As American, 1855-1918* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 10-11.

a particular interest in history. He enjoyed sports and participated in the university's first organized football game with Wake Forest College in October 1888. With college mates William Watkins Davies, Wray Martin, and Shepard Bryan he helped organize a fraternity, the "Order of the Gimghouls," complete with secret ritual. While Bingham attended the commencement exercises of 1890, he did not graduate from the University of North Carolina. For his declamation on the topic of "Manifest Destiny and Manifest Duty," he received the Representative Medal for Oratory, the highest award for the presentations. In this speech he stressed that "the Teuton is the noblest race that has existed and is the most progressive," words that echoed his father's racial pronouncements. Rob studied for one year at the University of Virginia and then returned to the Bingham School to teach. However, after four years he decided to sever his relationship with the school, breaking a three-generation tradition, and strike out on his own. He followed his college friend Davies to Louisville. After taking the LL.B. degree in 1897 from the University of Louisville and passing the Kentucky bar examination, he joined Davies in a law firm.[47]

From the time he began the practice of law until his death forty years later, Bingham took an active interest in the political, social, and economic affairs of his city, state, and nation. After the turn of the century he joined the progressive forces in Louisville, serving briefly as interim mayor in 1907 and later became a crusading judge. His law practice prospered as he represented major businesses in Louisville. He also worked for regional and national corporations, at one time lobbying in behalf of the National Biscuit Company for pure food laws in the southern states. His influence would have been small, however, if it had not been for his purchase of a controlling interest in the Louisville

47 Kemp P. Battle, *History of the University of North Carolina, Vol. II* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1912), 450-51, 651; Bingham to Ansley Coxe, 25 February 1935, Bingham Papers; Archibald Henderson, *Robert Worth Bingham: A Memorial Address* (pamphlet, The Society of Transylvanians, 1941, North Carolina Collection), 41; *Durham Morning Herald*, 4 October 1959.

Courier-Journal in 1918. Immediately prior to this transaction his second wife Mary Lily Kenan Flagler, heiress to the fabulous fortune of Henry Flagler, died leaving him approximately five million dollars. With a part of this bequest he bought the Louisville papers, giving him an entrée into regional and national power circles. The papers generally paid their own way, even during the worst days of the Great Depression, allowing Bingham to use his fortune to influence city, state, and national affairs. On most accounts Bingham would qualify as a southern "business progressive." As part of this thrust he provided leadership and a sizeable amount of money to the farm cooperative movement in the early 1920s. He became one of the earliest supporters of Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidential campaign and contributed much time, money, and the influence of his papers to the election of 1932. As a result of his unflagging efforts, Roosevelt appointed Bingham to the nation's most prestigious diplomatic post, ambassador to the Court of St. James, in early 1933. The Louisvillian served in that position until just before his death in late 1937.[48]

In the present context, however, the primary interest is in his reactions to issues that concerned him as a southerner and in which we can discern a southern influence. He carried with him to Louisville, a city that demonstrated many "southern" features after the Civil War, the intellectual, moral, and spiritual baggage of his North Carolina upbringing.

Of course, Bingham maintained membership in the Sons of Confederate Veterans and saw to it that his father's name became one of the first inscribed on the Roll of Honor at the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial in Georgia. He demonstrated his "southern-ness" in other ways, ranging from his love of hunting and hunting dogs, at one time keeping a kennel of over seventy-five pedigreed dogs on his hunting plantation in Georgia, to belonging to such favorite southern "quasi-religious" institu-

48 Ellis, "Robert Worth Bingham and Louisville Progressivism, 1905-1910," 169-96; Ellis, "Robert Worth Bingham and the Crisis of Cooperative Marketing in the Twenties," 99-116; Tindall, *Ethnic Southerners*, 147-49.

tions as the Masonic Lodge. He admitted to another distinctly southern trait, that of carrying a revolver most of the time. Though he never served in the armed forces, he maintained a steady interest in military affairs, particularly after purchasing the Louisville papers. When the United States entered World War I, he volunteered to form a military unit and was turned down. Arthur Krock, an editor for the *Louisville Times* and later editor of the *New York Times,* claimed that Bingham then took his suggestion and purchased the newspapers in Louisville as a compensation for not being able to serve his country otherwise.[49] As the transplanted North Carolinian's wealth and power grew, he changed his religious affiliation from the Presbyterian Church to the Episcopalian Church, a path often taken by the upwardly mobile in southern society. After he could afford it, he made annual pilgrimages to the British Isles. By the time he left the United States on his diplomatic mission, he had reworked his ancestry, over-emphasizing the Anglo-Saxon branch of his family tree at the expense of the Scots-Irish side of the family, the one to which his most immediate ancestor, William Bingham, belonged.[50]

If wealth, power, and a change of church altered Bingham's North Carolina roots, in other ways he clung solidly to many of the ideals of his father. While the son demonstrated a more liberal reaction to current issues after the turn of the century than did the father, the heritage remained quite strong. Robert Worth loyally supported most of the Progressive reforms of the early twentieth century. He stood for clean government, government regulation of business, and limited social reform. Upon assuming control of the Louisville papers, his support of woman sufferage and the League of Nations led to the resignation of

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49 Arthur Krock, *Memoirs: Sixty Years On the Firing Line* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1968), 46-48.

50 Ibid.; Lillian Taylor to Bingham, 8 March 1924, Bingham Papers; *Atlanta Constitution,* 21 January 1934; Bingham to John H. Cowles, 14 January 1924, Bingham Papers; Samuel S. Hill, Jr., and others, *Religion and the Solid South* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 51.

longtime editor Henry Watterson, a man of Colonel Robert's generation.[51]

On the issue of race, however, Bingham did not stray far from the values of his father. Like most southern Progressives, he excluded blacks from a full share of democracy. On the one hand, he could support the Kentucky Interracial Commission and the Louisville Urban League with generous contributions of time and money. Moreover, he often gave substantial donations to Negro educational institutions. But Bingham could never entirely divorce himself from his southern racist heritage. For example, his papers ran "Hambone," a blatantly racist stereotyped cartoon, very popular in southern newspapers, in the period between the world wars. He differentiated between the Klan of his father's day and that of the 1920s. "In its day," he asserted, "the genuine, old organization absolutely saved the women and children and the civilization of the South." If Bingham took a stand against the Klan of his own day and editorially opposed lynching, he could become defensive on the latter subject. When asked by an English lady why blacks were lynched in the South, he replied "that we would probably stop it when negroes [*sic*] stopped raping white women and girls." Not too many years before he had voiced similar concerns and predicted racial extermination if the problem did not cease.[52]

With the death of Robert Worth Bingham in 1937, four generations of the Bingham family had reacted to the major historical trends in the United States, more particularly in the South. From the late eighteenth century into the present one, they often typified the attitudes, values, and belief systems of

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51 Ida Husted Harper to Bingham, 28 August 1918, Watterson to Bingham, 22 March, 27 May 1919, Bingham to Watterson, 8 April 1919, Bingham Papers.

52 Ellis, "Robert Worth Bingham and Louisville Progressivism, 1905-1910," 192-95; J. M. Ragland to Robert Worth Bingham, 10 December 1923, 25 November 1924, Bingham to Henry Luce, 16 October 1926, Bingham to John H. Cowles, 1 February 1923, Bingham Papers; "Bingham Diary," II, 166, 30 October 1934, Bingham Papers; Bingham, *Some Sectional Misunderstandings*, 16; Bingham, *An Ex-Slaveholder's View*, 12-14; Steven Heller, "Racist Ephemera: The Melting Pot Reconsidered," *American Book Collector*, 3 (January-February 1982), 14-21.

middle-class white southerners. They represented the best in southern society and did not take a passive role in their time. Each in his own sphere, the Binghams of North Carolina played important parts in educational, political, legal, and civic affairs.

In a final tribute to Margaret Mitchell, Bingham summed up his interpretation of the southern heritage, one which he heartily bequeathed to the future:

> To a voiceless people you have become the voice. In behalf of a people not only tortured and robbed, but cynically and cruelly maligned, you have told the truth, and, in telling the truth, you have told it so vibrantly, so beautifully, with such interest and fascination, you have forced the facts upon our countrymen for the first time. In so doing, you have done a service for all our countrymen, beyond measure, beyond calculation, but most of all for us of your own South, for us who would be worthy of our tradition of calm, unflinching courage, of dignity in the face of any tragedy, of honor to the end, of chivalry and who, striving to live up to our heritage, would have it pass in its noble entirety to those who come after us.[53]

53 Bingham to Mitchell, 16 February 1937.