

The Voice of a Prophet: Andrew Sledd Revisited

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In 1902, Andrew Sledd, a professor of Latin at Emory College published “a strong denunciation of lynching in the *Atlantic Monthly*.” The furor that followed the article’s appearance led the president of Emory, James Dickey, “to ask for Sledd’s resignation.” For the next 100 years, Emory University sought to gloss over or ignore this stain on its institutional soul.¹ Not until April 2002, at a special symposium held to commemorate the controversy, did the University act to “right a wrong committed a century ago by revisiting the ‘Sledd affair’ and reflecting on its meaning for Emory today.”²

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Indeed, Andrew Sledd’s life and work had meaning far beyond the borders of the Emory campus. He was one of the key figures responsible for undermining the ruling orthodoxies of race, education and religion that held Southern culture in an iron grip for far too long. Although hardly perfect, Sledd was one of those rare persons who possessed the character and courage to labor heroically for a new South, even though he was only able to see and greet it from afar. A self styled “Apostle of the New South,” Sledd spoke out forcefully against the “infidelity of the orthodox” proclaiming a gospel of “righteousness and social service” that would inspire his students at Emory College and the Candler School of Theology to become agents of change across the region.³ Largely forgotten after his death, Andrew Sledd became “a prophet without honor in his own country,” with few Southerners knowing that he lived, and still fewer appreciating the changes that he helped bring to the region.⁴

¹ “Reverence, emotion run high at Sledd Symposium,” *Emory Report*, April 29, 2002 From the beginning, Emory was sensitive to the issues arising out of the Sledd Affair. Despite overwhelming evidence that Andrew Sledd was forced from his teaching position at Emory College for violating prevailing standards of racial orthodoxy, the official explanation was that he had simply resigned his post. Even as recently, as 1987, the President of Emory, James T. Laney, still argued (1) that Sledd “voluntarily resigned from the faculty and moved on to become president of the University of Florida,” and (2) that “he established without question a firm precedent for untrammled academic freedom that was later so staunchly upheld by President Atwood during the God is dead controversy.” (President James T. Laney, “A Sense of Larger Purpose: A Sesquicentennial Address,” 63 *Emory Magazine*, (March 1987), 19)

² The Symposium in question was entitled “Professing Justice: A Symposium on the Civil Rights Legacy of Professor Andrew Sledd.” It was jointly sponsored by Pitts Theological Library, Candler School of Theology, the Office of the University Secretary, The Program of African-American Studies, The Violence Studies Program, and the Department of Religion of Emory University. Emory Events, April 22, 2002.

³ Andrew Sledd, Lecture entitled “Attitude of People toward Religion: The Problem, -Its Causes and Solutions, nd, Andrew Sledd Papers, Emory University.

⁴ http://www.aarweb.org/syllabus/syllabi/m/matthews/rel_166/twenty.htm

Andrew Sledd found inspiration and strength in the Old Testament prophetic tradition. He believed there would be “no higher life in the South” until someone offered a vision of a society free of “narrowness, bigotry, prejudice and pride,” in which racial justice and harmony would prevail. It mattered little that this “field of . . . ministry” might prove “a desert waste, silent and dead, unreceptive to his message.”⁵ A man with the courage of his convictions, Sledd was prepared to pay a high price for his dissent as he embarked on a life long struggle against the “blind adherents” of racism, anti-intellectualism, and reactionary religion.⁶

Andrew Sledd cherished his calling as an educator. Trained at Randolph-Macon, Harvard and Vanderbilt, Sledd earned a Ph.D. at Yale in 9 months. He taught at Vanderbilt, Emory, Southern University, and Candler.⁷ He was the first president of the University of Florida and served in the same capacity at what is now Birmingham-Southern College. Sledd’s commitment to education was rooted in the belief that it represented a powerful tool “in the struggle . . . to free” the South of its bondage to “literalism and traditionalism.”⁸ A particular passion was Sledd’s quest to raise academic standards. If Southern colleges and universities could be reconstructed with higher standards and better-trained faculty, they might produce students capable of tackling the problems of racism, poverty and illiteracy that shaped life in the region. His efforts, however, were not always well received. An example of this was his dismissal from the Presidency of the University of Florida. Having initially established standards that exceeded those of other schools in the state, Sledd came under great pressure to lower admissions and grading standards to accommodate the recruiting and retention of football players. In 1909, both Sledd and his high standards were swept aside in the quest for athletic success.

The degree to which Andrew Sledd’s demands for higher academic standards shaped the outcome of the Sledd Affair of 1902 is less well known. Sledd took particular delight in bringing into the open issues and skeletons the authorities at Emory preferred to keep in the closet. One of the most noteworthy was his campaign to terminate the Emory law school, a “fake” department of the college with a “total faculty . . . of one in-competent and inconspicuous so called judge.”⁹ After considerable effort, Sledd was able to force a resolution through the faculty abolishing this “discreditable sham.” While winning such battles furthered the cause of educational reform at Emory, it also won him powerful enemies. The Emory Law School had been a pet project of Warren Candler while he

⁵ Andrew Sledd, Lecture notes, Andrew Sledd Papers, Emory University

⁶ Andrew Sledd, “Idols of the Cave,” nd., np., pp. 3-6, Andrew Sledd Papers, Emory University

⁷ Southern University was located in Greensboro, Alabama, and was supported by the Alabama Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. In 1917, it merged with a rival institution supported by the North Alabama Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South to form Birmingham-Southern College and relocated to Birmingham, Alabama.

⁸ W.A. Smart, “Memoir: Andrew Sledd—1870-1939, *Combined Journals of the Nineteen Hundred Thirty-Nine Sessions of the Alabama Annual Conference, Methodist Protestant Church; Alabama Annual Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church; Alabama Annual Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church, South; and of the Alabama Annual Conference, The Methodist Church*, 127-129.

⁹ Andrew Sledd, Autobiography, unpublished MS in the Andrew Sledd Papers, Emory University

served as president of the College, and the “so called judge” was John S. Candler, brother of Warren and Asa, the founder of Coca Cola and a major benefactor of Emory.

The most intriguing example of how this quest for higher academic standards shaped the Sledd Affair of 1902 concerns Andrew Sledd’s effort to end Emory College’s practice of awarding honorary degrees. While this practice was used by colleges of the day to gain patronage and funds, Sledd objected to giving degrees to men in “some distant section” just to enhance the college’s treasury or to win it new friends. Instead, he argued, “a degree should represent something, and if it is bestowed, it should be justified by some distinguished attainments in the line represented by the degree.” In the spring of 1902, shortly before the events of the Sledd Affair, a recommendation came to the faculty to award an honorary D.D. degree to the Reverend James E. Dickey. Sledd was the only faculty member to oppose the awarding of the degree and his arguments carried the day, but it was a stand that came back to haunt him. Within weeks, President C.E. Dowman was forced from office, and James Dickey, with the support of the Candler family, was elected in his stead, giving Dickey and others alienated by Sledd’s campaign for reform the opportunity to punish the young professor for his principled stands.

Andrew Sledd also took seriously his ordination as a Methodist minister and played a major role in introducing an entire generation of educators and pastors to new ways of looking at the Bible by employing the tools of literary criticism.¹⁰ Sledd skewered religious orthodoxy as “a profoundly irreligious attitude” with its “mistaken reverence for tradition.” As practiced in the South, it had become bound in a “fossil form of doctrine and organization” and had failed to recognize that “Christianity properly understood,” was not a “static state of being, but a dynamic process of becoming” with “profound social implications.”¹¹ By sharing such views with his students, Sledd hoped to mold a new generation of leaders who would transform church and society. Albert C. Outler, the noted scholar of Wesley, had “a life changing experience” when he began his studies under Sledd. Outler wrote, “Sledd was an academic missionary to Methodism in the Southeast . . . and opened the way for a lot of questioning minds . . . One can think of him as one of the most important intellectual forces in his time and place . . . Andrew Sledd was a double agent, both for Athens and Jerusalem, an authentic means of grace to young folks maturing in the new South. I could never thank him properly, directly, but my gratitude to him has been one of the driving forces in my life and work ever since.”¹²

¹⁰ F. Thomas Trotter, General Secretary of the Board of Higher Education and Ministry of the United Methodist Church has written: “It is not unlikely that Sledd’s influence in biblical scholarship has never been fully described. His students became the leaders of critical New Testament scholarship in the period 1935-75. In addition to the intellectual stimulation this one teacher exerted on a generation, his students caught from Sledd a deep piety and devotion to Christ that infused their work with remarkable directness.” F. Thomas Trotter, “Introduction,” Charles Cole, ed., *Something More than Human: Biographies of Leaders in American Methodist Higher Education*, p. 6.

¹¹ Andrew Sledd, *Introduction to the New Testament*, p 11; Andrew Sledd, The Challenge to the Church, Notes for a lecture entitled, “Christian Social Expression,” Andrew Sledd Papers, Emory University

¹² One of Albert Outler’s major contributions to the study of John Wesley was his recognition that Wesley’s theology contained a unique synthesis of the Catholic and Protestant traditions, particularly in the area of soteriology. Outler has pointed out that the goal of Wesley’s theology was to find “an alternative to both of the older polarizations that had separated the notions of Christ’s imputed righteousness in

Again, Andrew Sledd's effort to free the South from its bondage to "literalism and traditionalism" cost him greatly. When pressures from Georgia conservatives forced the President of Emory to implore the faculty of the Candler School of Theology to "soft pedal" certain "emphases in their teaching" so that the University could secure adequate financial resources, Sledd spoke up to say, "I must tell you with complete candor . . . that neither I nor any other members of this faculty would be worth their salary if he compromised what he takes to be the truth. I have never taught anything I counted non-essential, and God helping me I shall not now modify by a hair's breadth the content of my teaching for the sake of money! . . . The exclusive authority of truth, never the authority of the hand that writes the check, may legitimately rule the University."¹³

For Andrew Sledd, the results of this particular defense of the truth were disastrous. Faculty salaries were cut, putting Sledd's commitment to the freedom of the classroom to the test. Unable to meet the payments on his home in Decatur on his reduced salary, he was forced to move and a "deficiency judgment" was entered against him. His last years of life were spent in near poverty, and when he died (ironically drinking a Coke) he was on his way to the bank to make a payment on his vast debts. But not even death could protect him from one last indignity. His creditors laid claim to all his "furniture and books," forcing his family to sell them to satisfy his debts.

All of this was still very much in the future when Andrew Sledd sat down in 1902 and put pen to paper to record his thoughts on the lynching of Sam Hose, an event that he had witnessed along the railroad tracks between Atlanta and Covington, Georgia. As a youth,

justification [the idea of forensic justification put forward by classical Protestants] from an actual imparted righteousness [the idea of justification as a therapeutic act, an essentially Catholic point of view.]" Wesley "was rightly convinced" according to Outler, "that the much vaunted disjunction between the imputed righteousness of Christ (the ground of our justification) and his imparted righteousness (the Spirit's work of regeneration) posed a false alternative." Instead, Outler argued, "Justification for Wesley involved both a "relative and a real change in the believer." The grace that imparts justification, also imparts change to the human heart, such that salvation comes to be seen as part of a "process." This process or order of salvation [*Ordo Salutis*] as Wesley "had come to see it," wrote Outler, "is an organic continuum: conscience, conviction of sin, repentance, reconciliation, regeneration, sanctification, glorification. All of these are progressive stages in the divine design to restore the image of God in human selves and societies."

Fundamental to Outler's "insight" into Wesley's thought, was a lesson that he learned while studying under Andrew Sledd. Speaking on "one burst of insight I still remember," Outler wrote, "The 'case' that interested me then, and still does, is the adjective, *dikaiois* and the verb, *dikaioo*. For if *dikaioo* could have meant "to be *made* 'just,' (*dikaiois* then *dikaioisyne*) you could construe justification, even in Paul, as meaning both acquittal from the condemnation of sin, and a character change as well. Justification could mean both the imputation of Christ's righteousness and its impartation as well—and that would make an enormous difference, in the whole area of soteriology and in ecumenical dialogue in particular. It is a fully credible idea in classical Greek—and in patristic Greek as well. Most 'Orthodox' exegetes still read Romans 4-6 this way. But most Protestants, even 'the liberals,' read *dikaioisune* from the perspective of a law court, and insist on 'acquittal', to the exclusion of 'character change.' It was Dr. Sledd's priceless gift to give me enough confidence in standing by the text and context and not to be intimidated by such things as what sometimes get called 'scholarly consensus.'" Albert C. Outler to Terry Matthews, TLS, 1 October 1986, Andrew Sledd Papers, Emory University

¹³ Albert Barnett, *Andrew Sledd: His Life and Work*, 9, 15.

Sledd had “imbibed all the traditions of an ardent and patriotic Southerner,” but the views of this “unreconstructed rebel” began to evolve after he took time away from his studies at Randolph-Macon to teach at a secondary school in Durant, Mississippi. There he encountered the brutality of racism as it was practiced in the South of Jim Crow. Sledd had not been in town more than a few hours when he learned of the murder of Bill Patton, an African-American, at the hands of the local sheriff. A few days later, Harry Turpin, an African-American preacher, was hunted down, murdered and his body “shot into an unrecognized mass.” Like many Southerners, Sledd remained silent in the face of these evils, but by the spring of 1902 that was changing. Confronted with the lynching of Sam Hose, the young dissenter could remain quiet no longer.

Andrew Sledd was traveling by train when the conductor stopped to allow passengers to view the lynching of Sam Hose. Sledd stood by as a crowd “mad with the terrible blood lust that wild beasts know” strung up the hapless Hose. Not satisfied, and eager to heap further indignity upon his lifeless body, the mob cut him down and proceeded to mutilate and burn his corpse. “The burning of Sam Hose” took “place on a Sabbath day,” Sledd wrote, and local railroads ran extra trains to the scene with “men and boys, crowding from cowcatcher to the tops of the coaches” to see “the indescribable and sickening torture and writhing of a fellow human being.” Trophies such as “a charred finger bone” or the “remains of a knee cap” were fancied by the crowd as “treasures to take home.”¹⁴ Traveling home, the silence of a man stunned by the sheer inhumanity of what had taken place began to give way to a growing sense of moral outrage. Sledd made a fateful decision before reaching Oxford. He would write an essay attacking not only lynching but also the whole system of racial proscription then in place.

The result was an article entitled, “The Negro: Another View.” Andrew Sledd submitted his essay to the *Methodist Review* in Nashville and the *Independent* of New York. Neither accepted the article. Undeterred, he sent it to the *Atlantic Monthly* which published the essay in its July 1902 issue.¹⁵

On the surface, the essay is an exercise in studied balance between Northern and Southern views of “the Negro”. Eschewing a “partisan and sectional discussion,” Sledd claims he is writing with a “calm, unbiased reason” to find the truth “between . . . two extremes.” He challenges Northern views on the race question by arguing they lack “knowledge or experience of actual conditions” in the South whereas Southerners were willing to deal with “the Negro” only “on the antebellum basis of his servile state.” Attacking the Compromise of 1877, Sledd refused to cede African-Americans to the South’s care, offering in its place a new national consensus that would “lead” to “a fair

¹⁴ Andrew Sledd, “The Negro: Another View,” *The Atlantic Monthly* (June 1902), pp. 70-71. See also Phillip Dray, **At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America**, Random House, 2002, pp. 3-16. Dray tells the story of Sam Hose utilizing the resources of the Tuskegee Institute. Tuskegee has documentary reports of 3,417 African-Americans who met the same fate as Sam Hose. Sadly, these records are far from comprehensive. But based on just these incomplete records, Dray has concluded that during the period 1882-1952, the American South averaged one lynching a week, a chilling confirmation of the magnitude of the problem that Andrew Sledd was addressing.

¹⁵ Andrew Sledd, *Autobiography*.

and satisfactory solution to the Negro problem.” Evidencing a concern for balance, he argued that two “fundamental facts” were critical to attaining this consensus: 1) “The Negro belongs to an inferior race,” and 2) “the Negro has inalienable rights.”¹⁶

This sense of balance was more illusion than real. For one thing, Sledd spent little time on the question of “Negro” inferiority. True, this was a “commonly held postulate of the time,” and it was widely accepted in the South as a universal truth. And it should also be noted that Sledd appears to accept uncritically certain “scientific” evidence that the “Negro” is “lower in the scale of development than the white man,” that “his inferiority” was “radical and inherent, a physiological and racial inequality.” Sledd even goes so far as to argue that there could be no amalgamation of the races because such a thing would be “coarse and repugnant” to both North and South, and such thoughts could find welcome only “in the brain of the wildest theorist, ignorant of conditions, and hurried by his negrophile propensities.”

“The purpose of [lynching] was to brutalize and strip ‘the Negro’ of his humanity for no other reason than he was black.”

I do not mean to defend these and other statements by Andrew Sledd. What I find intriguing is where his argument carries him. As H. Shelton Smith pointed out in his classic text on race and Southern religion, (*In His Image, But . . .*), Southerners maintained a strict racial orthodoxy complete with a confession of faith. A principal tenet of this faith was that the human races were “unequal and will remain unequal to the end of history.”¹⁷ What many Southerners found disturbing about Sledd’s essay was his unwillingness to make this confession of absolute and eternal inequality. By allowing that “the Negro’s” present inequality “may indeed, be modified by the environment,” and holding out a vision for a time “in the remote future” when “the Negro” might become the equal of the white man “by process of development,” his opponents insisted Sledd was opening the door for racial amalgamation despite his protests to the contrary. And they were right. Sledd was indeed holding out the hope that one day through affirmative steps the present social inequality between the races that resulted from slavery, poverty, racism and lack of access to education might be ameliorated. Sadly, Sledd’s vision of such a society remains very much a “dream deferred.”¹⁸

The main focus of Sledd’s essay is to be found in his discussion of the second “fundamental fact.” While allowing that the North had “erred in approaching the Negro question with the assertion of the (social) equality of the races,” the South had “much more grievously erred in precisely the opposite direction,” Sledd wrote. Further, “our section has carried the idea of the Negro’s inferiority, almost if not quite, to the point of dehumanizing him.” Offensive as that may have been to the defenders of white superiority, Sledd’s description of them as “demagogues,” “shysters,” “ignorant” and

¹⁶ Andrew Sledd, “The Negro: Another View,” pp. 65-66.

¹⁷ H. Shelton Smith, *In His Image, But...*, p. 265.

¹⁸ Andrew Sledd, “The Negro Another View,” p. 66

“frothing with hatred,” stood in sharp contrast to their perception of themselves as defenders of Anglo-Saxon virtue and civilization. Defying the white stereotype of “the Negro” as a lazy and ignorant, Sledd argued that many “Negroes” were “well educated, courteous, God fearing, and . . . are, in everything save color, superior to many white men.” Yet, despite this inherent dignity, African Americans were forced to live in a social and cultural system that was slowly, but inexorably stripping them of their personhood. “They walk our streets,” Sledd wrote, “they lift their hats in passing the aged or prominent, wither man or woman; yet no man so returns their salutation . . . at the depot they may not enter the room of the whites, and on the train they must occupy their own separate and second-class car. Reaching their destination, they may not eat at the restaurant of the whites, or rest at the white hotel. If they make purchases, shop ladies and . . . gentlemen look down on them with manifest contempt and treat them with open brusqueness . . . And if, on a Sabbath, they would worship in a white man’s church, they are bidden to call upon God, the maker of the black man as well as of the white alike, from a place apart. And so, from the cradle to the grave, the Negro is made in [the] Southern phrase, ‘to know and keep his place.’”¹⁹

Lynching, for Sledd, was the vilest expression of this dehumanization. “In the last decade of the last century of Christian grace and civilization, he wrote caustically, “more men met their death by violence at the hands of lynchers than were executed by due process of law,” approximately 1700 souls. The purpose of these acts was to brutalize and strip “the Negro” of his humanity for no other reason than he was black. The lynch mob would “teach the Negro the lesson of abject and eternal servility, would burn into his quivering flesh the consciousness that he has not, and cannot have, the rights of a free citizen or even of a fellow human creature.” Nor were African Americans the only ones dehumanized by such acts. The lynch mobs were also demeaning themselves. “Wholly ignorant, absolutely without culture, apparently without even the capacity to appreciate the nicer feelings or higher sense, yet conceited on account of the white skin which they continually dishonor,” these individuals, “when aroused” form “as wild and brutal a mob as ever disgraced the earth.”

“The root of the matter,” Andrew Sledd asserted, was simple. “The Negro” had never been given a fair chance by white America. Returning to his earlier theme about the need for affirmative steps, Sledd argued that “the Negro” “is but a generation from servitude and almost complete illiteracy. During that time, he has lived under the cloud of his former state, and in the miasmatic atmosphere of unfriendliness and repression. That he has made any progress is strange, that he has made the progress he has is a little short of wonderful.” “The radical difficulty is not with the Negro, but with the white man,” Sledd insisted, because he continued to do something that cannot be done, to measure “the development of a servile people . . . by the standards of the free.” Were African-Americans truly free in the wake of Emancipation? Sledd thought not. “No people is free whose simple human privileges and possibilities are curtailed or denied by the public sentiment that surrounds them. No people is free that is dominated and terrorized by a more numerous and powerful class. No people is free whose inherent rights to life,

¹⁹ Andrew Sledd, “The Negro Another View,” p. 68

liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, how much soever guaranteed by the organic law, are in practice and in fact . . . constantly at the mercy of a lawless mob.” Racial peace would not come about until whites respected the “inalienable rights” of “the Negro,” recognized his essential equality with whites, were prepared to defend his fundamental rights” and allowed “the Negro” “to work out, unhampered, his destiny among us.”²⁰ In Sledd’s mind, such ideals held forth the promise of a new and more equitable social order than the “separate but equal” regime of Jim Crow.²¹ Some of his readers, however, would see the matter differently.

Andrew Sledd’s article in the *Atlantic Monthly* article had little initial impact. Apart from a single editorial in the *Atlanta Constitution* attacking him for an “old form of foolosophy,” Sledd’s views on the race question were largely ignored in the South. This changed when Madison Bell shared a copy of the article with Mrs. Rebecca Felton, a leader of the Agrarian movement, the first woman to serve in the United States Senate, and a tireless defender of white supremacy. Mrs. Felton’s position on lynching was clear: “If it takes lynching to protect women’s dearest possession from drunken ravening human beasts,” she had insisted, “then I say lynch a thousand a week if it becomes necessary.”²² Mrs. Felton quickly took up the gauntlet laid down by Andrew Sledd for reasons that were an odd mixture of racism and revenge.

For many years, Mrs. Felton and the Candler family had been at odds. Warren Candler, Sledd’s father-in-law, described her as “my most malignant enemy and . . . the worst enemy of the college.” Felton and Candler had clashed over theological heresy in the church, a scandal involving the Methodist Publishing House and over a plan by Warren Candler to limit support for the University of Georgia forcing it to charge tuition at a rate comparable to Emory, making Emory more competitive. The two also clashed over equality for women (Candler was a determined foe) and the work of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. Mrs. Felton proved a difficult opponent at every turn. But the real reason for their feud may have been personal: Felton’s son had enrolled at Emory and been expelled by Candler for being a “vagabond and drunkard.”

As in all things in the South, however, race and class were never far from the surface. The Candlers were a rising New South family deeply resented by Mrs. Felton and her Populist allies like Thomas E. Watson. Indeed, Watson had already singled out “Bishop C. [Candler]” in a letter to Felton as a “rich, educated white man who debauches poor

²⁰ Andrew Sledd, “The Negro: Another View,” p. 72

²¹ Andrew Sledd’s views on this point were very comparable to those of Dr. Atticus G. Haygood, a former President of Emory College. In 1888, Haygood had offered a similar attack on lynching, arguing “The government that winks at lynching is vicious; the government that does not care is foolish.” (“Letter of Dr. A.G. Haygood, *Wesleyan Christian Advocate* 2 June 1888) Haygood wrote, however, before the campaigns for disenfranchisement filled the South with racist propaganda, and made dissenting from racial orthodoxy a dangerous endeavor.

²² James E. Talmadge, *Rebecca Latimer Felton, Nine Stormy Decades*, 113-118.

white & nigger—is he not the really dangerous man?”²³ What better way to humble such a “dangerous” man than to involve his son-in-law in a scandal over his racial views?

Rebecca Felton launched her attack on Andrew Sledd in the August 3 Sunday edition of the *Atlanta Constitution*, the most widely read paper in the state. Felton denied knowing Sledd’s identity, a profession taken at face value by many including her biographer, James Talmadge, and Ralph Reed of Christian Coalition fame. But her papers contain a letter from a Mr. J.W. Renfroe dated 5 July 1902 linking the writer of the *Atlantic Monthly* article to the Andrew Sledd of Emory, which means she knew exactly who her target was a month before she published her response to Sledd’s views.²⁴ And there is further evidence that she knew her target well: she paid to have a card inserted into the copies of the *Constitution* delivered in Covington, Georgia, Sledd’s place of residence, informing them that the writer of “The Negro: Another View” was the same Andrew Sledd of their community.

Rebecca Felton’s attack on Sledd was laced liberally with a raw and virulent “Negrophobia” designed to ignite a firestorm against Sledd and his racial views. In this, she succeeded beyond her wildest expectations. Her goal was clear. Sledd should “retire to the country where [he] belonged,” or “he would be made to retire.”

The next day, the *Atlanta Journal* reported “excitement is intense among the citizens of Covington . . . over an article published by Prof. Andrew Sledd . . . on the Negro . . . The feeling is doubly strong in that Mr. Sledd holds such a prominent position in Emory college,” wrote the *Journal*, so much so that “so long as a man with views so inimical to the people among whom he lives is retained on the faculty of such an institution as Emory college neither he nor any other true Southerner could trust a son to that institute.” It was a sentiment that was soon echoed across Georgia, leaving authorities at Emory fearful for their institution’s survival.

For his part, Andrew Sledd was unbowed by the controversy and disinclined to resign his position at Emory. His article had been “a claim for human rights for the black man; for equality before the law; and particularly a protest against the deadly and damnable practice of lynching,” and he would not recant.²⁵ This did not mean that he was unaware of the “delicacy of the situation.” Already deeply in debt, he was ill positioned to lose his faculty appointment. Nonetheless, a reporter for the *Atlanta Constitution* found that he remained “a man of strong opinions and of fearlessness in expressing them. The comments that have been made concerning his article in the *Atlantic Monthly* seem to have had little effect on him.” Sledd remained defiant: “Yes, I wrote the article, and I have nothing to retract or explain concerning it.”²⁶

²³ Thomas E. Watson to Mrs. Wm. Felton, 27 June 1902 ALS, Rebecca Felton Papers, Special Collections, University of Georgia

²⁴ J.W. Renfroe to Mrs. Felton, ALS, 5 July 1902, Rebecca Felton Papers, Special Collections, University of Georgia

²⁵ Andrew Sledd, “Autobiography.”

²⁶ “Indignation at Covington,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 5 August 1902.

Andrew Sledd's defiance of racial orthodoxy did not sit well with his neighbors.²⁷ On August 7, "a stuffed effigy of Sledd was burned in public by a crowd of citizens in Covington."²⁸ Sledd could hardly ignore that this "tempest in a teapot" was "steadily" spreading and growing "in intensity and ferocity." Despite the threats made against his person, Sledd retained "his characteristically cool courage." Writing to the *Virginia Dispatch*, he uttered a classic statement of the credo of a prophet: "I undertook to set down my conclusions in the matter, declaring the truth as I saw the truth, feeling I had a message of righteousness that I could no longer refuse to utter . . . And so I wrote."²⁹

Likewise, Andrew Sledd's refusal to attenuate his message did not sit well with the powers that be at Emory. Although Sledd had once hoped to find a "college . . . brave and wise and honest enough to break with its environment" and take a stand against "the tyranny of popular taste and clamor," he quickly discovered that Emory was not to be that school.³⁰ He found that the authorities at Emory were unwilling to do anything that might risk "the failure of patronage" or "jeopardize its very existence." Concerned that the college might be materially affected by the uproar over the *Atlantic Monthly* article, they moved quickly to appease Mrs. Felton and those who had joined her crusade.

"...Sledd the prophet inspired his students to serve as a kind of leaven in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South."

The principal figure in the effort to oust Sledd was James Dickey, president of the college for less than one month. In speaking to the press, Dickey insisted that Sledd had written his article "in his capacity as a private citizen and in no way as being connected with Emory college, hence I am not concerned in the matter officially." But privately, Dickey was worried the Sledd Affair would undermine his program for institutional advancement, adversely affecting the school. His anxieties were heightened by statements in the *Atlanta Journal* that warned that while Emory had "formerly upheld the best sentiments of its state and section," it now had "been indirectly placed in a false light before the public in having among its corps of tutors a man who is apparently incapable of properly comprehending the conditions with which his own people are surrounded." If Emory did not terminate Sledd, it would have to accept the inevitable consequences. As similar statements began to appear in papers across Georgia, Dickey had a right to be concerned.

Other factors shaped James Dickey's thoughts. His immediate predecessor had been removed from office for angering the college's constituency with the "liberality of his

²⁷ Andrew Sledd's neighbors would have no doubt been surprised to learn that future scholars would come to view Sledd as "a racial Conservative." Joel Williamson, for instance, has suggested that Sledd's writings "bore the essence of that creed." (Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race*, pp. 4-7) Clearly, by their actions Sledd's neighbors believed otherwise.

²⁸ Andrew Sledd, "Autobiography," p. 51; "Bad Boys Burn Sledd in Effigy," *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 August 1902

²⁹ Andrew Sledd to W.E. Harris, 9 August 1902, Andrew Sledd Papers, Emory University

³⁰ Andrew Sledd, "The Small College in the South," *The Methodist Review*, 49 (September-October 1900) 744-745.

views and the progressiveness of his policy.” Dickey also aspired to higher office within the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. He had no wish to damage his career by defending Sledd.

The one thing that may have given James Dickey pause in moving against Sledd was Sledd’s relationship by marriage to the powerful Candler family. Sledd had married Warren Candler’s daughter, Annie Florence, early in his tenure at Emory. Warren was widely perceived as the power behind Dickey’s selection as President, and Asa and John Slaughter Candler served on the College Board of Trustees. This bulwark, however, had eroded in the months leading up to the Sledd Affair. Tensions had arisen between Sledd and Warren Candler, and now the Bishop declined to involve himself publicly in the controversy. As for Asa and John Slaughter, there were “none more violent” among those calling for Sledd’s resignation. Nor were they alone. Seventeen trustees weighed in with Dickey that Sledd’s continuing relationship with the College would be “hurtful,” and “six or seven of these,” “stated that if they had sons of college age that they would not send them to Emory while he held a professorship.”³¹

On August 6, three days after the controversy erupted, James Dickey went to Andrew Sledd to demand his resignation. Sledd’s initial response to Dickey was, “I will not resign; and your Board will have to take formal action to put me out . . . I have worked diligently, faithfully . . . and lived righteousness, and now for the supposition of a heresy which you have not done me justice to verify by a half hour’s perusal of the article I am called upon to take my wife and little one and go out in disgrace.” The two men parted company “with the understanding that the President was to call at” Sledd’s residence “that evening for a final decision.” Talking matters over with his wife, Sledd concluded that “it would not be in keeping with common dignity and appropriate for me to go into the fight which I had proposed . . . and that the best thing for the college and the best thing for me was that I should quietly tender my resignation.”³²

All that remained was to negotiate the financial matters. Sledd informed Dickey that he had a series of financial obligations and the President offered him “a considerable portion of the salary for the year.” With this settled, Sledd gave Dickey what he wanted: the promise that he would resign the next day. Within hours of receiving Sledd’s letter of resignation, word was passed to all major newspapers in Georgia that Sledd’s relationship to the college had been terminated. Great care was taken to insure that it did not appear that the college had bowed to public pressure. Instead the media was told that the “action of Professor Sledd was entirely voluntary and was caused by a fear of injuring Emory college,” a position that would be continually reaffirmed by Emory officials over the course of the next century.

If James Dickey hoped that quick action on Andrew Sledd’s resignation would bring an end to the controversy, he was sadly mistaken. The transparency of the official

³¹ James Dickey to W.A. Candler, ALS, 1 December 1902. Warren Candler Papers, Special Collections, Emory University.

³² Andrew Sledd, *Autobiography*, 52-54.

explanation fooled no one. The forces of reaction had won an important victory, but Emory College's Sledd Affair was far from over. The public outrage over Sledd's article was surpassed by the regional and national reaction that followed his dismissal. Where trustees and administration had acted to protect the reputation and patronage of the college, the result was a mountain of unfavorable publicity that cost Emory important financial support. Emory was portrayed in the national press as a symbol of "prejudice and intolerance," an institution more concerned with "inculcating certain fixed ideas" than "a place to arrive at the truth by the free discussion of every great subject." Even within the South, there were those who expressed the hope that "sometime in the future the interests of Emory College will be committed unto the keeping of men who will understand and respect the principle of liberty of thought and speech." By the summer of 1903, the college had suffered so much damage to its patronage from the Sledd Affair it was unable to pay its faculty on time.³³ The vituperation that fell upon Emory was an early indication that the sands were shifting under the feet of racial orthodoxy. An editorial writer for the New York *Evening Post* put it well when he called Sledd a "prophet," one of those "rare" individuals "who can so detach themselves from the prejudices of class and locality" that they can paint society a "picture" of itself that "is all too true."³⁴

Sledd's own struggle for a "liberated intellectual life" in the South continued.³⁵ He returned in triumph to Emory in 1914 as the first Professor of New Testament at the newly organized Candler School of Theology. From here, Sledd the prophet inspired his students to serve as a kind of leaven in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. In steadily increasing numbers, these Methodist pastors returned to their annual conferences to labor in small but significant ways for racial justice, slowly transforming their denomination from a bulwark of racial and theological conservatism to an agency for social righteousness.³⁶ Some of these students came together to form Andrew Sledd societies dedicated to the values he embodied. The late Kenneth Goodson provided one of the more moving examples of Sledd's success in inspiring new values and aspirations in his students. Goodson did not study under Sledd, but was the presiding Methodist Bishop for Montgomery, Alabama, in 1963 when four young girls were killed in the

³³ Ralph Reed, Jr., "Emory College and the Sledd Affair: A Case Study in Southern Honor and Racial Attitudes," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 72 (Fall 1988): 484.

³⁴ The New York *Evening Post*, Clipping in the Andrew Sledd Papers, Emory University

³⁵ Andrew Sledd, "The Dismissal of Professor Banks," *The Independent*, 25 May 1911, p. 1114

³⁶ Among the leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South heavily influenced by Andrew Sledd were: Nolan Harmon, editor of Abingdon Press, and a prominent Bishop, Marvin Harper and John Norris, key figures in the denomination's mission program, as well as F. Darcy Bone, and John Q. Schisler, who played leading roles in the preparation of Sunday School literature. Sledd's influence was not confined to Southern Methodism. Several of his students also helped to shape the intellectual landscape on a national level. Among them were Ernest Cadman Colwell, New Testament Professor and president of the University of Chicago and John Knox, a leading New Testament scholar at Union Theological Seminary in New York. Andrew Sledd's influence was greatest, however, among rank and file pastors and lay persons within the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Upon his death in 1939, he was eulogized in pulpits and in church bulletins across the denomination. The large number of obituaries that also appeared in the regional press suggests that Sledd was widely known and well respected person whose passing was lamented by large numbers.

bombing of a Birmingham church. Sensing that racial tensions were about to explode, Goodson asked his ministers to help calm the situation by attending an interracial memorial service for the four young African-American girls. Only a few attended, Goodson related, but those who came to take a stand against racial injustice were “almost to a man, students of Andrew Sledd.”³⁷

Although Andrew Sledd often had to “face defeat and a discredited future,” he remained hopeful that “despite my seeming failure, perhaps even because of it, I have contributed somewhat to the spread of that righteousness to which I dedicated myself when I became a teacher so long ago.”³⁸ Change, he believed, could only be “effected by the gradual, all pervasive, all denominating spread of the truth.” It was to this task that he was called, and it was this strength of purpose that made him a prophet. Like the prophets of old before him, “the majestic glory of his conception of God; and the wonder that he felt at God’s presence and power, left him no room for self-esteem; left him no place for any utterance on his own authority, and no place for any questioning as to what the consequences of his utterances might be.”

Such was the nature of the man whom Emory University now honors. In candidly confronting its institutional amnesia, Emory has made clear that the voice of a long forgotten prophet can still be heard. But that is a truth Andrew Sledd understood very well. In a lecture given to the students of the Candler School of Theology, he described a “true prophet” in words that could have been written for his epitaph: “The man has disappeared in the prophet. As a man, he leaves nothing but a name, grown well-nigh meaningless; as a prophet, he leaves a message in which we recognize the voice of a changeless and eternal God.”³⁹

³⁷ Bishop Kenneth Goodson, interview by author, Greensboro College, Greensboro, N.C. April 1989. This incident occurred twenty five years after Andrew Sledd’s death in 1939. It suggests that his influence and example helped leaven race relations long after Sledd’s death.

³⁸ Andrew Sledd, “Confessions of A College President,” 11, Andrew Sledd Papers, Emory University

³⁹ Andrew Sledd, “Lecture No. 1. Subject: *The Place of the Prophet*,” 4, Andrew Sledd Papers, Emory University.