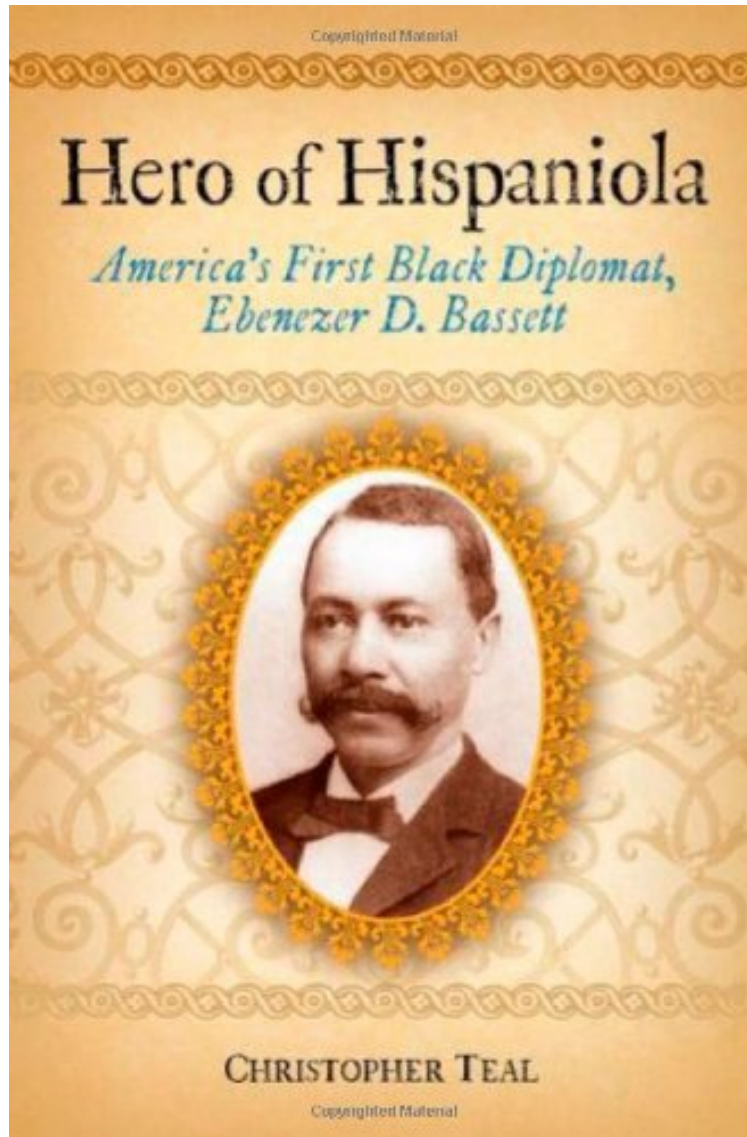


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# Hero of Hispaniola: America's First Black Diplomat, Ebenezer D. Bassett

*Christopher Teal*

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**Christopher Teal : Hero of Hispaniola: America's First Black Diplomat, Ebenezer D. Bassett** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Hero of Hispaniola: America's First Black Diplomat, Ebenezer D. Bassett:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Hero of Hispaniola by Christopher Teal: Book Review Essay By Chris Teal Hero of Hispaniola by Christopher Teal: Book Review Essay By Patricia H. Kushlis The February 2009

Foreign Service Journal published an article by Christopher Teal on Ebenezer Bassett, America's first black diplomat. The article summarizes Teal's biography of the same man - a remarkable story that Teal came upon accidentally when he was assigned to the Caribbean as a Foreign Service Officer - and one he researched and turned into a book thereafter. Bassett, like all other US diplomats until 1924 owed his appointment to political benefactors. In his case, the appointment was a reward for having recruited blacks to serve in the Union Army during the Civil War. His post: Ambassador to Haiti (then spelled Hayti), whose population consisted primarily of former black slaves. He and his family lived there for six years. A tough assignment then as now Haiti was a tough assignment for this former educator. It would have been difficult for anyone. The tropical climate took its toll on the health of his Connecticut born family and the Haitian political instability and ensuing violence - characteristics of that country that persist today - were trying. Unlike today with instant communications, however, Bassett was on his own - trying to represent American interests as best he could and communicating with his bosses by written reports transmitted to Washington and dependent for delivery upon the irregular mail. These reports served as a foundation for Teal's book. That Bassett possessed innate diplomatic skills helped save his and others lives - many times over. That his appeals for help or guidance were often ignored or passed over lightly by the then Secretary of State made Bassett's life even more difficult. In all too many ways, the parsimony and lack of support from the State Department sounds all too familiar. At one point when Bassett requested a naval ship off shore to be ready to assist in the event of evacuation of American citizens from the war torn island, the US refused to send one even though the British and the French had theirs at the ready. What makes the US administration's refusal to send even one vessel to protect American interests there even stranger is the fact that not only had the US proclaimed the Monroe Doctrine years before but also - as Teal tells us - that Haiti was seen as a strategically located coaling stop between the US mainland and the Panama Canal. From US Ambassador to Haiti to Haitian representative in NYC When Bassett's tour of duty finally ended, he and his large family returned to the U.S. and he became the Haitian representative in New York City. This is not as peculiar as it now sounds: Bassett was not rich. He needed a job to make ends meet, his appointment as a US diplomat had ended and the Haitians needed a representative who knew their country and could represent its interests well. Why Bassett's story remained untold until a junior State Department Officer stumbled upon it more than a century after the fact remains an unanswered question - perhaps as Teal suggests it was because despite Bassett's large family, none of his eight children had children of their own so the family line died out with them. Regardless of what didn't happen, Teal should be commended for not only coming across this remarkable and dedicated man but recognizing his historical importance, conducting the research and making the time to write his biography. Christopher Teal, *Hero of Hispaniola: America's First Black Diplomat*, Ebenezer D. Bassett, Praeger Publishers, 2008.[...]

We know Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice as two of today's most high-profile African American political figures, but who paved the way for these notable diplomats? More than one hundred and thirty years ago, Ebenezer D. Bassett served as the first black United States ambassador. In the midst of the aftermath of the Civil War, the U.S. government broke the color barrier by naming this leading educator, abolitionist, and activist to the controversial post of ambassador to the hemisphere's Black Republic - Haiti. For the first time, a nation founded on the principle that all men are created equal would have as its representative abroad someone previously less than equal under the law. This movement toward equality proved to be a force impossible to turn back, leading to a wider acceptance of blacks in U.S. foreign policy. This book lays bare the struggles Bassett faced as a pioneer of racial integration, helping to secure Bassett's legacy as the first African American political figure, a man who not only altered the American political structure, but led the way for all future civil rights advocates. This book highlights Bassett's achievements, which directly contributed to the racial revolution in the U.S. These include being appointed the first African American diplomat and chief of a U.S. diplomatic mission, leading the integration of public schools, and fighting for equal rights alongside revolutionaries such as Frederick Douglass. Bassett played a critical role in foreign affairs during the late 19th century, the formative years of American expansionism in Latin America and the Caribbean. 2008 marks the 100th anniversary of Bassett's death. Though he is long forgotten by history, his legacy as an innovator, activist, and diplomat lives on, and his life story? a tale of intelligence, integrity, and bravery? serves as an inspiration to patriotic Americans of all races and backgrounds. *Hero of Hispaniola* secures Bassett's legacy as the first African American political figure, a man who not only altered the American political structure, but led the way for all future civil rights advocates to follow.

"This is a very readable first biography, although the author's claim that Bassett's appointment 'forever altered US foreign policy' toward equality and democratization (p. 4) is very debatable. Summing Up: Recommended." - Choice About the Author Christopher Teal is a career diplomat with the U.S. Department of State. He has extensive foreign policy experience, serving as a consultant for the Department of Defense, a Senate aid, and most recently with the State Department through a decade of diplomatic assignments in Latin America and Washington. He has also written on topics ranging from election monitoring to anti-Americanism. Prior to government work, he collaborated

with journalist Juan Williams on the award-winning biography *Thurgood Marshall: American Revolutionary* (2000).