

August 2, 2022

News Essay Assignment

The role of the press in the North Carolina election of 1898 and the Wilmington Massacre



White supremacists burn the offices of *The Daily Record*, Wilmington Massacre 1898.
Library of Congress

Assignment: Write a 1,000-1,250-word news essay about the role of the press in the North Carolina election of 1898 and the Wilmington Massacre. You must develop a narrow topic that focuses your news essay. Your news essay must include either a news hook or a statement about why this history matters today.

In writing your essay, you will, of course, use and link to authoritative, credible sources of information. I've provided below a list of primary and secondary historical sources. You can do your own research and find other sources. A great deal has been written about the

NC Election of 1898 and the Wilmington Massacre in the recent past. But you MUST use at least two secondary sources and at least two primary sources.

In your essay drafts, add footnotes and/or hyperlinks that cite your sources for all factual information and analysis that is not your own (use a consistent style like Chicago, and provide page numbers). We will use citations in peer workshops to fact-check all essays, although, as author, you are responsible for making sure your news essay is scrupulously accurate.

Write in general news form. Spelling, grammar, and good writing matter. Structure matters. Use AP style.

Background: In 1898, the Democratic Party in North Carolina embarked on a white supremacist political campaign to wrest power from the Fusionists, a biracial political movement of Black Republicans and white Populists. The Fusionists held power in the state government, including the governorship, and in Wilmington, NC, a black majority port city.

The Democratic Party used the racist lie of the Black man as sexual predator preying on virtuous white women and white fear of “Negro domination” to drive a wedge in the biracial Fusionist movement. Josephus Daniels, the publisher of the *Raleigh News & Observer* and a key strategist in the Democratic Party, used his newspaper to publish editorials, articles, and political cartoons spreading this lie and agitating against “Negro rule” in the state. Alexander Manly, editor of the most powerful black newspaper in the state, the *Daily Record*, fought back with editorials explaining the more complicated reality of cross racial relationships, including the obvious but verboten fact that white men had sexually assaulted Black women throughout the era of slavery and afterward.

The Democratic Party succeeded in its campaign, gaining control of the state government. But 1898 was not an election year in Wilmington, so white “leading men” of North Carolina took over Wilmington’s government by force, killing Black citizens and forcing hundreds if not thousands more into exile. It was a coup.

In 2005, on orders from the state of North Carolina government, the 1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission published its report uncovering this history. On December 17, 2005, the *Raleigh News & Observer* published an editorial expressing regret for the newspaper’s role in the events.

In May 2006, the Commission issued a set of recommendations for the state to follow in responding to the report’s findings, including

In November 2006, the *News & Observer* newspaper in Raleigh published a front page, 16-page history of events titled “The Ghosts of 1898: Wilmington’s Race Riot and the Rise of White Supremacy” by then Duke University Professor Timothy B. Tyson.

Secondary sources:

- Report by the 1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission, 2006:
<https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/1898-race-riot>
- *Raleigh News & Observer* editorial, 2005:
<http://core.ecu.edu/umc/wilmington/scans/ticketThree/uglyChapter.pdf>
- *Raleigh News & Observer* special report “The Ghosts of 1898,” 2006:
<http://media2.newsobserver.com/content/media/2010/5/3/ghostsof1898.pdf>
- Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (University of North Carolina Press, 1996), chapter 4, “Sex and Violence in Procrustes’s Bed” (p. 91-118), on Moodle
- Kristin Gustafson, “Death of Democracy, North Carolina,” chapter 7, in Kathy Roberts Forde and Sid Bedingfield, eds., *Journalism and Jim Crow: White Supremacy and the Black Struggle for a New America* (p. 187-224), on Moodle

Primary sources:

- *Raleigh News & Observer* political cartoons from the Democratic Party’s white supremacist campaign in North Carolina in 1898, PDF in assignment folder on Moodle
- Political cartoons; Democratic Party campaign handbook; news articles about rallies, speeches, etc.; brief biographies of key historical figures; timeline; and more on UNC Libraries’ digital exhibit The 1898 Election in North Carolina
<https://exhibits.lib.unc.edu/exhibits/show/1898/history>
- Contemporaneous news coverage of the events in Wilmington in November 1898 after the election, PDFs of front pages of various newspapers from November 1898 in assignment folder on Moodle
- Alexander Manly’s editorial in the *Daily Record*
<https://exhibits.lib.unc.edu/exhibits/show/1898/item/2278>

Due dates:

XXXX: First complete draft due for peer review workshop

XXXX: Revised draft due for peer review workshop, including final fact check

XXXX: Final news essay due

News essay models: I love doing research with undergraduate students, and we often publish our work in news outlets. Sometimes they are lead authors! Review these news essays to get ideas about how best to structure your news essay with a strong lede, nut graf, tie-in to present moment, headings to guide the reader. See annotated version of “How Slave Labor Built the State of Florida” on Moodle.

Gardner, Sophia, Brie Thompson-Bristol, and Kathy Roberts Forde, [“How the Tougaloo Nine Transformed History.”](#) Made by History section, *WashingtonPost.com*, May 23, 2021

Forde, Kathy Roberts, with support from undergraduate research partners Ethan Bakuli and Natalie Didomenico, [“An Editor and His Newspaper Helped Build White Supremacy in Georgia.”](#) *The Conversation*, February 15, 2019

Bowman, Bryan and Kathy Roberts Forde. [“How Slave Labor Built the State of Florida—Decades after the Civil War.”](#) Made by History section, *WashingtonPost.com*, May 17, 2018

News Essay Assignment

How to Fact-Check Your Writing

These days only a few news organizations have fact-checking departments and independent fact-checkers. Most journalists have to be their own fact-checkers, with back up from their editors. Like journalists, professional historians must be scrupulously correct in their facts, context, and arguments.

Directions: Create a duplicate Google doc of your news essay and add “fact check” to title. Using the comments function, highlight each of the fact-check items listed below and provide source for fact-check in the comment.

Items to fact-check:

- Double check spellings and accuracy of all names, titles, companies, place names.
- Check dates, times, seasons, ages, locations.
- Check all numbers and statistics. If you quote someone who cites numbers, ask for and check the original source.
- Check accuracy of your quotations. Check facts within quotations.

- Check historical facts.
- Check physical descriptions.
- Check timelines.
- Check for accurate attribution.
- Check for any buried assumptions.
- Check details in your narrative by consulting your interview notes and reporting notes. When consulting your reporting notes, go back to the original source.
- If you find you've interpreted facts, and you surely have, make sure your interpretation follows from the facts.
- Check spelling, punctuation, grammar, AP Style.
- If you aren't sure about something, do some more reporting or research.

Useful tips:

- Keep good records of your interview notes and research notes.
- Embed links in your research notes to online sources.
- Provide a source for all notes.

Fact-checking resources:

- ["7 steps to better fact-checking."](#) PolitiFact
- [Accuracy checklist for journalists](#), Reynolds National Center for Business Journalism
- [Hands-on fact-checking: A short course](#), Poynter (a 90-minute free course!)