Offering Stories to the World
How different narratives shape perspectives

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The Course

Southern Legacies: The Descendants Project
This year, our coursework centered around a heinous example of racial violence that was carried out in Warren County, North Carolina, in 1921. In mid-January of that year, Alfred Williams and Plummer Bullock were abducted and lynched by a white mob. The exacts details vary, but the reality remains that this event and others like it continue to shape the lives of people today. This course allowed us to learn how folks are still impacted today, through archival research and interviews with modern descendants of the Williams and Bullock families.

The Story Printed at the Time

Stories of racial violence have been intentionally and systematically overlooked, misrepresented, and even hidden for generations. This project has set out to uncover one small segment of those stories. Our goal is not only to understand how the events of 1921 played out in Warren County, but also to understand how those events, publicized or not, continue to shape the lives of modern descendants.

The different versions of the story seen here demonstrate how easily perspectives can shift depending on who’s controlling the narrative. Further, it highlights how essential narratives are in deciding when and if justice is delivered.

Modern Implications

The ways that stories, both old and new, are told, shape the way we perceive them. Today, we are able to document some injustices through recordings, but even such evidence does not guarantee justice. All too often, stories are told in ways that portray victims of injustice as somehow responsible for the harm to them; some search through their pasts for ‘incriminating’ anecdotes, or otherwise rationalize inexcusable wrongdoings. It is essential that we move away from this harmful practice, and represent people-- and their stories-- in genuine, authentic, and respectful ways.

An Introduction

The “Uncovered” Story

Other sources at the time elected to print one version of the events of that night that laid the blame entirely in the lap of the black community of Warrenton. Though they acknowledge the lynching, they focus more on the alleged actions of Plummer Bullock and Alfred Williams, attempting to justify the atrocious acts committed against them by painting the men in a poor light. Instead of focusing on the fact that a white supremacist mob that murdered two men, the news sources at the time focused their efforts on rationalizing and thus normalizing reprehensible brutality.

The Story from Dr. Coleman

The great-nephew of Alfred Williams: "The stories I’ve been told...are different from what you may have heard. My aunt Ella passed [the story] onto her children, and they told me. Her story was that they were not in jail, but that Plummer and Alfred had gathered with… their friends in the Williams home. They heard a vigilante group was coming to get them, so they prepared for it… They took them out from the home, and hung them and shot them… Ella was old enough to remember that time, and she would have seen it." -Dr. Arnette Coleman

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