



Offering Stories to the World

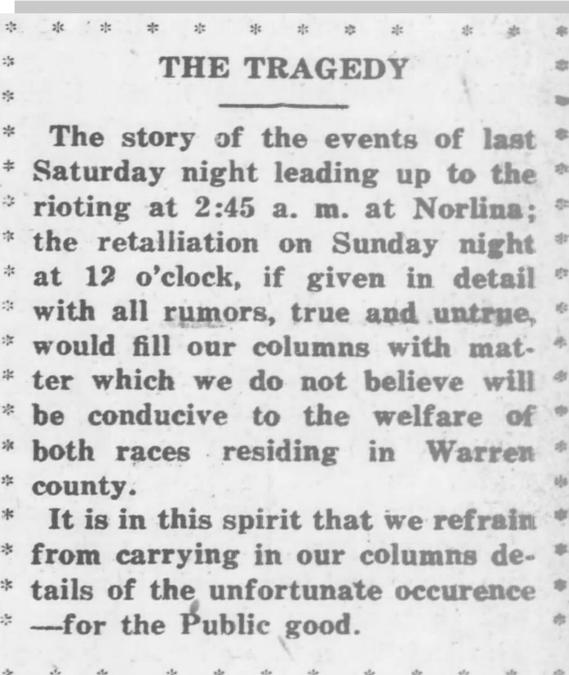
How different narratives shape perspectives

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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 exact 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



The local paper, the Warren Record, refused to report the events of the night, even though most community members already knew what had transpired.

Reference

The Tragedy. (1921, January 28). *The Warren Record*, p. 1. Retrieved April 27, 2021.

An Introduction

Stories of racial violence have been intentionally and systemically 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.

Two Negroes Lynched By Mob At Warrenton After Race Riot At Norlina.

Because a negro did not like his purchase when he bought ten cents worth of apples, two negroes were lynched after a group of their race had started a race riot that caused the wounding of five white men and three negroes, at Norlina Sunday. The lynching took place at Warrenton, where a mob took Alfred Williams and Plummer Bullock from jail and shot them to death, after they and eleven others had been captured by a posse and placed in jail charged with rioting.

About 150 masked men overpowered the jailer about one o'clock yesterday morning, selected the two men they wanted out of the thirteen arrested, and quickly put them to death. Masked sentries held up the sheriff, after firing on him, as he came to the rescue of the jailer.

The trouble at Norlina had its beginning when Plummer Bullock bought ten cents worth of apples from a merchant. He did not like his purchase and demanded his money back, which was given. Some words were passed and the negro made threats of violence toward the clerk. About one o'clock Sunday morning about twenty armed negroes were observed about the station. A brother of the man who had been threatened went up to Bullock and asked what the trouble was. Jerome Hunter, another negro, advanced and fired on the young man, then shot him twice more as he lay on the ground. Four railroad men working on the Seaboard yards near the station then came in as targets for the negroes' bullets and all were shot down three negroes, including Hunter, also being wounded.

One of the white men was probably fatally wounded and he and two others were taken to a hospital at Henderson. Hunter was taken to a negro hospital in Raleigh, and he is hardly expected to recover.

Reference

Race Riot Ends with Lynching at Warrenton. (1921, January 27). *The News-Herald*, p. 1. Retrieved April 27, 2021.

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