

OPINIONS • OPINIONS • OPINIONS • OPINIONS

# Black Press sparked Wilmington race riot

By Kevin E. Washington

The Black Press has always been an instrumental organ in the black community bringing black citizens information not usually covered by the white press.

Since the first publication of **Freedom's Journal**, the first black newspaper in the country in 1827, several hundred black newspapers have championed the rights of the black man, helping him to move from slave status to that of citizen.

During the 1890s, the black press became a part of a raging debate about the new generation of non-slaves. White scholars had come to view the black population as a retrogressing one, not socially or culturally fit to be in charge of itself much less white people.

As the effects of Congressional Reconstruction began to wear off, the old southern white Democrats began to make power plays to secure the government offices that had been taken from them after the Civil War.

In Wilmington, the first conspicuous race riot of the era of black disfranchisement took place in 1898. Although the white Democrats who took over were out for political gain in Wilmington, they focused on an editorial written by a black newspaper editor in the city.

By focusing on the black press, the Democrats knew that they could effectively silence one of the loudest dissenting voices against their future rule and destroy any real opposition from the black community.

The Wilmington riot of 1898 basically took place because of the defeats of Democrats in the elections of 1896 and 1897. Fusionists Republicans and Populist party members who had joined forces to get black votes and win elections, were running the state at the time Wilmington had a strong fusion government because the city was 58 percent black.

In addition to helping the Fusionists control the city politically, black voters had also elected four black aldermen out of the ten aldermen seated. Five other black men also held office within the city government.

Wilmington's Democratic inhabitants resented the black officeholders and made several emotional appeals to citizens across the state as well as in the city by starting rumors that black men and women were rude to whites in the streets and acted like animals in public.

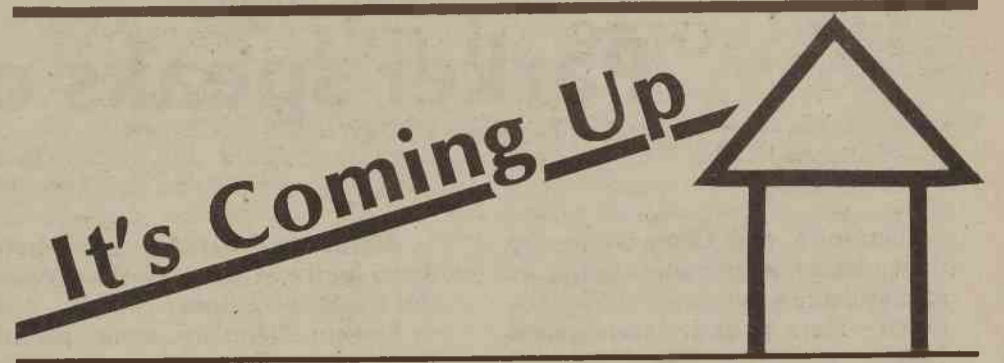
A group of nine white Democrats began to plan the November race riot in January, 1898. The group which called itself the "Secret Nine" did not openly oppose the city officials for fear of retaliation, so very few citizens knew what was going to happen in the coming months.

The Democrats also tried to use the lynching of black men, which had risen astronomically since 1889, as propaganda. Racist white scholars of the day maintained that the "New Negro," was a subhuman animal and should be punished for his wrong doings by lynching. The rest of the country was killing and disfranchising blacks, so why couldn't Wilmington do it also, the Democrats said.

The premise of the black beast rapist and the women's suffrage movement had been fused earlier by **Atlanta Journal** writer Rebecca Latimer Felton in her famous speech to the Georgia Agricultural Society at Tybee, Georgia, in 1896. She said that not only was black rape of white women on the increase, but white men were partially responsible for its increase. Felton stated that white farmers left their wives unprotected, thus giving the black beasts the opportunity to rape their women.

On August 8, 1898, almost two years after the Tybee speech by

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### ACKLAND ART MUSEUM

"American Graphics: 1860-1940," a collection of prints from more than eight decades of American printmaking, will be on view until March 25. The Ackland's permanent and temporary exhibitions are open to the public 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday and 2-6 p.m. Sunday. Admission is free. For more information, call (919) 966-5736.

### SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

The Fifth Annual Black Experience Workshop: Implications for Social Work Education and Practice will be held Friday, March 23, 1984 at the Carolina Student Union. For more information, write to:

Audrey E. Johnson  
The Black Experience  
School of Social Work  
223 E. Franklin St. 150A  
Chapel Hill, N.C. 27514

### CHUCK MANGIONE

"An Evening with Chuck Mangione and the Chuck Mangione Quartet" will be presented Saturday, March 24 at 8 p.m. in Memorial Hall. For more information call the Union Box Office at 962-1449. This is a Carolina Union Program.

### MOREHEAD PLANETARIUM

"Skyways," a show exploring how the real and apparent motions and changes in the heavens affect our everyday lives, will run through March 26. Shows are weeknights at 8 p.m.; Saturdays at 11 a.m., 1, 3 and 8 p.m.; Sundays at 2, 3 and 8 p.m. There is an admission fee for all shows. Call (919) 962-1236 for information.

### BRUCE BENNETT

Bruce Bennett, a professor and author, will speak on "The World University Games, the Olympic Games, and International Sports." This lecture will begin at 7.30 p.m. on March 27, in 109 Fetzer Gymnasium. For more information, please contact Dr. Angela Lumpkin at 962-2021.



**Black Ink Staff:** Front Row (L-R) Darlene Campbell, Marjorie Roach, Gwen Hailey (83-84 Editor) Cheryl Smith, Albertina Smith (84-85 Editor). Back Row: (L-R) Jackie Leach, Rhonda Hubbard, Winfred Cross, Angela, Cheryl Deloatch, Joy Thompson. Photo by Denise Moultrie

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