

The Wilmington Record Editorial ^[1]

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The editorial below appeared in the Wilmington Record, an African American newspaper, during the 1898 election campaign. It was attributed to editor Alex Manly, though associate editor William L. Jeffries may possibly have written it. The editorial was a blunt and angry response to a speech by Mrs. Rebecca Felton of Georgia, who spoke in favor of the widespread lynching of African Americans in order to protect white women.

During the campaign, Democratic newspapers and orators referred to the Record editorial repeatedly, and white anger over the editorial not only helped the Democrats to victory but was a cause of the violence in Wilmington that November.

Many African Americans in Wilmington were angry with Alex Manly for publishing this editorial. They believed that he had unnecessarily flamed racial tensions in Wilmington, and that by publishing this editorial, he endangered the safety of all blacks who lived in the city.

The Republican party in Wilmington was mostly composed of African American men, who denounced Manly and urged him to recant his editorial. Some even tried to force Manly to leave town, hoping that this would quiet the uproar among whites in Wilmington. As we'll see later in this chapter, they were right to fear a violent response.

A Mrs. Felton from Georgia, makes a speech before the Agricultural Society, at Tybee, Ga., in which she advocates ^[2] lynching as an extreme measure. This woman makes a strong plea for womanhood and if the alleged ^[3] crimes of rape were half so frequent as is oftentimes reported, her plea would be worthy of consideration.

Mrs. Felton, like many other so-called Christians, loses sight of the basic principle of the religion of Christ in her plea for one class of people as against another. If a missionary spirit is essential for the uplifting of the poor white girls, why is it? The morals of the poor white people are on a par with their colored neighbors of like conditions and if one doubts that statement let him visit among them. The whole lump needs to be leavened by those who profess so much religion and showing them that the presence of virtue is an essential for the life of any people.

Mrs. Felton begins well for she admits that education will better protect the girls on the farm from the assaulter. This we admit and it should not be confined to the white any more than to the colored girls. The papers are filled often with reports of rapes of white women and the subsequent lynchings of the alleged rapists. The editors pour forth volumes of aspersions ^[4] against all Negroes because of the few who may be guilty. If the papers and speakers of the other race would condemn ^[5] the commission of the crime because it is crime and not try to make it appear that the Negroes were the only criminals, they would find their strongest allies in the intelligent Negroes themselves; and together the whites and blacks would root the evil out of both races.

We suggest that the whites guard their women more closely, as Mrs. Felton says, thus giving no opportunity for the human fiend ^[6], be he white or black. You leave your goods out of doors and then complain because they are taken away. Poor white men are careless in the matter of protecting their women, especially on the farms. They are careless of their conduct toward them and our experience teaches us that the women of that race are not any more particular in the matter of clandestine ^[7] meetings with colored men than are the white men with colored women. Meetings of this kind go on for some time until the woman's infatuation ^[8], or the man's boldness, bring attention to them, and the man is lynched for rape. Every Negro lynched is called a "big burly, black brute," when in fact many of those who have thus been dealt with had white men for their fathers, and were not only not "black" and "burly" but were sufficiently attractive for white girls of culture and refinement ^[9] to fall in love with them as is very well known to all.

Mrs. Felton must begin at the fountain head if she wishes to purify the stream.

Teach your men purity. Let virtue be something more than an excuse for them to intimidate and torture a helpless people. Tell your men that it is no worse for a black man to be intimate with a white woman than for the white man to be intimate with a colored woman.

You set yourselves down as a lot of carping [10] hypocrites in fact you cry aloud for the virtue of your women while you seek to destroy the morality of ours. Don't ever think that your women will remain pure while you are debauching [11] ours. You sow the seed -- the harvest will come in due time.

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Wilmington *Record*, August 18, 1898. Quoted in Robert, H. Wooley, "Race and Politics: The Evolution of the White Supremacy Campaign of 1898 in North Carolina." Ph. D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1977.

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[24]

Alexander Manly



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Rebecca Latimer Felton

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Related Topics:

- [Rebecca Latimer Felton](#)^[29] entry from the Georgia Encyclopedia
- [The Ghosts of 1898](#)^[30], Wilmington's Race Riot and the Rise of White Supremacy from the *News and Observer*, 2010.

Primary Sources:

[Alex L. Manly Papers 1898-1984](#)^[31] at ECU Libraries

Artifacts:

[The Wilmington Daily Record Project](#)^[32], housing digitized versions of eight editions of the *Daily Record* as well as a "Remnants" issue, compiled by Wilmington middle school students.

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