



## The Unfinished Story of Alex Manly’s “The Daily Record”

Wilmington, North Carolina was once home to a thriving middle class Black population. In 1898, the only successful coup d’etat in American history put a stop to it. Alex Manly was part of that elite Black community. An editorial he printed in his newspaper, *The Daily Record*, was the catalyst for the violence, and Manly was run out of town by a group of White supremacists. In this episode, Manly’s grandson, Dr. Lewin Manly talks about what his family is owed for the loss of *The Record* and how the Manly family could be made whole again. Reported by Pamela Kirkland.

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**Kirkland:** I’m Pamela Kirkland, a reporter and producer. The conversation around reparations can seem both overwhelming and contradictory. On one hand, it's hard to imagine how our country could ever fully atone for the centuries of injustice and atrocities committed against Black and brown citizens. On the other hand, there's the belief that reparations are not only achievable, but essential to healing and moving forward. What we know is that reparations are owed to the descendants of the enslaved, and frankly, the bill is past due.

In this episode, we'll explore historical reparations through the story of Alex Manly, his newspaper, and the 1898 Wilmington Massacre.

**Dr. Lewin Manly:** That town was the largest city in North Carolina. It was predominantly a Black city. The Black people in the city had a very strong Black middle class. The Blacks and whites, particularly Alex Manly, got along with everybody.

**Kirkland:** We'll explore the lasting effects of the only successful coup in American history and the ongoing conversations around reparations for thousands that fled the city and the hundreds whose descendants were killed simply for living free while Black.

It's warm in Atlanta for this time of year. The air is already sticky and thick, even though it's just barely March. Dr. Lewin Manly is enjoying the day from his Four Seasons room overlooking a park. Family photo albums are carefully placed on the table in front of him. Photography is one of Dr. Manly's hobbies. Here's how he describes himself.

**Manly:** As a retired dentist who is now, for the most part, a yard man and gardener. I pursue my hobbies of reading history.

Kirkland: Though he's fond of World War I history books, his own family history has enough chapters to fill a library.

Manly: Here's a copy of it, August 30, 1898.

Kirkland: Oh, wow.

Manly: Two cents, and it says "circulation large."

Kirkland: He pulls out a newspaper from his archive of family materials. It says "The Daily Record, Volume Two, Number 18, Wilmington, North Carolina. Price, two cents." Most notable about the large reprinted paper Dr. Manly holds in his hands, the publisher, Alex Manly.

Manly: Alex Manly, my grandfather, he knew me, but I didn't know him. I lived in his house the first maybe four years of my life, and my grandfather had a daily Black newspaper, which was the largest Republican paper in the state at that time.

Kirkland: Wilmington in the 1890s was a thriving racially diverse city with a significant Black middle class. It was a major center of commerce and trade. The economic boom allowed for many Blacks in Wilmington to own shops, become skilled tradesmen. They were doctors, and lawyers, and educators. And that well-to-do Black community had political influence. Alex Manly was part of that community of Black excellence and one of their most prominent leaders.

Manly: They came to Wilmington from, I guess, a little hamlet up in North Carolina. He spent a few years at Hampton. He didn't graduate, but he studied painting, not painting portraits, but painting buildings and houses, and apparently had enough of an academic background to write a newspaper, write editorials for newspapers.

Kirkland: Black newspapers like the Daily Record, were influential in advocating for the interests of Black citizens. The Record also gave Manly an outlet to express himself and his thoughts on society at large.

Manly: If you read his editorial, that was the catalyst for what happened in Wilmington. You wonder what in the world was he thinking to write an editorial like that during that particular time?

Kirkland: After the Civil War and during reconstruction, Blacks in Wilmington gained voting rights. Many of them became politically active, and that led to the election of a number of Black politicians to both local and state offices, something that happened across the South. The local government of Wilmington was made up of both whites and Blacks, but the growing political power of the Black community had also drawn the attention of white supremacists. Alex Manly's August 18th, 1898 editorial was a response to a speech given by Rebecca Felton, a white suffragist from Georgia who would later become a senator for the state. In her speech, Felton advocated for the lynching

of Black men as a way to better protect white women from sexual assault. Manly's editorial on the matter was controversial, to say the least.

Alex Manly:

Every negro lynched is called the big burley Black brute, when in fact, many of those who have thus been dealt with had white men for fathers, and were not only Black and burley, but were sufficiently attractive for white girls of culture and refinement to fall in love with them, as is very well known to all. Mrs. Felt must begin at the fountainhead 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 a white man to be intimate with a colored woman.

You set yourselves down as a lot of carping hypocrites. In fact, you cry out loud 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're debauching ours. You sow the seed, the harvest will come in due time.

Kirkland:

The idea of consensual relations between Black men and white women was enough to enrage the white supremacists in the area, but it wasn't Manly's editorial originally published in his paper months before the election of 1898 that had them up in arms. Josephus Daniels, the white editor and owner of the Raleigh News and Observer, saw an opportunity to use Manly's editorial as fuel for the Democrats in the upcoming election. He took Manly's editorial and published a portion of it in his paper to escalate racial tensions in Wilmington, [calling the Manly op-ed "vile and villainous."](#) The edited version of Manly's words ran in the News and Observer and other Democratic newspapers just weeks before the election. Dr. Manly says it's not that different from some media tactics we see today.

Manly:

The Raleigh Observer was headed by Josephus Daniels and he did all sorts of fake news, fake cartoons, but he took Manly's editorial and sprayed it all over the state, and they wrote his stuff around what he was doing and what he looked like and he's a big brute and whatever. We just said that January 6th was the same thing. Well, the newspaper back then was doing the very same thing they're doing now.

Kirkland:

Racial tension in Wilmington continued to escalate as the election got closer. After Manly's editorial, white supremacist Democrats hatched a plot to regain control of the government and get rid of the fusionist coalition, which was made up of Black and Populist lawmakers in Wilmington.

The plan worked. Voter intimidation and violence caused by the Democratic Party and their white supremacist co-conspirators ushered the party back into power, but the plan didn't just stop at rigging the election.

[On November 10, 1898](#), two days after the election, a group of 2000 white supremacists led by Alfred Waddell, a former Confederate officer, marched to

Alex Manly's newspaper office and burned it to the ground. They planned to lynch him on site. Manly escaped with his life but left everything he had behind. The mob, led by a group of white supremacists known as the Secret Nine, had forced the resignation of Wilmington's Mayor, the entire board of Alderman and the police chief.

A new white supremacist government was installed, and a violent mob roamed the streets of Wilmington killing Black residents and forcing others to flee the city. The insurrection is the only successful coup d'etat in the United States.

In the wake of the 1898 massacre, North Carolina saw the entrenchment of Jim Crow segregationist laws, which continued to reverberate a century later. The Black population, which once held the majority in Wilmington, now constitutes a mere 17% of the city's residents.

Manly's fiance Caroline Sadgwar was traveling through Europe when the coup happened. They met when Manly was working, painting houses with her father and Wilmington. Caroline saw her father and smiled, although she writes Manly thought she was smiling at him. Caroline was a student at Fisk University and for a time worked with Alex Manly at the Record. She wrote letters to her children about Alex Manly's paper years after it had been destroyed. This is a letter Caroline wrote sometime around 1953 from East Carolina University's library collection.

Caroline Sadgwar: I learned to set type on the Fisk Herald, the news of Fisk and its alumni. I was idle at home and my father, after persuasion, consented for me to help the young men with their paper. It was a strange thing to see a girl slinging type in a newspaper office. Mr. Manly, your father, was the editor of that paper, which grew into a daily. It was the only negro daily in the USA at that time. I'll tell you about the Record sometime. I am too tired now, and it brings heartache to think about it even to this day. I like to write cheerful letters, and there is too much sadness about that newspaper for me to tell you now, so I will wait until I can find courage to tell you. I wish I could forget it.

Kirkland: Dr. Manly says his grandfather tried starting another paper after he fled Wilmington, but his heart just wasn't in it. The insurrection had changed everything.

Manly: After that, he became very reticent about almost anything because when I spoke to his son, my uncle, he never discussed any of those things that happened in Wilmington because almost everybody who was a Manly found out what happened in Wilmington long after they were grown. It's like a warrior. The people say, my father was in the war and he never spoke. I never knew what he did. They couldn't discuss it. So apparently, these people suffered from post-traumatic stress. There's no question about it. I guess they were so happy to be alive, and they dealt with so much evil, that of course they had personality changes. It would be hard to be the same. This was his personality. There were survivors after that. That's about all.

Kirkland: From an affluent middle class newspaper publisher to simply a survivor. The Black prosperity and racial integration that Wilmington had built after the Civil War was gone. Families were run out of town and never returned, including the Manlys. Alex Manly and his wife Caroline, eventually settled in Philadelphia. They never talked about what happened in Wilmington until many, many years had passed.

Manly: What makes it so unusual is that the accomplishments that the Blacks had made after maybe just 30 years or 33 years after the Civil War, that these people were doing almost everything so they could do business together and get along without killing each other, and then all of a sudden there's a group of people that says, for whatever reason, "There's not going to be a Black middle class. We will destroy them. I don't care what it takes to do, but they got to go," and here you're abandoned. So we get back to talking about reparation, and I don't push or think a whole lot about reparation because reparation represents slavery for a toil that wasn't paid for slavery. But this wasn't anything about slavery. These are the people who are business people. This is basically grand larceny.

Kirkland: In 2000, the North Carolina General Assembly established the [1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission](#) to investigate what actually happened. Bertha Boykin Todd helped to create the centennial commemoration of the 1898 massacre and is a descendant of Wilmington. Prior to the forming of the commission, she and other community members came together to discuss how to mark the centennial of the coup. She spoke to the Black on Black Project about the initial criticism she faced in trying to mark the massacre.

Bertha Boykin Todd: Why do you want to bring this up after all these years? I said, "Because we think it is due for a commemoration. It hasn't been discussed openly." I said, "Ladies and gentlemen, Wilmington experienced a serious wound in 1898, but the wound never properly healed, and now we are going to have to lance it as doctors usually do so that it might heal properly." That is, I tell you, it was divine guidance. I never thought of doing that, but that helped more individuals realize that we had a wound, we had to face it, we had to lance it, and we've got to start healing properly.

Kirkland: The commemoration of 1898 also started discussions about reparations for the Black families in Wilmington affected by the events of the massacre. In their final report in 2006, the commission recommended reparations for descendants. Yet no concrete actions have been taken at the federal or state level to provide compensation or reparations to the descendants or those who were directly impacted. Bertha Boykin Todd acknowledged the slow progress, admitting that in her view such slow movement is hardly surprising.

Boykin Todd: I do hope that we're in the phase of reconciliation and if it took a hundred years to uncover this in the open, it's going to take a hundred or plus years for the process of reconciliation. But we are beginning to heal forward as a process of

reconciliation and beginning to respect human beings as each one is required. That's my goal.

Kirkland: Some of the suggested ideas for reparations included economic development initiatives, scholarships, and funding for public history projects to educate people about the events of 1898. On the local level, there have been steps taken to memorialize the event and acknowledge its lasting impact on the Black community, but comprehensive reparations for the descendants of those affected by the 1898 coup have yet to be realized. Dr. Manly isn't optimistic those reparations will come anytime soon. He says calculating what his family is due would be difficult, not knowing the potential of his grandfather's newspaper.

Do you think that your grandfather's newspaper, had it continued to publish, could have become a paper of record?

Manly: Of course, because it was the largest Republican paper in the state at that time, one of the few daily Black papers in the country. It had no boundaries as to what could have happened. He's willing to work hard, and apparently he was. So, I can see it being like *The New York Times* or like the Raleigh Observer. When we start talking about reparations, people say, "Well, let's go ahead and do blah, blah, blah, blah." If it were just society, we should be able to sue the Raleigh Observer for everything they have. For what Josephus Daniels actually pushed to have my grandfather lynched, killed, destroyed his paper. Then he goes on to become secretary of the navy during World War I, big politician, and family now see probably worth billions of dollars now.

Kirkland: The descendants of Josephus Daniels declined to be interviewed for this episode. The impact of the Wilmington massacre went far beyond the city's borders.

Manly: Wilmington is a blueprint of what happened from that point on. It's very important. It's more important than Tulsa because what happened in Wilmington, the next place was here in Atlanta in 1906. The Atlanta paper sent reporters up to Wilmington to talk to the people up there who put that thing together, how they handled it, and came back here and they went on down to Eatonville, Florida, then to Tulsa. The very same stuff. It's just history repeating itself over and over.

Kirkland: All of these events took place over a hundred years ago, but Dr. Manly says the impact on the nation can still be felt in attempts to erase and distort Black history. He believes debates like the recent uproar over the teaching of AP Black history in Florida and the teaching of critical race theory in other states underscore the ongoing struggle to reckon with the nation's history of racial violence.

Manly: So now we have people very concerned about how history is taught. The governor of Florida said, "Well, it's Black history. You can't do—" And so I said,

"Well, Black history is American history. Like it or not, it's a lot of bumps in American history and they need to be opened up as history. Don't hide it. It happened. Let's try to do better. Let's stop just repeating the same nonsense over and over."

Kirkland: Is there such a thing as historical reparations in your mind? You mentioned there's so many places talking about critical race theory right now and what should and should not be taught, and how race should and should not be discussed in schools. But like you said, Black history is American history, and so is there something to be done in that space even to make amends, to repair the damage that's been done for the glazing over of stuff like the 1898 coup that's happened?

Manly: Yeah, it should be, but the thing is, or the problem, is how would we do it? We could say, well, unless every historical Black university should have a Black studies program that's supported by the federal government, given unlimited funds to anybody who wants the degree or advanced degrees in that you don't have to pay a penny. Just get involved and do it and be a missionary to push what actually happened.

Kirkland: The city of Wilmington and the state of North Carolina have both acknowledged the devastating impact of racial terror on the Black community. Every year, on November 10th, the coup d'etat is commemorated as a reminder of the tragic event that took place. *The Raleigh News and Observer*, which remains in circulation today, issued an apology in 2006 for the role its publisher Josephus Daniels and the newspaper itself played in the destruction of Wilmington. It took nearly a century for these acknowledgements to surface. For decades, the events in Wilmington were inaccurately portrayed as a race riot, implying an uprising of the Black community. These accounts downplayed the organized attack by white supremacists and their coordinated efforts to overthrow the multiracial government in order to assert white dominance. As a result, generations grew up with a skewed understanding of the true nature of the events that took place in Wilmington.

Manly: Up until that point, the historians said that what happened, there was a riot, that Blacks ran them out, and the Blacks started it, and nothing could be further from the truth. The Blacks had no idea they were blindsided, and it was just horrendous what happened to them there.

Kirkland: Dr. Manly believes that one form of reparations that could be feasible would be investing in public education by providing high quality education and resources to historically marginalized communities. Dr. Manly emphasized that public education should not only involve teaching history, but also investigating and reconciling with the truth, delving into the painful aspects of the past, acknowledging the injustices that occurred, and understanding the lasting impact they have on present day society.

Manly: I think the ultimate goal would revolve around education. Education for anybody who could say that he had a direct descendant who was a slave. No matter what kind of education he would want, he should be able to have the government cover every penny or whatever cost. The needs are complete.

Kirkland: Dr. Manly believes that his grandfather, Alex Manly, would want to be remembered as a champion for truth by elevating the voices and experiences of Black women and men in his editorial, and challenging the hypocrisy of white supremacists. Alex Manly fought to demonstrate the inherent equality of all people.

Manly: Remember him as somebody who was not afraid to tell the truth and to show that people are equal, because what he actually did was to promote Black women to the same level as white women.

Kirkland: The echoes of Alex Manly's passion for truth and justice can be heard in the way his grandson, Dr. Manly, speaks about their family history. Although he never had the opportunity to know his grandfather, Alex Manly's spirit lives on through his descendant.

Dr. Manly may not have a clear vision of what reparation should entail for the devastation his family experienced and the loss of his grandfather's treasured newspaper, but he carries on the Manly tradition of speaking the truth, telling it like it is—honestly and authentically.

Dr. Lewin Manly isn't sure what exactly it would take to make his family whole again. He thinks monetary compensation would be difficult to calculate. Reconciliation, healing, and most importantly, education as forms of reparations offer one way to confront historical injustices and make sure these tragic events are remembered—accurately.

Special thanks to Dr. Lewin Manly, [East Carolina University](#), [UNC Chapel Hill](#), and the [Black On Black Project](#). This podcast is meant to be enjoyed in an order that makes the most sense for our listeners. Choose your reparations journey and keep the conversation going. For more information, all episodes and transcripts, visit [StillPayingThePricePod.com](#).

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