

From Wyatt Outlaw to the “Kirk Holden War”

Overview

While Reconstruction in the South following the Civil War offered hope and possibility, in reality states and the federal government floundered with how to reunite the country and fashion policy regarding newly freed people. In North Carolina, Governor William Holden, like others throughout the south, faced enormous challenges, from the reorganization of local and state governments to managing a deteriorated economy. It was this unstable and transitory environment that set the state for the rise of white supremacist groups such as the KKK, which grew from secret fraternities comprised of Confederate veterans and sympathizers, to a paramilitary force bent on reversing any progressive Reconstruction policies through terrorist tactics all around North Carolina. In this lesson, students will learn about the realities of Reconstruction North Carolina, specifically through the stories of Wyatt Outlaw, Graham, NC’s first black constable who was horrifically lynched by the KKK, and the Kirk Holden War, a result of the Governor’s actions to try and tamp down Klan terrorism across the state. Through class discussion, examination of primary source documents, and reading, students will gain an understanding of the importance of this history and the ways facing it can move us forward as a nation.

Grades

8 – 12

Essential Questions

- In what ways did the realities of post-Civil War North Carolina set the stage for racist hate groups to become increasingly active?
- What were the challenges North Carolina Governor Holden faced during his governorship?
- In what ways did the Union League provide a platform of resistance for newly freedmen and others supportive of the Republican ideals of the time?
- What were the events of the Kirk Holden War and what was their impact?
- What steps did the state and federal government take to address the terrorist actions of the Klan throughout the late 1860s – early 1870s?
- Although history such as this can be difficult, why is it important to learn? In what way can it help move our country forward?

Materials

- “PPT, available in the Database of K-12 Resources (in PDF format) at https://k12database.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2021/04/WyattOutlaw_Holden_KKK_PPT.pdf
 - To view this PDF as a projectable presentation, save the file, click “View” in the top menu bar of the file, and select “Full Screen Mode”
 - To request an editable PPT version of this presentation, send a request to CarolinaK12@unc.edu
 - The PPT is meant to be edited, as well as used as a basis for discussion and not lecture.
- Worth’s Letter to Holden, attached
- Message from Governor Holden to NC General Assembly (1869), attached
- The Life and Death of Wyatt Outlaw, Alamance County’s First Black Commissioner & Constable
 - *Article excerpted from [The Life and Tragic Death of Wyatt Outlaw](#), by Alamance County historian Walter Boyd, [NCPedia](#)*
- Sesquicentennial to become Wyatt Outlaw Park? Graham council to consider, article and corresponding questions attached

Optional/Additional Resources (for Teacher Reference)

- A “Reign of Terror” in North Carolina: From Wyatt Outlaw to the Ku Klux Klan Testimonies of 1871; webinar available on Carolina K-12’s YouTube playlist - <https://youtu.be/zSUIkyar3Ck>
- [Reconstruction in America: Racial Violence After the Civil War, 1865-1876](#), from the Equal Justice Initiative
- [Post War Collection \(Civil War North Carolina\)](#), digital collection of primary sources
- [Kirk Holden War](#), digital collection
- [N.C. state senate pardons governor who stood up to Klan](#) (2011), article
- [Remembering Wyatt Outlaw](#), 4 min. news segment/video
- [The life and tragic death of Wyatt Outlaw](#), article

Duration

60-90 Minutes

Preparation

- Students should have a basic understanding of the period of Reconstruction, as this lesson provides a specific example of the ways in which conflicts escalated and the push and pull between progressive ideals and white supremacy played out in North Carolina.
- While this lesson deals with sensitive topics of the KKK and racial violence, it is important for students to explore such “hard history” to ensure they understand the implications of our past and are empowered to address the challenges of the present. In order to study such topics effectively and safely, teachers must have established a safe classroom community with clear expectations of respect, open-mindedness, and civil conversation. Consult Carolina K-12’s “[Tips for Tackling Sensitive History & Controversial Current Events in the Classroom](#)” for recommendations.

Procedure

Day 1

Reconstruction in North Carolina

1. As a warm up, project [SLIDE 2](#) of the accompanying PPT which contains a quote by poet Amanda Gorman: “Being American is more than a pride we inherit. It’s the past we step into and how we repair it.” Ask students to take a few minutes to consider what message she is conveying and what this makes them think about, then discuss as a class:
 - What message is Amanda Gorman conveying?
 - What word is usually used to describe pride for your country? (Patriotism.) How do you think Amanda Gorman would define patriotism? Do you agree/disagree with her definition and why? How do you define patriotism?
 - What actions do you think she is calling on us to take?
 - How does this quote connect to how we study history and why we study history?
 - Why is it important to know about all of our history, the progress and the mistakes? How is part of understanding such history a part of repairing the past and ensuring a better future?
2. Tell students to keep this quote in mind (you will return to it at the close of the lesson) and let them know that today’s class will focus on a difficult part of our nation’s past: the period of Reconstruction in North Carolina. Project [SLIDE 3](#) and ask students to take a moment to consider the word “reconstruction.” What is the definition of reconstruction? What does it mean to reconstruct something? Allow students to share their thoughts, leading to the understanding that the very definition of this word is to re-build, redo, make over, or re-create; to abandon former positions, beliefs, etc. Use this as a jumping off point to review any prior points regarding Reconstruction already covered in past classes. (Remember that students will need a basic overview understanding of this period in order to fully appreciate this lesson. [SLIDES 4 & 5](#) contain sample points to review; teachers should customize these based on the needs and past discussions of each particular class.) Tell

students that in today's lesson, they will learn more about the push and pull that took hold in upended Southern states such as North Carolina, between progressive Reconstruction ideals and policies, and white supremacist hate groups, such as the KKK, who were determined to impede any rights granted to freed people.

3. Move on to discuss **SLIDES 6 & 7** with students, which focus on Reconstruction in North Carolina, and particularly the complicated back and forth regarding the governorship. Discuss:
 - What changes do you think helped Republicans gain control of the NC General Assembly?
 - *This includes suffrage for freedmen, disenfranchisement of many Confederate supporters; remind students that the 14th Amendment addressed citizenship rights for anyone born in the US and provides equal protection under the law*
 - Why do you think Worth refused to run for reelection?
4. Move to **SLIDE 8**, explain to students that they will be examining a primary source, a letter from outgoing Governor Worth to incoming Governor Holden. A copy of the text of the letter is attached to provide to each student. Have students partner up to read the document and discuss the questions provided on the slide. After 5 minutes of working in pairs, ask students to report back regarding their thoughts and further discuss the document as a whole class.
 - What is Worth's purpose in writing this letter? What message is he sending?
 - According to Worth, how did Holden become governor and why does he take issue with this?
 - Why is the peaceful transition of political offices such an important tenant of American democracy?
 - Teachers who choose to do so, may take an opportunity to connect this letter to what happened in the January 6, 2021 protests and insurrection in Washington, DC.
 - What challenges do you think Governor Holden will face as governor, both based on the way in which he reassumed office, and based on what you know of this historical period?
 - What we can learn about North Carolina in the 1860s & 70s from this document, combined with the other information you have learned in the past?

Holden's Challenges as Governor

5. Move to **SLIDE 9** and review the vast challenges Holden faced. Let students know that they are now going to turn to the last challenge noted, the increasing activities of terrorist activities by white supremacists.
6. Project **SLIDE 10*** and explain:
 - Though institutional slavery had been legally dismantled, the struggles of African Americans were far from over. Discrimination, intimidation, and violence against African Americans was common in many parts of the country, especially in the South, where groups like the KKK not only used political influence to curtail the rights of African Americans, but also intimidation, arson, violence, and even murder through lynching. Meanwhile, state and local governments made laws designed to circumvent the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution, setting up poll taxes, literacy tests, and segregation laws.”
([Source](#))

**Prior to projecting this slide, teachers may want to again prepare students that for some, seeing such images may be unsettling. Each teacher should make the choice whether and how to share/address such images effectively given your relationship with your students and community.*

7. Provide students with the attached Message from Governor Holden to NC General Assembly (1869), which includes corresponding questions. Individually or in reading partners, have students review the letter and answer the questions, then discuss as a class:
 - What phrases or sections of this message stand out to you most and why?
 - What is the purpose of this message? What is Holden asking the General Assembly to do?
 - What are the “outrages” Holden is referring to?

- Why is Holden asking the General Assembly for help now?
- How do you think the General Assembly will respond to Holden’s request?

The Union League and Wyatt Outlaw

8. Despite such push back against the ideals of Reconstruction, there were glimmers of progress, as well as resistance by Black people and Republicans to such sanctioned discrimination and lawless violence by vigilante hate groups like the Klan. While the Klan was dangerous, not all people acquiesced to their terror tactics. Discuss [SLIDES 11 & 12](#), explaining to students that one example of the resistance to such injustice was the formation of the Union League (or Loyal League), the first African American Radical Republican organization in the US, established in May 1863. (Additional information on the Union League in North Carolina is available [here](#).)
9. At this point, tell students that they are going to take some time to learn about one particular Union League member, whose story is critical to further understand the realities of this time in North Carolina. Ask students if any of them know anything about a man named Wyatt Outlaw. (Take note for the class that most if not all students do not know who he is, as this will be relevant for the closing activity.) Provide some overview information about Wyatt Outlaw via [SLIDE 13](#), then provide students with the attached reading, *The Life and Death of Wyatt Outlaw, Alamance County’s First Black Commissioner & Constable*, which includes corresponding questions. Instruct students to read this (either individually or back in their reading partners) and answer the questions. Afterwards, discuss as a class student responses and thoughts to ensure understanding:
- In what ways was the stage set for racist hate groups such as the KKK to become so active during Reconstruction in NC and the south?
 - Who was Wyatt Outlaw and what are some of the ways he overcame adversity and made a difference, despite all that was stacked against him at the time?
 - Summarize the Union League. Why was this an important organization for resistance during Reconstruction?
 - Why did the Klan target Wyatt Outlaw? What does the murder of a constable and a state senator tell you about society and government at this time?
 - How did Governor Holden respond to the Klan’s violence and what happened to him based on these actions?
 - [SLIDES 14-18](#) share additional information regarding Governor Holden’s actions and the charges leveled against him, and his subsequent impeachment. Teachers should use this information as a basis for discussion and edit the material as seen fit.
 - Students may also be interested to know that it was not until 2011 that the NC General Assembly finally pardoned Governor Holden posthumously. Details [here](#).
 - Summarize the Enforcement Acts. What impact could these acts have on the Klan?

How Should Wyatt Outlaw Be Remembered?

10. Remind students of the Amanda Gorman line that class opened with: “Being American is more than a pride we inherit. It’s the past we step into and how we repair it.” Ask students how the excerpt might apply to the history they have learned in this lesson. Further discuss:
- Rather than “stepping into it,” instead, why do you think history such as this and people such as Wyatt Outlaw are often neglected?
 - Alamance County historian Walter Boyd noted in the article’s opening that “great apprehension among local citizens that any attempt to honor him, or even tell his story, might unnecessarily inflame racial tensions.” Despite the horrific way he was murdered, in what ways might remembering and honoring the entire life of Wyatt Outlaw actually help “repair” racial tensions?
 - How would you argue that Wyatt Outlaw SHOULD be remembered and honored?

- 11.** As a culminating activity, provide students with the attached article about Graham’s town council’s consideration of whether to name a downtown park after Wyatt Outlaw. Students should read the article, answer the questions, then use what they have learned to determine their final idea on how Wyatt Outlaw should be remembered. They will then write a letter (or e-mail, depending on the teacher’s final instructions) to the Graham town council expressing their own idea. On the due date of the letter or e-mail, teachers may want to determine a way for students to share their ideas with one another (i.e., group up and read their work out loud, or collect the letters and swap them among students to read each other’s work, etc.) Students could also share their ideas with the entire class, and afterwards, students could vote on which idea they think would be more impactful.
- An alternative activity is to have students design a memorial for Wyatt Outlaw. Teachers may want to reference [this lesson plan from Facing History and Ourselves](#) for further ideas and more detailed instructions on having students design their own memorial. While this lesson is tailored to the Holocaust, the activity (with revised language) can be applied to this subject matter.

**State of North Carolina Executive Department
Raleigh July 1st, 1868**

Gov. W. W. Holden
Raleigh, N.C.

Sir,

Yesterday morning I was verbally notified by Chief Justice Pearson that in obedience to a telegram from Genl Canby, he would today at 10 A.M. administer to you the oaths required preliminary to your entering upon the discharge of the duties of Civil Governor of the State; and that there upon you would demand possession of my Office.

I intimated to the Judge my opinion that such proceeding was premature even under the Reconstruction legislation of Congress and that I should probably decline to surrender the Office to you.

At sundown yesterday evening I received from Col. Williams, Commandant of this Military Post an extract from the General Orders No. 120. - of Genl Canby as follows

Head Quarters 2nd Military Dist. -- Charleston, S. C.

To facilitate the organization of the new State Government, the following appointments are made. To be Governor of North Carolina, W. W. Holden, Governor elect, vice Jonathan Worth, removed To be Lieut Governor elect of North Carolina, Tod R. Caldwell, Lieut Governor elect to fill our original vacancy. To take effect July 1st 1868. on the meeting of the General Assembly of North Carolina.

I do not recognize the validity of the late election, under which you and those cooperating with you claim to be invested with the Civil Government of the State. You have no evidence of your election, save the certificate of a Major General of the United States Army. I regard all of you as, in effect, appointees of the Military power of the United States, and not as deriving your powers from the consent of those you claim to govern. Knowing, however, that you are backed by Military force here, which I could not resist if I would, I do not deem it necessary to offer a futile opposition but vacate the office without the ceremony of actual eviction, offering no further opposition than this, my protest. I would submit to actual expulsion in order to bring before the Supreme Court of the United States the question as to the Constitutionality of the legislation under which you claim to be the rightful Governor of the State, if the past action of that tribunal furnished any hope of a speedy trial. I surrender the office to you under what I deem Military duress, without stopping as the occasion would well justify. To comment upon the singular coincidence that the present State Government is surrendered, as without legality, to him whose own official sanction, but three years ago, declared it valid.

I am, very Respectfully,

Jonathan Worth,
Governor of N.C.

Source: http://www.ncrepublic.org/lib_surrenderletter.php

Message from Governor Holden to the General Assembly, December 16, 1869

To the Honorable, the General Assembly of North Carolina:

Gentlemen: — Allow me respectfully and earnestly to call your attention to the necessity which exists for such amendments to the militia law as will enable the executive to suppress violence and disorder in certain localities of this State, and to protect the persons of citizens, their lives and their property. Since my last annual message, dated Nov. 16th, 1869, numerous outrages of the most flagrant character have been committed upon peaceable and law-abiding citizens, by persons masked and armed, who rode at night, and who have thus far escaped the civil law. I have adopted such measures as were in my power to ferret out and bring to justice all breakers of the law, without reference to their color or to the political party or parties to which they belong, and I am satisfied that Judge and solicitors in the various circuits have been prompt, energetic and impartial in the discharge of their duties.

Notwithstanding this, Gentlemen, the outrages referred to seem to be rather on the increase in certain localities in so much that many good citizens are in a constant state of terror and society in said localities is in a deplorable condition. It is for your honorable body to apply the remedy by so strengthening the arm of the executive as to enable him to repress these outrages and restore peace and order. I have confidence in your wisdom, in your regard for law, and in the disposition which I feel sure exists in every member of your honorable body to adopt such measures as will speedily put an end to the evils complained of.

I have the honor to be, Gentlemen, with great respect,

Your obedient servant,
W. W. Holden, *Governor*.

Questions to consider:

- What phrases or sections of this message stand out to you most and why?
- What is the purpose of this message? What is Holden asking the General Assembly to do?
- What are the “outrages” Holden is referring to?
- Why is Holden asking the General Assembly for help now?
- How do you think the General Assembly will respond to Holden’s request?

From Wyatt Outlaw to the KKK Enforcement Acts: The Fight Against the Klan in North Carolina & the Nation

Wyatt Outlaw, one of Alamance County's most influential, progressive, and respected citizens, has been all but forgotten today, primarily because it was long feared that any mention of him might resurrect painful memories. Even today, more than 145 years after his tragic death, there is great apprehension among local citizens that any attempt to honor him, or even tell his story, might unnecessarily inflame racial tensions.

Who Was Wyatt Outlaw?

Wyatt Outlaw was born near Union Ridge about 1820, the son of Chesley Farrar Faucett, one of the richest and most powerful men in the county, and "Mima" Phillips, one of the people he enslaved. Eventually, he escaped and enlisted in the **2nd Regiment of Cavalry, U.S. Colored Troops**. After the war ended, his regiment was sent to Texas, where he served until being discharged in February 1866.

When Wyatt Outlaw returned to Alamance County in April 1866, he found the whole area impoverished and exhausted. A total of 236 men from Alamance County were killed in battle or died during the war — more than in any other war before or since.

Before the Civil War, most white men in Alamance County had been subsistence farmers and were not slave owners. They had voted overwhelmingly against secession, generally despised the Confederate government, and had been drafted into the army against their will. After being pushed to their physical and mental limits during the war, they returned home to find their families starving and everything in ruins. They needed to buy seed, livestock, lumber and tools to get their farms going again, but everyone was bankrupt and there was no money to lend. Newly freed people faced even greater challenges, as they worked to build a life from scratch, while also battling the still present racism and lingering support of slavery despite it having been declared illegal. Not surprisingly, crime rates soared, and lawlessness was widespread for years after the Civil War as southern governments and institutions scrambled to reorganize.

Upon his return, veteran Wyatt Outlaw was able to secure a job as a carpenter for the N.C. Railroad in Company Shops in 1866. He also became a leader in the local black community. Five months after returning home, Outlaw attended the **1866 Freedmen's Convention in Raleigh** & was elected to the 5-man executive board. He went on to organize the **Alamance County Loyal Republican League**, comprised of black & white working men. In July 1867, Outlaw accepted a **Union League** commission from North Carolina's Governor, **William Holden**.

Throughout North Carolina and the rest of the South, the **Union League** pushed back against injustice, and sometimes conducted retaliatory acts of violence against whites and their property. But unlike some of his counterparts in other counties in North Carolina, Outlaw did not advocate Union League violence or retaliation, and counseled against such action whenever young hotheads suggested it, telling the members of his chapter that such action would be suicidal. Wyatt was neither a rabble-rouser nor an activist, and started the Alamance County chapter of the Union League more as an effort to raise funds to build a church and school than as a political organization. He went on to become Graham's first Black town commissioner and constable.

The KKK in North Carolina

During these years, resentful hate groups began to form with the goal of intimidating African Americans and curtailing their gaining rights during the Reconstruction period. Groups such as the **Ku Klux Klan, the Red Shirts, and the White Brotherhood** used arson, violence, and even murder through lynching against Black people and anyone seen as sympathetic to newly freed people and the Republican cause.

The mere existence of the Union League in Alamance County thus garnered the attention of the White Brotherhood in 1868. Headed initially by a Graham lawyer, it may have had as many as 800 members at one time. By early 1869 the White Brotherhood effectively controlled Alamance County, and both whites and blacks lived in fear of

retribution from its members. Anyone who spoke out against the group's excesses or who helped formerly enslaved people in any way were beaten, whipped, tortured, or threatened with death.

In spite of the fact that Outlaw was an extremely polite, intelligent, industrious and rational man who got along well with people of both races, his leadership of the League and position of being a Black man in the leadership role of commissioner and constable made him a target.

On the night of Saturday, Feb. 26, 1870, an estimated 60-80 mounted and disguised riders came into Graham. Carrying torches, they marched around the east side of the courthouse and then up North Main Street, yelling for Wyatt Outlaw. When they arrived at his house, they beat down the door with axes, terrifying Outlaw's mother and children with whom he lived, and pulled him into the street. He was harassed, beaten and marched to the courthouse.

The next morning, when the people of Graham headed out to church, they were met by the body of Wyatt Outlaw hanging from the limb of an elm tree. (The tree was located in today's Sesquicentennial Park, approximately 30 yards from the courthouse). A sign attached to Outlaw's chest read, "Beware! Ye guilty parties — both white and black."

Today, the name of Wyatt Outlaw is relatively unknown. But it is important to remember the man who resisted enslavement by escaping, who courageously fought in the Civil War, and who returned home to try and make life better in Alamance County as a civic leader. His lynching was horrific, and while this violent practice was not uncommon at the time, it did get the attention of North Carolina Governor Holden.

The Kirk-Holden War to Battle the KKK

Several months after Wyatt Outlaw was brutally lynched, **John Stephens**, a Republican State Senator from Caswell County, was assassinated by the KKK in the Yanceyville Courthouse (Caswell County.) Senator Stevens was an agent of the **Freedmen's Bureau**, an active member of the **Union League** and the Republican party, and a supporter of Governor Holden, all of which made him a target.

Holden condemned the actions of the Ku Klux Klan, accusing them of murdering North Carolinians and using terror tactics to suppress the vote of both newly enfranchised African Americans and white Republicans. Throughout the height of the violence, he issued five proclamations, which were a call of urgency to the people of North Carolina as well as the legislature to disregard party or color and to respect and follow the law. In order to protect the citizens of North Carolina, he felt it was necessary to call out the militia, and under the **Shoffner Act** (passed in 1870), he was able to declare certain counties in insurrection. While the Klan was active across the state, the counties of Alamance (where Wyatt Outlaw had been lynched) and Caswell were particularly violent, so Holden declared martial law in these two places. This meant that in these specific counties civil law was suspended and authorized the arrest of suspected persons. These proclamations as well as the Shoffner Act would be of great significance in his subsequent impeachment and in his criminal trial.

These actions ignited to so called "**Kirk Holden War.**" To impose and maintain order in Alamance and Caswell, Holden brought in **George W. Kirk**, a former Union cavalry officer with a reputation for having terrorized Southern mountain communities during the Civil War. Led by Kirk, the state militia arrested and jailed over 100 suspected Klan members in the two counties. Both Kirk and Holden ignored writs of habeas corpus issued by a state court on behalf of the arrested men, so their supporters turned to the federal judiciary for help. President Ulysses S. Grant informed Holden that he would no longer support Holden's controversial policies, and the suspected Klan members were released in August 1870. In November 1870, Alamance and Caswell counties were declared to no longer be in insurrection.

Despite Holden's attempts to hold the Klan accountable, his actions led to his December 1870 impeachment and March 1871 conviction. This is also thought to have played a large part in the Republican Party's later electoral defeat in the state.

The Federal Government's Klan Hearings and Enforcement Acts

Meanwhile, in January 1871, Pennsylvania Republican senator John Scott convened a committee, which took testimony from witnesses about Klan atrocities across the South. In 1872, the U.S. Congress published the 13 volume report, often referred to as the "KKK Testimonies," of which Volume II focuses on North Carolina and trials from the United States circuit court held at Raleigh, North Carolina. These testimonies highlighted the horrid intimidation and terror tactics utilized by white supremacist hate groups such as the Klan.

During this same time, the federal government passed the Enforcement Acts in 1870 and 1871 (also known as the Force Acts) in attempts to end such violence and empower the president to use military force to protect African Americans:

- The **Enforcement Act of May 1870** prohibited groups of people from banding together "or to go in disguise upon the public highways, or upon the premises of another" with the intention of violating citizens' constitutional rights. Even this legislation did not diminish harassment of black voters in some areas.
- The **Second Force Act**, which became law in February 1871, placed administration of national elections under the control of the federal government and empowered federal judges and United States marshals to supervise local polling places.
- The **Third Force Act**, dated April 1871, empowered the president to use the armed forces to combat those who conspired to deny equal protection of the laws and to suspend habeas corpus, if necessary, to enforce the act. (*The Second and Third Acts were also known at the "Ku Klux Klan Acts."*)

While the Klan eventually became less active by the end of Reconstruction, the 20th century saw two revivals of prominent Klan activity: one in response to immigration in the 1910s and '20s, and another in response to the American civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s. Various chapters of the KKK and other hate groups still exist today, and having a full understanding of this history is one of the ways to combat such hate and injustice.

Article excerpted from [The Life and Tragic Death of Wyatt Outlaw](#), by Walter Boyd, and [NCPedia](#)

Questions to Consider:

- In what ways was the stage set for racist hate groups such as the KKK to become so active during Reconstruction in NC and the south?
- Who was Wyatt Outlaw and what are some of the ways he overcame adversity and made a difference, despite all that was stacked against him at the time?
- Summarize the Union League. Why was this an important organization for resistance during Reconstruction?
- Why did the Klan target Wyatt Outlaw? What does the murder of a constable and a state senator tell you about society and government at this time?
- If you were Governor Holden, how would you respond to Klan violence?
- Summarize the Enforcement Acts. What impact could these acts have on the Klan?
- Why do you think history such as this, and people such as Wyatt Outlaw, are often neglected? Alamance County historian Walter Boyd noted in the article's opening that "great apprehension among local citizens that any attempt to honor him, or even tell his story, might unnecessarily inflame racial tensions." Despite the horrific way he was murdered, in what ways might remembering and honoring the entire life of Wyatt Outlaw actually help repair racial tensions? How would you argue that Wyatt Outlaw SHOULD be remembered and honored?

Sesquicentennial to become Wyatt Outlaw Park? Graham council to consider

Jan. 18, 2021 | by [Isaac Groves](#), Times-News

The Graham City Council will have a proposal on its February agenda to rename Sesquicentennial Park to Wyatt Outlaw Park.

“Given the history of the city and culture of the present community, it would be a gesture of reconciliation to rename the park after the man who was hung by the neck from a tree,” wrote Barret Brown, president of the Alamance County Branch of the NAACP in a letter to the city council. “Given the increasingly negative attention the city has been garnering nationally, a unanimous vote on this issue in the affirmative would be viewed as a commitment that you represent all of the citizens of Graham.”

Outlaw was born into slavery in Union Ridge, according to local historian Walter Boyd. While on a detail to build earthworks outside Petersburg, Va. in 1864, he escaped slavery with several others and joined the 2nd Regiment Calvary, U.S. Colored Troops. In 1866, he returned to Alamance County to find it devastated in the aftermath of the Civil War and stewing in poverty and resentment.

Outlaw started a carpentry shop in Graham, and became a target of the White Brotherhood, a local Ku Klux Klan-like vigilante group, over forming a local chapter of the Union League. He was also appointed an officer of the law and blamed for firing shots at a White Brotherhood demonstration in Court Square in 1869.

A year later, a large force of the White Brotherhood dragged Outlaw from his home late at night and hanged him.

It led to a year of strife called the Kirk-Holden War, historians say. White vigilantes assassinated Caswell County Republican state Sen. John Walter Stephens. Gov. William Woods Holden sent in notorious Union guerilla Col. George W. Kirk from Tennessee thinking his reputation for terrorizing western North Carolina would quell the insurrection.

It was a disaster, and the political fallout helped make Holden the only North Carolina governor ever impeached and removed from office. The men charged with Outlaw’s murder were freed in a general amnesty in 1873.

Many have talked about some Outlaw tribute being due, from protesters of the Confederate monument on Court Square to state Sen. Amy Galey. Those ideas include a statue on the square to the name of the new high school now in the planning stages.

Graham Mayor Jerry Peterman said renaming the park was a good request, but there could be some complications and resistance. Council Member Ricky Hall asked about structural problems that could mean the end of the park.

“Why rename something that’s going away?” he asked.

Peterman said there is an old basement under the park, which is roped off now for repairs. If it is someday demolished, Peterman said, any plaque would be moved to the Graham Historical Museum.

The park has been the site of many demonstrations over the years, particularly in the past year. Some, like the Occupy Graham protesters this month, have been calling the location Wyatt Outlaw Park for some time.

The council’s next meeting is Feb. 9.

Article from <https://www.thetimesnews.com/story/news/2021/01/18/graham-name-change-wyatt-outlaw-park-tribute-black-lynching-victim/4173306001/>

Questions to Consider:

- Why might naming the park in memory of Wyatt Outlaw be a “gesture of reconciliation”, as petitioned by the NAACP?
- The Mayor notes that “there could be some complications and resistance.” What do you think he is referring to?
- What would your recommendation be to the Council in regards to how Wyatt Outlaw should be remembered?

Write A Letter/E-mail

After thinking out your ideas for how Wyatt Outlaw should be remembered, compose a letter/e-mail to the Graham Town Council that shares your idea. Your writing should:

1. Open with an introduction, in which you share who you are, what you are writing about, and a summary of what you want.
2. Provide one or more detail paragraphs that explain how you think Wyatt Outlaw should be remembered, and why this is important. Support your idea with reasons as to why it is the best way to remember Outlaw.
3. Close with a conclusion, reiterating what you want and why it is important the town council members take the actions you have recommended.

Be prepared to share your letter with classmates on the due date.