

The Raleigh News and Observer ^[1]

by Eric Medlin, 2022

The *News and Observer* began as a combination of two papers founded after the Civil War. The Raleigh *Observer* began in 1865 as the *Sentinel*. It became the *Observer* in 1876 under the leadership of [Peter M. Hale](#) ^[2] and [William L. Saunders](#) ^[3]. The *News* of Raleigh was founded in 1872 and was led in its early years by journalist [John Cameron](#) ^[4]. Financial difficulties forced the papers to merge in 1880, the new combined paper was titled *News and Observer* and led by historian and politician [Samuel A'court Ashe](#) ^[5]. Ashe was a leader in the Democratic Party and this was evident in the paper. In its early years, the *News and Observer* reported local and national news while clearly supporting ideas and candidates of the Democratic Party. These ideas embraced white supremacy, anti-fusion politics, and an anti-civil rights platform.

This partisan tradition continued under the paper's most famous owner, [Josephus Daniels](#) ^[6], who bought it in 1894. Daniels supported a number of ideas associated with the Progressive movement. But Daniels was also a white supremacist. He supported the constitutional amendments that effectively banned black Americans in North Carolina from voting. Daniels wrote glowingly ^[7] that the day the amendment passed was a "history-making day." He also wrote in favor ^[8] of the white supremacist campaign of 1898. This included the coup d'état in Wilmington ^[9], which was an illegal, violent uprising that overthrew the local government and killed tens to hundreds of black North Carolinians. The *News and Observer* continued to publish baseless and harsh anti-black media and journalism while Josephus Daniels was its editor. Josephus Daniels later became Secretary of the Navy and ambassador to Mexico. His son, [Jonathan](#) ^[10], became the editor of the *News and Observer* in 1933.

In the mid-20th century, the paper began to change. It remained a paper supporting the Democratic Party. But Jonathan Daniels moved away from the white supremacy that influenced his father's editorials. From the 1930s through the 1960s, Jonathan used the paper's influence to support civil rights and aid the poor.

Jonathan Daniels was slow to embrace desegregation. The *News and Observer* at first pushed for a gradual end to segregation in the 1950s. But that position eventually changed. On May 10, 1963, Daniels wrote in the paper that the "Negro is no longer willing to stay in 'his place' when that is a place designed in inferiority for him by others." The paper then endorsed the 1964 Civil Rights Act ^[11] and the 1965 Voting Rights Act ^[12] when they were proposed.

[Claude Sitton](#) ^[13] became the new editor of the *News and Observer* in 1968. He began to take the paper away from its earlier politicized approach. The *News and Observer* continued to support the candidates and policies of the Democratic Party, but became more focused on in-depth investigations. The paper won three Pulitzer Prizes between 1983 and 1996. The 1996 prize for "Boss Hog," a long-running investigation into the effects of North Carolina hog farming, was particularly notable. A later review of that investigation said, "Hog farming remains an economic force and environmental worry for our state, but since 'Boss Hog' hit print 10 years ago, just about everyone in North Carolina knows the issues."

Today, the *News and Observer* continues the legacy of Claude Sitton as a newspaper focused on local politics as well as investigative reporting. Instead of being the voice of the state's Democratic Party, it is now a voice for all of North Carolina. The paper has over 370,000 daily readers. It has also been on the cutting edge of technology. Its former website Nando.net, started in 1994, was one of the first newspaper websites in the world. Newspapers have faced many challenges in recent years from the internet, social media, and cable news, but the *News and Observer* retains relevance despite these many powerful competitors.

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[6]

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[Jonathan Daniels](#) [10]

Claude Sitton ^[13]

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VOL. XLV. NO. 17.

RALEIGH, N. C., TUESDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 27, 1898.

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^[22]

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“A Serious Question---How Long Will This Last (Negro Rule),” *RaleighNews and Observer*.

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