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Two recent columns by Mr. John Archibald of Alabama Media Group are low quality, inaccurate, and inflammatory journalism. Mr. Archibald won the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for Commentary. Relying on long-term memory for an inaccurate quotation by Mr. Donald Watkins in his November 29, 2018 column rather than review his actual 1991 article demonstrates a lack of rigor and fails any test of accurate journalism. Simply, it is fake news. Even more concerning are Mr. Archibald's lack of integrity, false accusation of racism, and race baiting in his characterization of Mr. Watkins.

What is the relevant background? Mr. Watkins served from 1985-1999 as Special Council to Richard Arrington Jr, Birmingham's first black mayor. Mr. Watkins was the subject of a lengthy 1991 article written by Mr. Archibald and Mr. Bob Blalock that reviewed perceptions and tensions at that time. In November 2018, a Federal Grand Jury in Birmingham indicted Mr. Watkins and his son Donald Jr. on charges of bank fraud, wire fraud, and conspiracy.

What are recent relevant facts? On November 29, 2018, Mr. Archibald wrote about Mr. Watkins' criminal indictment. He used his memory of a 1991 interview claiming Mr. Watkins said his job was to "kick white people's ass". That 1991 Birmingham News article clearly quotes Mr. Watkins saying, "kick ass" referring to his vigorous and aggressive legal style further detailed in that article. Thus, the actual article does not support Mr. Archibald's flawed recollection. On December 31, 2018, Mr. Archibald wrote a fauxpology "He (Mr. Watkins) is adamant that he never said, 'kick white people's ass'... In my memory it's clear that he did... my head argues that he did."

Can we resolve this "he said, he said" impasse? We could move closer to the truth if Mr. Archibald's reporting were corroborated by Mr. Blalock. Mr. Blalock has not responded to two requests for his recollection of the interview. Further, neither Mr. Archibald nor Mr. Blalock have provided objective evidence including notes or tape recording done at the time of the interview. The objective evidence of the quote "kick ass" in the 1991 column and not "kick white people's ass" as recalled by Mr. Archibald is very strong evidence. A second level of evidence in this "he said, he said" case would be a pattern of behavior consistent with Mr. Watkins being a racist. Despite Mr. Watkins being in the public eye for over three decades, there are no documented comments or actions suggesting racism. In fact, he has successfully defended numerous white defendants ranging from very wealthy to very poor. Taken together, the objective evidence of the 1991 article and a pattern of behavior inconsistent with Mr. Watkins being racist would lead any reasonable person to conclude that Mr. Archibald's memory is faulty and nonfactual, and his "head" is mistaken.

What shall we conclude? Mr. Archibald's faulty memory filled in a gap to falsely accuse Mr. Watkins of racism and constitutes race baiting. Very sadly, this race baiting comes at a time of heightened racial tension and rage in the US. Mr. Archibald's reporting resurrects old tensions, polarizes our community, and pollutes the pool of potential jurors with prejudicial information about Mr. Watkins before his February 2019 trial. Mr. Archibald refuses to accept and acknowledge his false accusation of racism, race baiting, and inflaming the criminal case. His reporting in these two articles is a low standard for a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and demonstrates a lack of integrity and prejudice in reporting on Mr. Watkins. It is the responsibility of Al.com to stand for truth, disavow Mr. Archibald's false accusation of racism, acknowledge Mr. Archibald's race baiting and issue an apology to Mr. Watkins.