

# The Ghosts of 1898

## WILMINGTON'S RACE RIOT AND THE RISE OF WHITE SUPREMACY



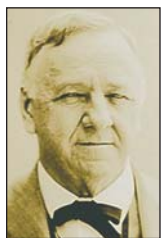
Destruction of The Daily Record of Wilmington, said to be the only black-owned daily newspaper in the United States at the time, by white supremacists.

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### CHARLES B. AYCOCK

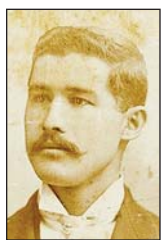
Charles Brantley Aycock graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1880, practiced law in Goldsboro and became involved in Democratic Party politics. As North Carolina's governor from 1901 to 1905, he championed education and white supremacy. He died in 1912 while delivering a speech on education.

### JOSEPHUS DANIELS



After studying at the University of North Carolina's law school, Josephus Daniels was admitted to the bar in 1885, though he never practiced. He purchased *The News and Observer* in 1896, making it a pivotal instrument of the white supremacy campaign. President Woodrow Wilson named him secretary of the Navy in 1913. President Franklin Roosevelt appointed him ambassador to Mexico in 1933.

### ALEXANDER MANLY



Alexander Manly was editor of *The Daily Record*, believed to be the only daily newspaper in the country owned by an African-American at the time. His editorial attacking whites' hypocritical attitudes toward interracial sex was used by Democratic leaders to support their anti-black scare tactics.

### FURNIFOLD SIMMONS

After losing statewide elections in 1894 and 1896, the North Carolina Democratic Party turned to Furnifold Simmons. As party chairman, the former congressman orchestrated the campaign of 1898 that restored Democrats to power. In gratitude, the legislature appointed him in 1900 to a seat in the U.S. Senate that he held for 30 years.

### ALFRED MOORE WADDELL

Alfred Moore Waddell served four terms in Congress (1871-1879). A gifted orator, he championed white supremacy in the 1898 election and was installed as Wilmington's mayor during the coup that occurred during the riot.

### MORE ONLINE

Read Tim Tyson's full report at [www.newsobserver.com](http://www.newsobserver.com) (key word: 1898)

### THE COMMISSION REPORT

Read the state report at [www.ah.dcr.state.nc.us/1898-wrrc](http://www.ah.dcr.state.nc.us/1898-wrrc).

### BY TIMOTHY B. TYSON

On Nov. 10, 1898, heavily armed columns of white men marched into the black neighborhoods of Wilmington. In the name of white supremacy, this well-ordered mob burned the offices of the local black newspaper, murdered perhaps dozens of black residents — the precise number isn't known — and banished many successful black citizens and their so-called "white nigger" allies. A new social order was born in the blood and the flames, rooted in what *The News and Observer's* publisher, Josephus Daniels, heralded as "permanent good government by the party of the White Man."

The Wilmington race riot of 1898 stands as one of the most important chapters in North Carolina's history. It is also an event of national historical significance. Occurring only two years after the Supreme Court had sanctioned "separate but equal" segregation in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the riot marked the embrace of virulent Jim Crow racism, not merely in Wilmington, but across the United States.

Despite its importance, the riot has remained a hidden chapter in our state's history. It was only this year that North Carolina completed its official investigation of the violence. In addition to providing a thorough history of the event, the report of the Wilmington Race Riot Commission recommended payments to descendants of victims. And it advised media outlets, including *The News & Observer*, to tell the people the truth about 1898.

Those truths include that what occurred in Wilmington on that chilly autumn morning was not a spontaneous outbreak of mob violence. It was, instead, the climax of a carefully orchestrated statewide campaign led by some of the leading figures in North Carolina's history to end interracial cooperation and build a one-party state that would assure the power of North Carolina's business elite.

### The black-white coalition

At the end of the 19th century, Wilmington was a symbol of black hope. Thanks to its busy port, the black majority city was North Carolina's largest and most important municipality. Blacks owned 10 of the city's 11 eating houses and 20 of its 22 barbershops. The black male literacy rate was higher than that of whites.

Black achievement, however, was always fragile. Wealthy whites were willing to accept some black advancement, so long as they held the reins of power. Through the Democratic Party, whites controlled the state and local governments from 1876 to 1894. However, the party's coalition of wealthy, working class and rural whites began to unravel in the late 1880s as America plunged into depression.

North Carolina became a hotbed of agrarian revolt as hard-pressed farmers soured on the Democrats because of policies that cottoned to banks and railroads. Many white dissidents eventually founded the People's Party, also known as the Populists. Soon they imagined what had been unimaginable: an alliance with blacks, who

shared their economic grievances.

As the economic depression deepened, these white Populists joined forces with black Republicans, forming an interracial "Fusion" coalition that championed local self-government, free public education and electoral reforms that would give black men the same voting rights as whites. In the 1894 and 1896 elections, the Fusion movement won every statewide office, swept the legislature and elected its most prominent white leader, Daniel Russell, to the governorship.

In Wilmington, the Fusion triumph lifted black and white Republicans and white Populists to power. Horrified white Democrats vowed to regain control of the government.

### Race baiting fuels vote

As the 1898 political season loomed, the Populists and Republicans hoped to make more gains through Fusion. To rebound, Democrats knew they had to develop campaign issues that transcended party lines. Democratic chairman Furnifold Simmons mapped out the strategy with leaders whose names would be immortalized in statues, building names and street signs: Charles B. Aycock, Henry G. Connor, Robert B. Glenn, Claude Kitchin, Locke Craig, Cameron Morrison, George Rountree, Francis D. Winston and Josephus Daniels.

They soon decided that racist appeals were the hammer they needed to shatter the fragile alliance between poor whites and blacks. They made the "redemption" of North Carolina from "Negro domination" the theme of the 1898 campaign. Though promising to restore something traditional, they would, in fact, create a new social order rooted in white supremacy and commercial domination.

At the center of their strategy lay the gifts and assets of Daniels, editor and publisher of *The News and Observer*. He would spearhead a propaganda effort that would incite white citizens into a furor that led to electoral fraud and mass murder. It used sexualized images of black men and their supposedly uncontrollable lust

for white women. Newspaper stories and stump speeches warned of "black beasts" who threatened the flower of Southern womanhood.

The Democrats did not rely solely upon newspapers, however, but deployed a statewide campaign of stump speakers, torchlight parades and physical intimidation. Aycock earned his chance to become North Carolina's "education governor" through his fiery speeches for white supremacy.

### Issue of race and sex

As in the rest of the state, Wilmington Democrats founded their campaign upon propaganda, violence and fraud. Their efforts to persuade white men to commit wholesale violence was made easier in August 1898 when Alexander Manly, the black owner of *The Daily Record*, answered a speech supporting lynchings. Not all interracial sex is rape, he noted; many white women willingly sleep with black men.

For Democrats, Manly's editorial was a godsend, allowing them to support their lies about predatory blacks. And no one was better at spreading that message of hate and violence than Wilmington's Alfred Waddell.

The former Confederate soldier was a passionate speaker, who riled crowds with his famous line: "We will never surrender to a ragged raffle of Negroes, even if we have to choke the Cape Fear River with carcasses."

As Waddell spoke, the Red Shirts, a paramilitary arm of the Democratic Party, thundered across the state on horseback, disrupting African-American church services and Republican meetings. In Wilmington, the Red Shirts patrolled every street in the days before the election, intimidating and attacking black citizens.

Through these efforts, the Democrats won resounding victories across the state on Nov. 8, 1898.

Stealing the election would not be enough for the conservatives. For one thing, Wilmington's local Fusionist government remained in office. Many local officials — the mayor and the board of aldermen, for example — had not been up for re-election in

1898. And Wilmington remained the center of African-American economic and political power, as well as a symbol of black pride. White Democrats were in no mood to wait.

The day after the election, Waddell unfurled a "White Declaration of Independence" that called for the disfranchisement of black voters.

The following morning, Nov. 10, Waddell and a heavily armed crowd of about 2,000 marched to Love and Charity Hall, where the *Record* had been published. The mob battered down the door of the two-story frame structure, dumped kerosene on the wooden floors, and set the building ablaze.

Soon the streets filled with angry blacks and whites. Red Shirts on horseback poured into the black community and other white vigilantes romped through the black sections of town to "kill every damn nigger in sight," as one of them put it.

At the end of the day, no one knew how many people had died — estimates ranged from nine to 300. The only certainty in the matter of casualties is that democracy was gravely wounded on the streets of Wilmington.

While the violence raged, white leaders launched a coup d'état, forcing the mayor, the board of aldermen, and the police chief to resign at gunpoint. By 4 p.m. that day, Waddell was Wilmington's mayor.

Still, they were not done. The white mob gathered at the city jail to watch soldiers with fixed bayonets march Fusionist leaders to the train station, banishing at least 21 successful blacks and their white allies from the city.

### Effects of 1898 linger

When the new legislature met in 1899, its first order of business was to disfranchise blacks. In the years that followed, the leaders of the white supremacy campaign were largely responsible for the birth of the Jim Crow social order and the rise of a one-party political system.

More than a century later, it is clear that the white supremacy campaign of 1898 injected a vicious racial ideology into American political culture that we have yet to transcend fully. Our separate and unequal lives attest to the fact, though much has changed for the better and a few things have changed for the worse.

But if 1898 has saddled us with its legacy, it also suggests how we might overcome it. Its central lesson is this: Human beings make history. So the mistakes that North Carolinians made in 1898 can be overcome, if we choose.

Timothy B. Tyson is senior research scholar at the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University. This is a condensed version of an article he wrote for *The News & Observer* and *The Charlotte Observer*.



# The Ghosts of 1898

**WILMINGTON'S RACE RIOT AND THE RISE OF WHITE SUPREMACY**



Destruction of The Daily Record of Wilmington, said to be the only black-owned daily newspaper in the United States at the time, by white supremacists.

COURTESY N.C. OFFICE OF ARCHIVES & HISTORY

**O**n Nov. 10, 1898, armed white men marched through the black sections of Wilmington, murdering all who dared to challenge them. As violence filled the streets, others snatched control of the government. After installing themselves in power, they banished at least 21 successful blacks and their white allies. Although it is one of the most significant chapters in state history, it is a story many have never heard. In this special report, historian Timothy B. Tyson describes the carefully orchestrated campaign that spread white supremacy across North Carolina and the South. He explains how many of the region's leading figures and institutions seized power, altering the state's history and creating a legacy that haunts us still.

**STORY BY TIMOTHY B. TYSON**



# Introduction

## EVENTS OF 1898 SHAPED OUR HISTORY

On a chilly autumn morning 108 years ago this month, heavily armed columns of white men marched military-fashion into the black neighborhoods of Wilmington, then the state's largest city and the center of African-American political and economic success. "Under thorough discipline and under command of officers," one witness wrote, "capitalists and laborers marched together. The lawyer and his client were side by side. Men of large business interests kept step with the clerks."

In the name of white supremacy, this well-ordered mob burned the offices of the local black newspaper, murdered perhaps dozens of black residents — the precise number isn't known — and banished many successful black citizens and their so-called "white nigger" allies. A new social order was born in the blood and the flames, rooted in what The News and Observer's publisher, Josephus Daniels, heralded as "permanent good government by the party of the White Man."

The Wilmington race riot of 1898 was a crucial turning point in the history of North Carolina. It was also an event of national historical significance. Occurring just two years after the Supreme Court had sanctioned "separate but equal" segregation in Plessy v. Ferguson, the riot signaled the embrace of an even more virulent racism, not merely in Wilmington, but across the United States.

This deepening racial chasm launched an extraordinarily violent and repressive era in this country. It was a time when some state legislatures — in the North and South — were controlled by members of the Ku Klux Klan. It was a period when groups of respectable white Southerners gathered to burn black men in public, brought their children to watch, and mailed their loved ones souvenir postcards of the smoldering corpses. It was a time when African-Americans lost the right to vote to a white South determined to control their lives and labor by any means necessary. North Carolina stripped the vote from black men in 1900. By 1910, every state in the South had taken the vote from its black citizens, using North Carolina as one of their models.

Wilmington 1898 marked a flowering of the Age of Jim Crow. White authorities constructed the symbols and signs of everyday life to show people their place. "White" and "Colored" signs were erected at railroad stations, over drinking fountains and at the doors of theaters and restaurants. Hubert Eaton, a black leader in Wilmington, recalled his shock and dismay in the 1950s to see two Bibles in every courtroom, clearly marked by race.

The Wilmington massacre inspired bloody racist crusades across the United States. When whites in Georgia, led by would-be governor Hoke Smith, sought to take the ballot from black citizens in 1906, they



Black firefighters stand on the second floor of the destroyed Love and Charity Hall in Wilmington. Children watch on the steps below. The building housed the city's black-owned newspaper.

COURTESY NEW HANOVER LIBRARY

consulted men who came to power by leading North Carolina's white supremacy campaign. They included Gov. Robert Glenn, U.S. Sens. Lee S. Overman and Furnifold Simmons and former Gov. Charles B. Aycock. Overman urged white Georgians to be prepared to use bloody violence and promised that disfranchisement would bring the "satisfaction which only comes of permanent peace after deadly warfare."

Smith campaigned across Georgia, braying about the protection of "white womanhood" and demand-

ing that the state take the ballot from blacks. If whites could not disfranchise blacks legally in Georgia, Smith vowed, "we can handle them as they did in Wilmington," where the woods were left "black with their hanging carcasses." Right after Smith's 1906 election, white mobs raged in the streets of Atlanta and killed dozens of blacks. Soon, exactly as in North Carolina, the state of Georgia took the vote from its African-American citizens.

Despite their importance, the events in Wilmington have remained

largely a hidden chapter in our state's history. It was only this year that North Carolina completed its official investigation of the violence. The report of the Wilmington Race Riot Commission concluded that the tragedy "marked a new epoch in the history of violent race relations in the United States." It recommended payments to descendants of victims and advised media outlets, including The News & Observer, to tell the truth about 1898.

Even as we finally acknowledge the ghosts of 1898, long shadowed by ignorance and forgetfulness, some ask: Why dredge this up now, when we cannot change the past? But those who favor amnesia ignore how the past holds our future in its grip, especially when it remains unacknowledged. The new world walks forever in the footsteps of the old. The story of the Wilmington race riot abides at the core of North Carolina's past.

And that story holds many lessons for us today. It reminds us that history does not just happen. It does not unfold naturally like the seasons or rise and fall like the tides. History is made by people, who bend and shape the present to create the future. The history of Wilmington teaches us that the ugly racial conflict that shaped North Carolina and the nation during much of the 20th century was not inevitable. So long as we remember that past, we might overcome its legacy.

For more than a century, most historians have obscured the triumph of white domination in 1898 by calling it a "race riot," though it was not the spontaneous outbreak of mob violence that the word "riot" suggests.

In his seminal study, "We Have Taken a City" (1984), H. Leon Prather calls it a "massacre and coup." What another scholar terms the "genocidal massacre" in Wilmington was the climax of a carefully orchestrated campaign to end interracial cooperation and build a one-party state that would assure the power of North Carolina's business elite.

When the violence ended, a war of memory persisted. Our politically correct public history, carved into marble on our university buildings and the statehouse lawn, exalts the men who overthrew an elected government in the name of white supremacy, including Charles B. Aycock and Josephus Daniels. No monument exists to the handful of visionaries who were able to imagine a better future, beyond the bounds of white supremacy. Nor do we remember those who gave their lives for simple justice. Instead, we mistake power for greatness and celebrate those responsible for our worst errors. The losers of 1898, though flawed themselves, have far more to teach us than the winners.

## HOW A RAILROAD TICKET INSPIRED JIM CROW LAWS

In 1892, Homer Plessy purchased a first-class railroad ticket — and thereby broke the law. Blacks were permitted to ride only third class in his home state of Louisiana, which required separate railway accommodations for the races. Ultimately, the Supreme Court heard, and rejected, Plessy's challenge, validating segregation in public facilities and inspiring a harsher wave of restrictive Jim Crow laws.

J. PEDER ZANE

## U.S. RACE RIOTS

The march of urban racial massacres that Wilmington led was not confined to the South.

In 1908, scores of blacks died in Springfield, Ill., in an attack that drew force from Wilmington's example. In East St. Louis, Ill., white mobs killed as many as 200 blacks and burned 6,000 out of their homes in 1917. The Chicago race riot of 1919 left 15 whites and 23 blacks dead; in 1919 alone, similar riots in 26 other U.S. cities from Omaha to Washington, D.C., left scores of bodies. In Tulsa in 1921, between 150 and 200 blacks died in a mass assault.

TIMOTHY B. TYSON

## FOUR-PRONGED PLAN

The events in Wilmington were not just a single day of violence, but part of a four-pronged plan:

**1. Steal the election:** Under the banner of white supremacy, the Democratic Party used threats, intimidation, anti-black propaganda and stuffed ballot boxes to win the statewide elections on Nov. 8, 1898.

**2. Riot.** On Nov. 10, armed whites attacked blacks and their property.

**3. Stage a coup.** As the riot unfolded, white leaders forced the mayor, police chief and other local leaders to resign from their offices, placing themselves in charge.

**4. Banish the opposition.** After seizing power, whites removed opposition by banishing their most able and determined opponents, black and white.

J. PEDER ZANE

# Chapter 1

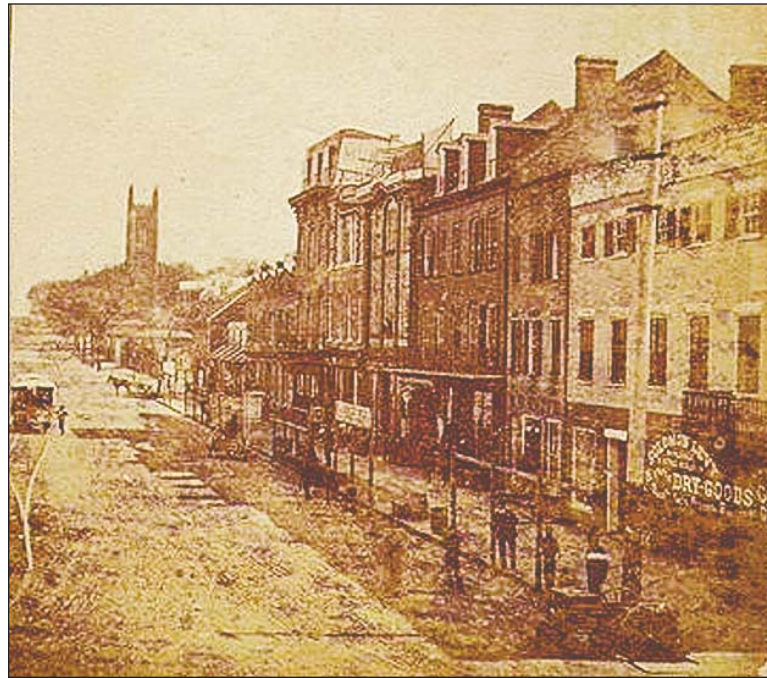
## WILMINGTON: SYMBOL OF BLACK ACHIEVEMENT

At the close of the 19th century, Wilmington was a symbol of black hope in post-Civil War America. The largest and most important city in North Carolina, it had a black-majority population — 11,324 African-Americans and 8,731 whites. The beautiful port city on the Cape Fear, about 30 miles upriver from the open Atlantic, boasted electric lights and streetcars when much of the state lumbered along in darkness. Its port did not quite match those of Savannah or Charleston, but it shipped tons of cotton around the world.

Wilmington's middling prosperity rested upon its black majority. Blacks owned 10 of the city's 11 eating houses and 20 of its 22 barber-shops. Black entrepreneur Thomas Miller was one of Wilmington's three real estate agents. The city's business directory listed black-owned Bell & Pickens as one of only four dealers and shippers of fish and oysters. Many of Wilmington's most sought-after craftsmen were also black: jewelers and watchmakers, tailors, mechanics, furniture makers, blacksmiths, shoemakers, stone-masons, plasterers, plumbers, wheelwrights and brick masons. Frederick Sadgwar, an African-American architect, financier and contractor, owned a stately home that still stands as a monument to his talents and industry.

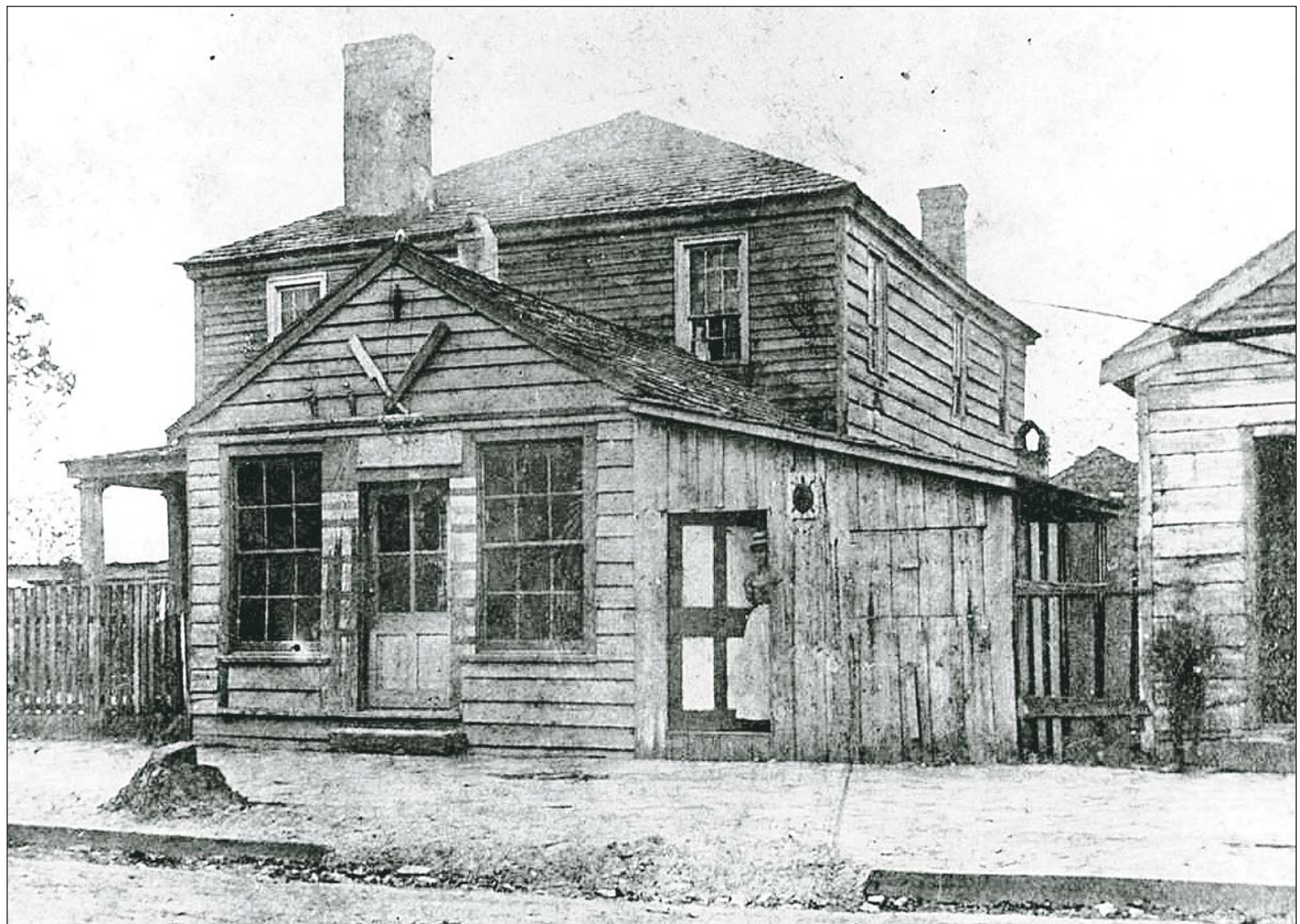
What's more, the black male literacy rate was higher than that of whites. The Daily Record, said to be the only black-owned daily newspaper in the United States, was edited by the dashing and progressive Alexander Manly, the mixed-race descendant of Charles Manly, governor of the state from 1849-51.

Black achievement, however, was always fragile. Wealthy whites might be willing to accept some black advancement, so long as whites held the reins of power. But black economic gains also provoked many poor whites who competed with them, and wealthy whites persistently encouraged animosity between poor whites and blacks in a divide-and-conquer strategy. In the years after Reconstruction, aspiring black farmers, businessmen and professionals often found themselves the victims of exclusion, harassment, discrimination and a range of violence that included the horrors of lynching.



Market Street between Front and Second streets, 1898.

PHOTOS COURTESY N.C. OFFICE OF ARCHIVES & HISTORY



Pedens Shop was one of many black-owned businesses in Wilmington. Blacks owned 20 of the city's 22 barber-shops. One of the city's three real estate agents was black. And black-owned Bell & Pickens was one of four shippers of fish and oysters.

# Chapter 2

## THE FUSION MOVEMENT: EXPERIMENT IN INTERRACIAL DEMOCRACY

Despite their defeat in 1865, the feverish devotion of the former Confederates to white dominion did not burn off like mists in the midmorning sun. For many white Southerners, black citizenship remained unacceptable and justified any level of violence. Ku Klux Klan terrorism swept the South. As the federal government became increasingly reluctant to protect the rights of former slaves, white terrorism and electoral fraud brought about the end of Reconstruction. The Conservatives, who later changed their name to the Democrats, took power across the region by 1876, and worked hard to limit black voting.

The collapse of Reconstruction left North Carolina with two distinct political parties. While Republicans, favored by blacks, controlled many federal appointments from Washington, the Democrats ruled the state and local governments from 1876 to 1894. But the coalition of wealthy, working class and rural whites that kept the Democrats in power began to unravel in the late 1880s as the American economy headed toward depression.

North Carolina became a hotbed of agrarian revolt as hard-pressed farmers soured on the Democrats because of policies that cottoned to banks and railroads. Many white dissidents rallied around economic issues and eventually founded the People's Party, also known as the Populists. As the ruling order discredited itself through its inability to meet human needs, many of the economic dissidents became racial dissidents, too.

Now they imagined what had been unimaginable: an alliance with blacks, who shared their economic grievances but also sought secure

access to the ballot box and safety from white terrorism.

These "Pops" were not quite as devoted to white supremacy as their conservative opponents. Still, poisonous ideas that had once served as a rationale for slavery — that God had distributed moral, cultural and intellectual worth on the basis of pigmentation — were as common among white Populists as they were among Democrats.

As the economic depression deepened, these increasingly desperate Populists joined forces with Republicans. Together they formed an interracial "Fusion" coalition that championed local self-government, free public education, modest regulation of monopoly capitalism and "one man, one vote," which would give a black man the same voting power as a white man. In the 1894 and 1896 elections, the Fusion movement won every statewide office, swept the legislature and elected its most prominent white leader, Daniel Russell, to the governorship.

In Wilmington, the Fusion triumph lifted black and white Republicans and white Populists to power. The new Fusion legislature reformed local government to allow communities to pick their own leadership, and won a majority of the Wilmington Board of Aldermen. But white Republicans and Populists kept most offices to themselves; only four of the 10 aldermen were African-Americans, despite the city's black majority.

We must resist the temptation to take a romantic view of the Fusionists and imagine that they represented the same vision as the civil rights movement at its



A cartoon in *The News and Observer* on Oct. 26, 1898, warned voters of the interracial Fusion coalition of Populists and Republicans who championed local self-government, free public education and giving a black man the same vote as a white man.

SOURCE: THE NEWS AND OBSERVER

best. Nearly all of the white Fusionists resisted equality for their African-American allies. But since they represented a vital part of the coalition, quite a few black North Carolinians took places on county electoral tickets and won. Imperfect though it was, this Fusion coalition embodied a brighter future for our state, not just in its ideals but in its practical approach to coalition politics.

Horrified at the prospect of a

more democratic government, with all men eligible to vote and hold office on equal terms, wealthy white Democrats vowed to regain control of the government.

Beginning in 1897, they saw their challenge as finding a strategy that would move the focus of disgruntled white voters away from their policies. What they needed was an issue that would shatter the fragile alliance between poor whites and blacks.

### RUSSELL LEADS FUSION



COURTESY UNC-CHAPEL HILL

It would be several generations before North Carolinians again witnessed the interracial cooperation that marked the race for governor in 1896. After a heated struggle, the Fusionists nominated Daniel Russell, a broad-faced, fleshy white man of nearly 300 pounds, for governor. Though many of the African-American delegates had favored another candidate, Russell swore his support for black advancement.

"I stand for the Negroes' rights and liberties," he declared. "I sucked at the breast of a Negro woman. I judge from the adult development the milk must have been nutritious and plentiful," Russell joked, mocking his enormous girth. "The Negroes do not want control. They only demand, and they ought to have it, every right a white man has."

Campaign fliers from the 1896 election reveal the Fusionist effort to appeal to black voters. "To the Colored Voters of Union County" reminded African-Americans that "two years ago the Republicans and Populists of North Carolina united and made one grand struggle for liberty," and that only this defeat of the Democrats enabled blacks to vote again. "THE CHAINS OF SERVITUDE ARE BROKEN," the interracial alliance reminded black citizens in an appeal to race pride. "NOW NEVER LICK THE HAND THAT LASHED YOU."

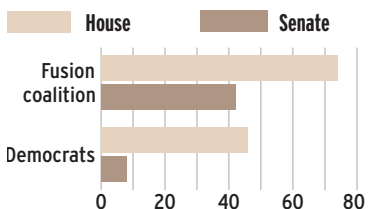
Such appeals brought black voters out in a gesture of audacious hope that the interracial democracy born in Reconstruction, but dead for 20 years, could be revived. An estimated 87 percent of eligible black voters went to the polls in 1896, and Russell was elected.

TIMOTHY B. TYSON

### FUSION VICTORY

Republicans and Populists joined forces to defeat Democrats in 1894.

#### 1894 statewide election results North Carolina General Assembly



Source: 1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission Report

## CHARLES B. AYCOCK



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Charles Brantley Aycock was born in Wayne County on Nov. 1, 1859, the youngest of 10 children. After graduating from the University of North Carolina in 1880, he practiced law in Goldsboro and became involved in Democratic Party politics. As North Carolina's governor from 1901 to 1905, he championed education and white supremacy. He died in 1912 while delivering a speech on education.

## JOSEPHUS DANIELS



NEWS &amp; OBSERVER FILE PHOTO

Josephus Daniels was born in Washington, N.C., in 1862. His father, a shipbuilder for the Confederacy, was killed before the child was 3. His mother soon moved the family to Wilson, where she worked for the post office. At age 16, he entered the world of journalism; by 18 he had bought the *Advance*, a paper serving Wilson, Nash and Greene counties.

After studying at the University of North Carolina's law school, he was admitted to the bar in 1885, though he never practiced. Instead he continued to publish and edit newspapers, proving himself a fierce ally of the Democratic

Party. He purchased *The News and Observer* in 1894, making it a pivotal instrument of the white supremacy campaign. President Woodrow Wilson named him secretary of the Navy in 1913. President Franklin Roosevelt appointed him ambassador to Mexico in 1933. Daniels died in Raleigh on Jan. 15, 1948.

## FURNIFOLD SIMMONS



COURTESY UNC-CHAPEL HILL

Furnifold Simmons was born on his father's plantation near Pollockville in Jones County in 1854. After graduating from Trinity College (now Duke University) in 1873, he studied law and began practicing in New Bern. He served one term in Congress (1887-89), then lost the next two elections for that seat.

After losing statewide elections in 1894 and 1896, North Carolina's Democratic Party named him its chairman. Simmons orchestrated the campaign of 1898 that would restore the party to power. Showing its gratitude, the legislature appointed him in 1900 to a seat in the U.S. Senate that he would hold for 30 years.

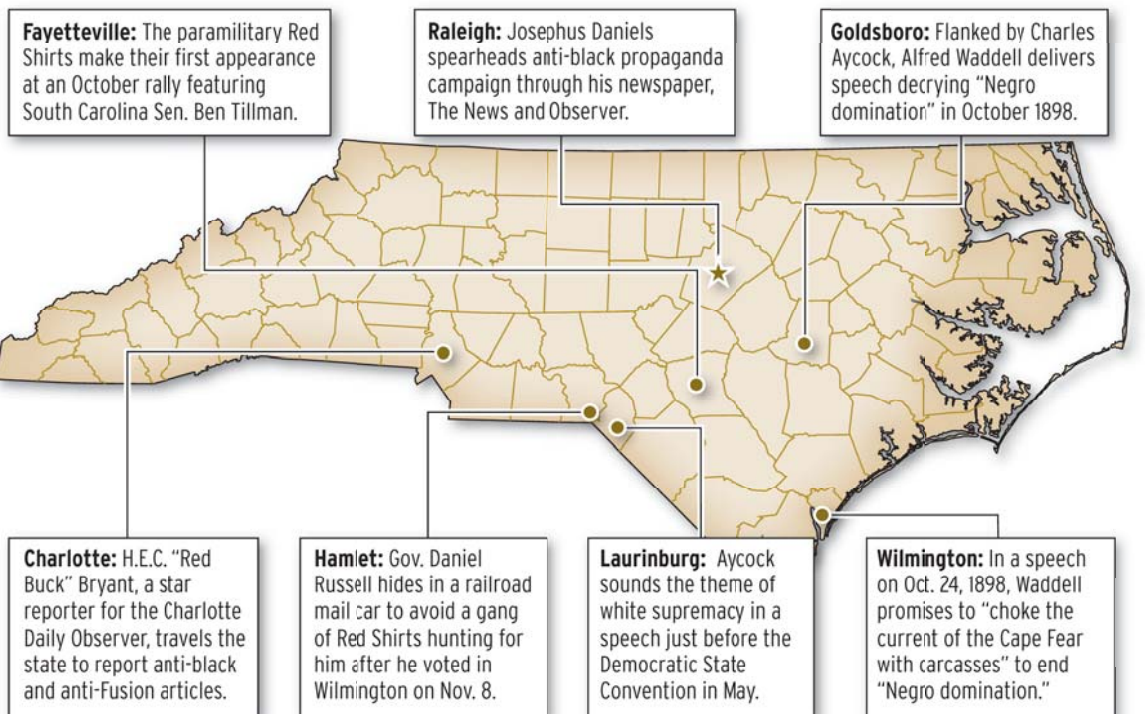
## Chapter 3

## THE STATEWIDE WHITE SUPREMACY CAMPAIGN

Charles B. Aycock, governor of North Carolina from 1901 to 1905, has become the central symbol of the state's progressive traditions, first and most illustrious of our "education governors." Politicians in North Carolina making high-minded appeals for education and civility routinely invoke "the spirit of Aycock." The contradictory truth is that Aycock earned his prominence by fomenting a bloody white supremacy revolution in North Carolina. This campaign — with Wilmington as its flash point — essentially overthrew the state government by force and by fraud, ending meaningful democracy in the state for generations. How this happened is a lesson in the politics of racial violence and the ironies of public memory.

## SPREADING THE WORD

Flash points of statewide white supremacy campaign in 1898:



Source: 1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission Report

The News & Observer

As the 1898 political season loomed, the Populists and Republicans hoped to make more gains through Fusion. The Democrats, desperate to overcome their unpopularity, decided to place all their chips on racial antagonism. Party chairman Furnifold Simmons mapped out the campaign strategy with leaders whose names would be immortalized in statues, on buildings and street signs: Aycock, Henry G. Connor, Robert B. Glenn, Claude Kitchin, Locke Craig, Cameron Morrison, George Rountree, Francis D. Winston and Josephus Daniels.

These men knew that the Democrats' only hope was to develop campaign issues that cut across party lines. Southern history and practical politics had taught them that white discomfort with black political par-

ticipation remained a smoldering ember that they could fan to full flame. So they made the "redemption" of North Carolina from "Negro domination" the theme of the 1898 campaign. Though promising to restore something traditional, they would, in fact, create a new social order rooted in white supremacy and commercial domination.

A propaganda campaign slandering African-Americans would not come cheap. Simmons made secret deals with railroads, banks and industrialists. In exchange for donations right away, the Democrats pledged to slash corporate taxes after their victory.

At the center of their strategy lay the gifts and assets of Daniels, editor and publisher of *The News and*

*Observer*. He spearheaded a propaganda effort that made white partisans angry enough to commit electoral fraud and mass murder.

It would not be merely a campaign of heated rhetoric but also one of violence and intimidation. Daniels called Simmons "a genius in putting everybody to work — men who could write, men who could speak, and men who could ride — the last by no means the least important." By "ride," Daniels employed a euphemism for vigilante terror. Black North Carolinians had to be kept away from the polls by any means necessary.

Though it would end in bloodshed, the campaign began with an ordinary enough meeting of the Democratic ex-

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## SUPREMACY

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ecutive committee on Nov. 20, 1897. At its end, Francis D. Winston of Bertie County published a call for whites to rise up and “reestablish Anglo-Saxon rule and honest government in North Carolina.” He attacked Republican and Populist leaders for turning over local offices to blacks. “Homes have been invaded, and the sanctity of **woman** endangered,” the Democratic broadside claimed. “Business has been paralyzed and property rendered less valuable.”

This claim ignored the enormous commercial expansion in North Carolina in the 1890s. Despite the pain of farmers pelted by the national agricultural depression, textile mills had increased fourfold; invested capital had surged to 12 times its 1890 value; the number of employed workers in North Carolina had skyrocketed during the decade; and the railroad interests had obtained a 99-year lease on public railways. But the truth was not the point. The Democrats clearly planned to portray themselves as the saviors of North Carolina from the Fusionist regime — and from “Negro domination.”

By any rational assessment, African-Americans could hardly be said to “dominate” North Carolina politics. Helen G. Edmonds, the scholar from N.C. Central University, which in her day was called North Carolina College for Negroes, weighed the matter in her classic 1951 work, “The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina, 1894-1901.” She wrote:

“An examination of ‘Negro domination’ in North Carolina revealed that one Negro was elected to Congress; ten to the state legislature; four aldermen were elected in Wilmington, two in New Bern, two in Greenville, one or two in Raleigh, one county treasurer and one county coroner in New Hanover; one register of deeds in Craven; one Negro jailer in Wilmington; and one county commissioner in Warren and one in Craven.”

Indeed, all three political parties were controlled by whites. Two of them — the Populists and the Democrats — could fairly be described as hostile to blacks, though the Populists supported a small degree of black office-holding in an arrangement based on the arithmetic of political power. Given that North Carolina’s population was 33 percent African-American, it would be far more accurate to describe the state of affairs as “white domination.”

But to white supremacists, the fact that black votes — usually for white candidates — could sway elections was tantamount to domination. They wanted blacks removed from the political equation.

## Chapter 4

## PROPAGANDA, PASSION ACROSS THE STATE

To achieve victory in 1898, Democrats appealed to irrational passions. They used sexualized images of black men and their supposedly uncontrollable lust for white women. Newspaper stories and stump speeches warned of “black beasts” and “black brutes” who threatened the pure flower of Southern womanhood. They cast any achievement or assertion by African-American men as merely an effort to get close to white women.

Aware that a picture could be worth a thousand votes, Josephus Daniels engaged the services of cartoonist Norman Jennett to pen front-page caricatures of blacks. Jennett’s masterpiece was a depiction of a huge vampire bat with “Negro rule” inscribed on its wings, and white women beneath its claws, with the caption “The Vampire That Hovers Over North Carolina.” Other images included a large Negro foot with a white man pinned under it. The caption: “How Long Will This Last?”

Sensational headlines and accounts of supposed Negro crimes were Daniels’ stock in trade: “Negro Control in Wilmington,” “A Negro Insulted the Postmistress Because He Did Not Get A Letter,” “Negroes Have Social Equality” and “Negro On A Train With Big Feet Behind White” were typical.

The News and Observer was one of many newspapers spreading anti-black propaganda. “The Anglo Saxon/A Great White Man’s Rally,” read a headline in the state’s leading conservative paper, the Charlotte Daily Observer. It offered readers a stream of sensationalized and fabricated stories about black crime, corruption and atrocities against white women. Star reporter H.E.C. “Red Buck” Bryant traveled North Carolina filing triumphant dispatches about the white supremacy campaign and disparaging accounts of the Fusion government.

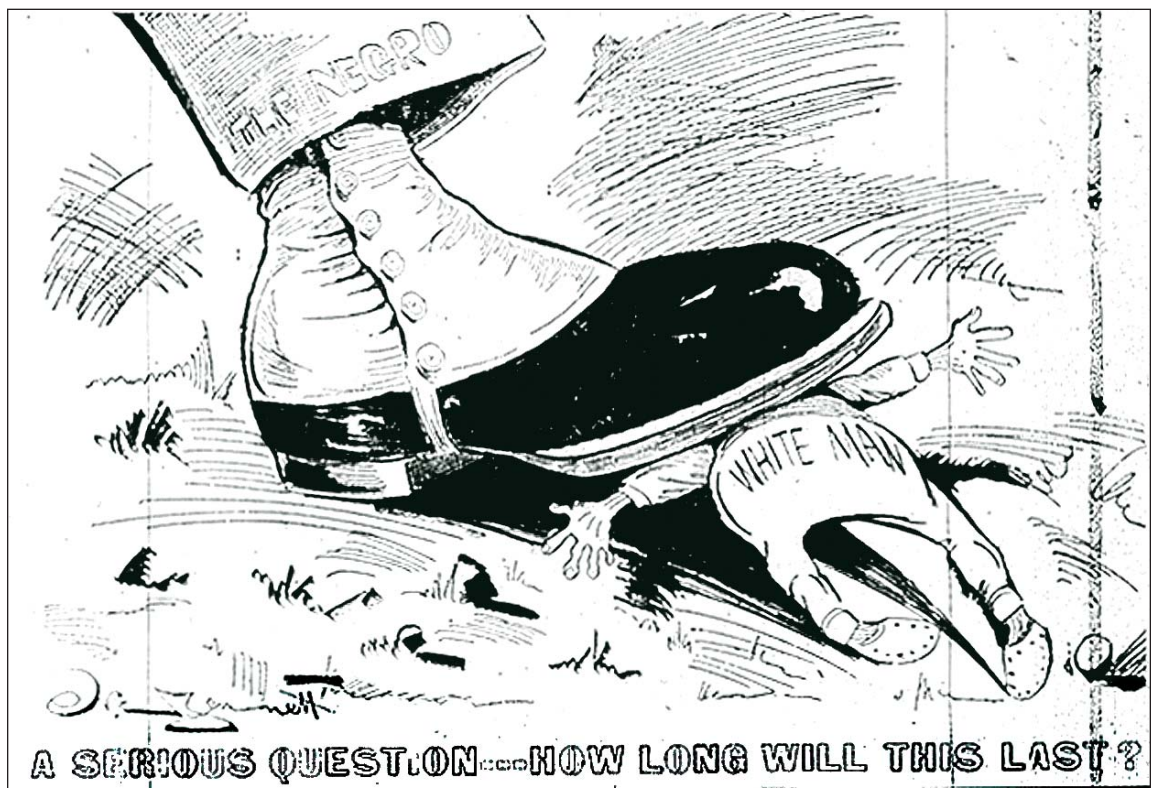
Populist leader Marion Butler, who was elected by the Fusion legislature to the U.S. Senate in 1895, anticipated the crucial role newspapers would play in the 1898 campaign. The year before, he wrote, “There is but one chance and but one hope for the railroads to capture the next legislature, and that is for the ‘nigger’ to be made the issue” with the Raleigh and Charlotte papers “together in the same bed shouting ‘nigger.’”

This propaganda fell on fertile soil.



N&O cartoonist Norman Jennett penned caricatures of blacks.

THE NEWS AND OBSERVER



The racist assumptions that made it effective were commonplace. Without the cooperation of the newspapers, though, especially The News and Observer, the white supremacy campaign could not have succeeded. Although he never apologized for his central role in the campaign, Daniels later acknowledged that his newspaper had been harsh, unfair and irresponsible. The News and Observer was “cruel in its flagellations,” Daniels wrote 40 years later. “We were never very careful about winnowing out the stories or running them down ... they were played up in big type.”

Nor was it a secret, as Election Day approached, that violence was part of the Democrats’ strategy. Two weeks before the slaughter in Wilmington, The Washington Post ran these headlines: “A City Under

Arms — Blacks to Be Prevented from Voting in Wilmington, N.C. — Prepared for Race War — Property-Holding Classes Determined Upon Ending Negro Domination.”

The white supremacy forces did not depend solely upon newspapers, but required a statewide campaign of stump speakers, torchlight parades and physical intimidation. Former Gov. Thomas J. Jarvis and future Govs. Robert B. Glenn and Cameron Morrison struck many a blow for the conservative cause.

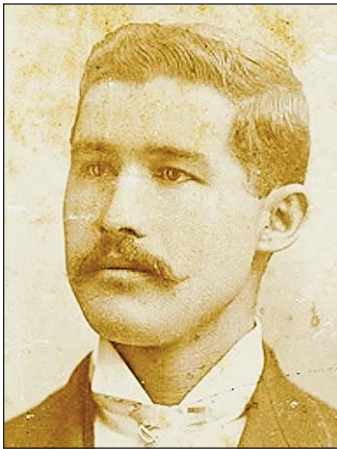
“The king of oratory, however, was Charles B. Aycock,” historian H. Leon Prather writes, “the Democratic Moses, who would lead North Carolina out of the chaos and darkness of ‘Negro domination.’” As he did throughout the campaign, Aycock mesmerized a standing-room-only crowd at the Metropolitan

House in Raleigh, pounding the podium for white supremacy and the protection of white womanhood.

White men have neglected poor and long-suffering white women, he explained in his famous “guilt and degradation” speech, which he repeated across the state that fall. “For them,” he said of the wives, daughters and sweethearts of white men, “it is everything whether Negro supremacy is to continue.”

Wilmington, Aycock explained later, was “the storm center of the white supremacy movement.” Here was the largest city in the state, with a black majority and a black-owned daily newspaper, and several African-American office holders. Wilmington represented the heart of the Fusionist threat. And so it became the focus of the Democrats’ campaign.

## EDITORIAL STOKED ANGER



COURTESY UNC-CHAPEL HILL

Alexander Manly's editorial response in *The Daily Record* to a pro-lynching speech delivered by a Georgia woman seemed heaven-sent to Democratic leaders. Though the African-American editor articulated painful truths, his adversaries used it to support their anti-black scare tactics.

"The papers are filled often with reports of rapes of white women, and the subsequent lynching of the alleged rapist. The editors pour forth volumes of aspersions against all Negroes because of the few who may be guilty. If the papers and speakers of the other race would condemn the commission of 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 ...

"Our experience among poor white people in the country teaches us that the women of that race are not any more particular in the matter of clandestine 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 or the man's boldness bring attention to them and the man is lynched for rape. ... 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 that you cry aloud for the virtue of your women while you seek to destroy the morality of ours. Don't think ever that your women will remain pure while you are debauching ours. You sow the seed — the harvest will come in due time."

## Chapter 5

## THE WILMINGTON CAMPAIGN

**E**arly in the fall of 1898, Democratic Party organizers arrived in Wilmington to press their cause. Most of the white-owned businesses in town contributed money. George Rountree, a local conservative, and Francis Winston of Bertie County, organized white supremacy clubs in the port city. Lawyers William B. McCoy, Iredell Meares, John Dillard Bellamy and others allowed the White Government Union — as the Democratic Party headquarters in Raleigh dubbed the local clubs — to meet in their offices.

Benjamin Keith, a white Populist who served on the Wilmington Board of Aldermen, claimed that support for the White Government Union was not altogether voluntary; the clubs demanded that every white man in the community join. "Many good people were marched from their homes, some by committees, and taken to headquarters and told to sign," Keith wrote. The threat of banishment or worse was plain, he said: "Those that did not [sign] were notified that they must leave the city ... as there was plenty of rope."

The white supremacy campaign in Wilmington made fervent appeals for the support of poor whites. With the blessing of the Chamber of Commerce, it demanded that whites be given the jobs now held by blacks, especially municipal positions. However, the campaign was not led by that symbol of Southern racism — the uneducated "red-neck."

In fact, Wilmington's elite directed the charge. "The Secret Nine," as an admiring local white historian called the cabal that helped hatch the violence and coup in Wilmington, included J. Alan Taylor, Hardy L. Fennell, W.A. Johnson, L.B. Sasser, William Gilchrist, P.B. Manning, E.S. Lathrop, Walter L. Parsley and Hugh MacRae. It was these men, and other scions of Eastern North Carolina's aristocracy, who organized armed militias to take control of the streets and drew up lists of black and white Fusionists to be banished or killed.

Not only in Wilmington but across North Carolina, the white supremacy campaign represented the triumph of financial and manufacturing interests. Later, the *Charlotte Daily Observer* would assess the white supremacy campaign and proudly celebrate the

triumph of wealth and bigotry: "The business men of the State are largely responsible for the victory. Not before in years have the bank men, the mill men, and the business men in general — the backbone of the property interest of the State — taken such sincere interest. They worked from start to finish, and furthermore they spent large bits of money in behalf of the cause."

The campaign to persuade white men to commit wholesale violence was made easier in August 1898 when the black-owned *Daily Record* of Wilmington answered an inflammatory article in the *Wilmington Messenger*. As part of the conservative propaganda barrage, the *Messenger* reprinted a year-old speech by Rebecca Felton of Georgia that urged white Southern men to "lynch, a thousand times a week, if necessary," to protect white women from black rapists.

In response to this fabricated rape scare and call for mass murder, the *Record's* editor, Alexander Manly, pointed out that not all sexual contact between black men and white women was coerced. He also noted that white men routinely seduced or raped black women. Why, Manly asked, was it worse for a black man to be intimate with a white woman than for a white man to be intimate with a black woman?

Manly's charge was particularly incendiary because he embodied its truth — the black editor was a direct descendant of North Carolina's

white governor, Charles Manly.

For Democratic strategists, Manly's editorial was a timely gift. In public, Furnifold Simmons fumed that Manly had "dared openly and publicly to assail the virtue of our pure white womanhood." In private, however, the Democratic Party's chief strategist was far more cheerful. Walker Taylor, a white Democrat from Wilmington, wrote: "Senator Simmons, who was here at the time, told us that the article would make an easy victory for us and urged us to try and prevent any riot until after the election."

Sen. Ben Tillman of South Carolina, the South's most gifted racist demagogue, saw no reason to wait. Tillman came to North Carolina in the fall of 1898 at the invitation of Simmons and bragged that he and his fellow Red Shirts, a terrorist militia, had seized power in South Carolina by force and by fraud. Tillman urged the white supremacy forces in North Carolina to adopt his "shotgun policy" and shamed them for failure to use violence already, especially against Manly. "Why didn't you kill that damn nigger editor who wrote that?" Tillman taunted the crowd.

"Send him to South Carolina and let him publish any such offensive stuff, and he will be killed."

Tillman headlined the largest rally of the white supremacy campaign, held in Fayetteville on Oct. 20. By early morning, in one account, "vehicles filling all the streets and thoroughfares gave evidence that the white people of upper Cape Fear had left the plow, the machine shops, the kitchen, nay, the very neighborhood school-room." Hundreds of white men showed up in red shirts, paying homage to Tillman's terrorist achievements. A delegation from Wilmington led the parade, followed by 300 Red Shirts in military formation, trailed by a float with 22 beautiful young white women dressed in white. The constant boom of cannons added a violent percussion to a brass band from Wilmington.

## WADELL'S POLITICS

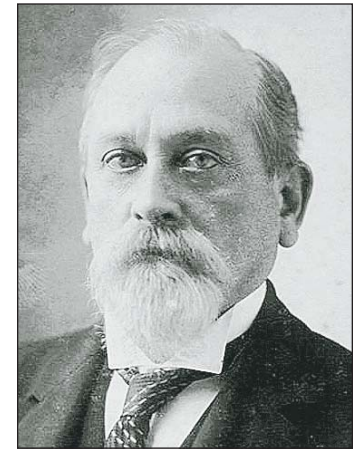


PHOTO COURTESY OF LOWER CAPE FEAR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Born in Hillsborough, Alfred Moore Waddell began practicing law in Wilmington shortly after graduating from the University of North Carolina in 1853. Rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel during the Civil War, Waddell later served four terms in Congress (1871-1879).

After his electoral defeat, he practiced law, edited the *Charlotte Journal-Observer* for two years (1881-82) and remained active in Democratic politics. A gifted orator, he championed white supremacy in the 1898 election and was installed as the city's mayor during the coup that occurred during the riot.

J. PEDER ZANE

## RED SHIRT VIGILANTES

The white sheets of the Ku Klux Klan have become the enduring symbol of racist vigilantism, but Red Shirts also struck fear in the hearts of black people. First coming to prominence in South Carolina in the elections of 1876 that would spell the end of Reconstruction, red shirts were donned by men eager to commit violence against blacks and their white allies. During Wilmington's white supremacy campaign of 1898, Red Shirts patrolled the city's streets to intimidate blacks.

J. PEDER ZANE





# Chapter 6

## SILVER TONGUES AND RED SHIRTS

**T**hough Ben Tillman helped fire the boiler of white supremacy, Wilmington had plenty of homegrown talent. The most effective advocate of violence probably was Alfred Moore Waddell. A lawyer and newspaper publisher born on Moorefield Plantation near Hillsborough, Waddell had fought as a lieutenant colonel in the Confederate cavalry. After the war, he served three terms in Congress, finally losing his seat to Daniel Russell, the Republican who would become the Fusionist governor of North Carolina. Unemployed in 1898, Waddell set out to overthrow the Russell regime by violence and demagoguery, becoming what some called “the silver tongued orator of the east.”

Waddell packed an auditorium in Wilmington early in the fall of 1898, where he shared the stage with 50 of the city’s most prominent citizens. White supremacy, he declared, was the sole issue and traitors to the white race should be held accountable. “I do not hesitate to say this publicly,” Waddell proclaimed, “that if a race conflict occurs in North Carolina, the very first men that ought to be held to account are the white leaders of the Negroes who will be chiefly responsible for it. ... I mean the governor of this state who is the engineer of all the devilry.” But his fiery closing, which became the tag line of his standard stump speech that fall, made clear that blacks would bear the brunt of the violence. “We will never surrender to a ragged raffle of Negroes,” Waddell thundered, “even if we have to choke the Cape Fear River with carcasses.”

Waddell unfurled his next blood-thirsty declaration in Goldsboro, where 8,000 white Democrats came to cheer the long-haired colonel and other Democratic leaders, including Simmons, Aycock and William A. Guthrie, mayor of Durham.

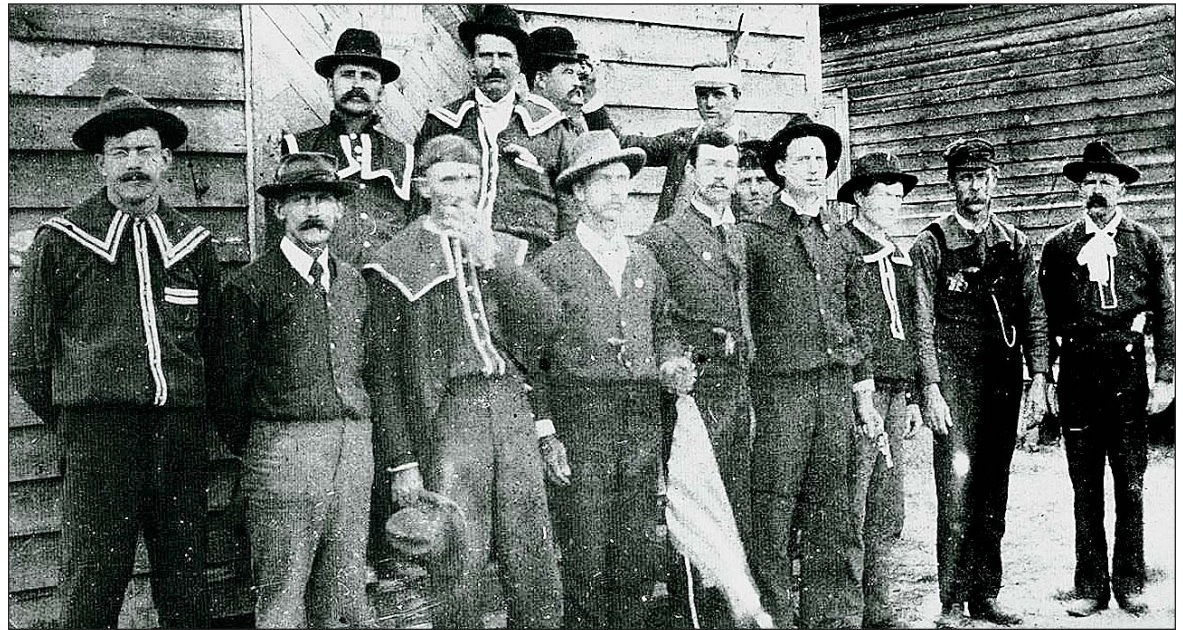
Waddell set the tone and electrified the crowd with his promise to throw enough black bodies into the Cape Fear River to block its passage to the sea. Guthrie, flanked by Red Shirts, imagined a bloody race war. “The Anglo-Saxon planted civilization on this continent,” Guthrie claimed, “and wherever this race has been in conflict with another race, it has asserted its supremacy and either conquered or exterminated the foe. This great race has carried the Bible in one hand and the sword

[in the other.]” Guthrie warned the Fusionists: “Resist our march of progress and civilization and we will wipe you off the face of the Earth.”

Men weren’t the only ones calling for violence. Rebecca Cameron, Waddell’s cousin, wrote to him on Oct. 26 to urge him to carry out his murderous threats. “Where are the white men and the shotguns!” she exclaimed. “It is time for the oft quoted shotgun to play a part, and an active one, in the elections.” The situation was sufficiently desperate, she believed, that not mere threats but “bloodletting is needed for the hearts of the common man and when the depletion commences let it be through!” Urging her menfolk to eliminate Gov. Russell, in particular, Cameron quoted the Bible in her plea for bloodshed: “Solomon says, ‘There is a Time to Kill.’”

The threats were not empty. The Red Shirts, a paramilitary arm of the Democratic Party, thundered across the state on horseback, disrupting African-American church services and Republican meetings. In Wilmington, the Red Shirts patrolled every street in the city in the days before the election, intimidating and attacking black citizens.

The terror went far beyond Wilmington; it was felt in many of the eastern counties. “The Red Shirt organization caused much unrest and alarm,” the editor of the Maxton Blade recalled, “and just before election day made nightly raids, shot through houses, and warned Negroes not to go near the polls.” On the day of the balloting, Red Shirts blocked every road leading to Maxton and many other com-



Red Shirts were a paramilitary arm of the Democratic Party that disrupted black church services and Republican meetings. This photo was taken in Laurinburg in Scotland County in 1898.

COURTESY N.C. OFFICE OF ARCHIVES & HISTORY

munities, and drove would-be black voters away with gunfire. “Before we allow the Negroes to control this state as they do now,” Congressman W.W. Kitchin declared, “we will kill enough of them that there will not be enough left to bury them.”

Russell, who was from Wilmington, complained before the election that “citizens had been fired on from ambush and taken from their homes at night and whipped; and that peaceful citizens were afraid to register” to vote. To quell the violence, Russell eventually withdrew the Republican ticket from New Hanover County. Yet this was not enough to satisfy his opponents. When Russell traveled to Wilmington on Election Day, Red Shirt terrorists swarmed his train at Hamlet and tried to lynch him. To understand the condition of the democratic process in North Carolina that year, we are forced to contemplate the governor huddling in a mail-baggage car, hiding from a lynch mob organized by his electoral opponents.

The Red Shirt mobs ruled the streets of Wilmington as the 1898 election approached. Mike Dowling, a former firefighter who had lost his job for “incompetency, drunkenness and continued insubordination,” led them through the streets of Wilmington on horseback.

Wealthy Democrats provided free food and liquor to the white mobs in the streets. Leaders of the white supremacy campaign also spent the staggering sum of \$1,200 on a new, rapid-fire Gatling gun. They demonstrated its power in early November, leaving no doubt of the consequences for those who openly resisted the campaign.

A “White Man’s Rally” on Nov. 2 featured free barbecue and torchlight parades of armed men. The night before the election, Waddell reminded the armed throng: “You are Anglo-Saxons. You are armed and prepared, and you will do your duty. If you find the Negro out voting, tell him to leave the polls, and if he refuses, kill him, shoot him down in his tracks. We shall win tomorrow if we have to do it with guns.”

The following day, Nov. 8, 1898, many African-Americans in Wilmington avoided the polls in hope of evading bloodshed. Other black citizens attempted to vote. But the armed white men posted on every block by the White Government Union certainly kept many away from the ballot box. Though the intimidation might have sufficed, given the violent atmosphere and the withdrawal of the local Republican ticket, the Democrats nevertheless stuffed ballot boxes. Dowling, the Red Shirt leader who also served as a Democratic Party election official, explained that he and others were taught “how to deposit Republican ballots so they could be replaced.”

Democrats won in Wilmington by 6,000 votes, a huge swing from two years before, when the Fusionists earned a 5,000-vote advantage. Even among the disappointed Fusionists, there was some relief that the city had been spared widespread violence.

“I awoke that morning with thankful heart that the election has passed,” a white woman, Jane Cronly, wrote, “without the shedding of the blood of either the innocent or the guilty.”

But even her small and measured optimism was unfounded.

### VOTING FRAUD IN 1898

Intimidation, violence and ballot-stuffing were the Election Day tools of choice of Democrats in Wilmington. The most egregious cases of election fraud occurred in heavily black sections of the First Ward.

In the Fourth Precinct, Democrats dramatically suppressed the black vote. Although 337 Republicans were registered in the precinct, the party tallied only 97 votes.

In the Fifth Precinct, Democrats not only suppressed the black vote, they also inflated their own totals. Thirty Democrats were registered in the precinct, but the party earned 456 votes. A precinct with 343 registered voters produced a total of 607 votes.

J. PEDER ZANE

### GOVERNOR ELUDES MOB

Despite a flurry of threats, Republican Gov. Daniel Russell voted without incident in his hometown of Wilmington on Nov. 8. His return trip to Raleigh was not so quiet. His train was stopped twice by Red Shirts – including one gang led by a future governor, Cameron Morrison. Morrison warned the governor of vigilantes up the track, and persuaded Russell to hide.

The governor huddled in a mail-baggage car to avoid a lynch mob.

TIMOTHY B. TYSON

# Chapter 7

## VIOLENCE IN THE STREETS

**T**he white supremacy campaign was so inflammatory that violence seemed unavoidable. “You cannot think or imagine anything to equal or compare to the policy the Democrats seem to have adopted to carry this section,” Benjamin Keith, a Fusionist alderman, wrote to Sen. Marion Butler in late October. “I look for a lot of innocent men killed here if things continue as they are now.”

Stealing the election would not be enough for the conservatives. For one thing, Wilmington’s local Fusionist government remained in office, since many local officials — the mayor and the board of aldermen, for example — had not been up for reelection in 1898. And Wilmington remained the center of African-American economic and political power, as well as a symbol of black pride. White Democrats were in no mood to wait.

The day after the election, Hugh MacRae, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology-trained industrialist and one of the Secret Nine, called a public meeting. “Attention White Men,” the headline in the *Wilmington Messenger* proclaimed. Court testimony later described the meeting at the courthouse as a “respectable representative assemblage of businessmen, merchants, lawyers, doctors, divines, and mechanics.” One local white man wrote to a friend in Raleigh that “businessmen are at present holding a big meeting to take steps to run the mayor and some prominent Negroes out of town.”

The meeting began with former Mayor S.H. Fishblate calling Alfred Waddell to the podium. Waddell unfurled a “White Declaration of Independence,” drawn up by the Secret Nine. The U.S. Constitution “did not anticipate the enfranchisement of an ignorant population of African origin,” Waddell read aloud. The framers of the Union “did not contemplate for their descendants a subjection to an inferior race.” Never again, the declaration said, would white men of New Hanover County permit black political participation. The crowd roared and rose to its feet.

An appointed committee revised the declaration, adding calls for the resignations of the mayor, the chief of police, and the board of aldermen, in addition to the demand for Manly’s newspaper to “cease to be published” and “its editor banished from the city.” The committee selected Waddell to head a Committee of Twenty-

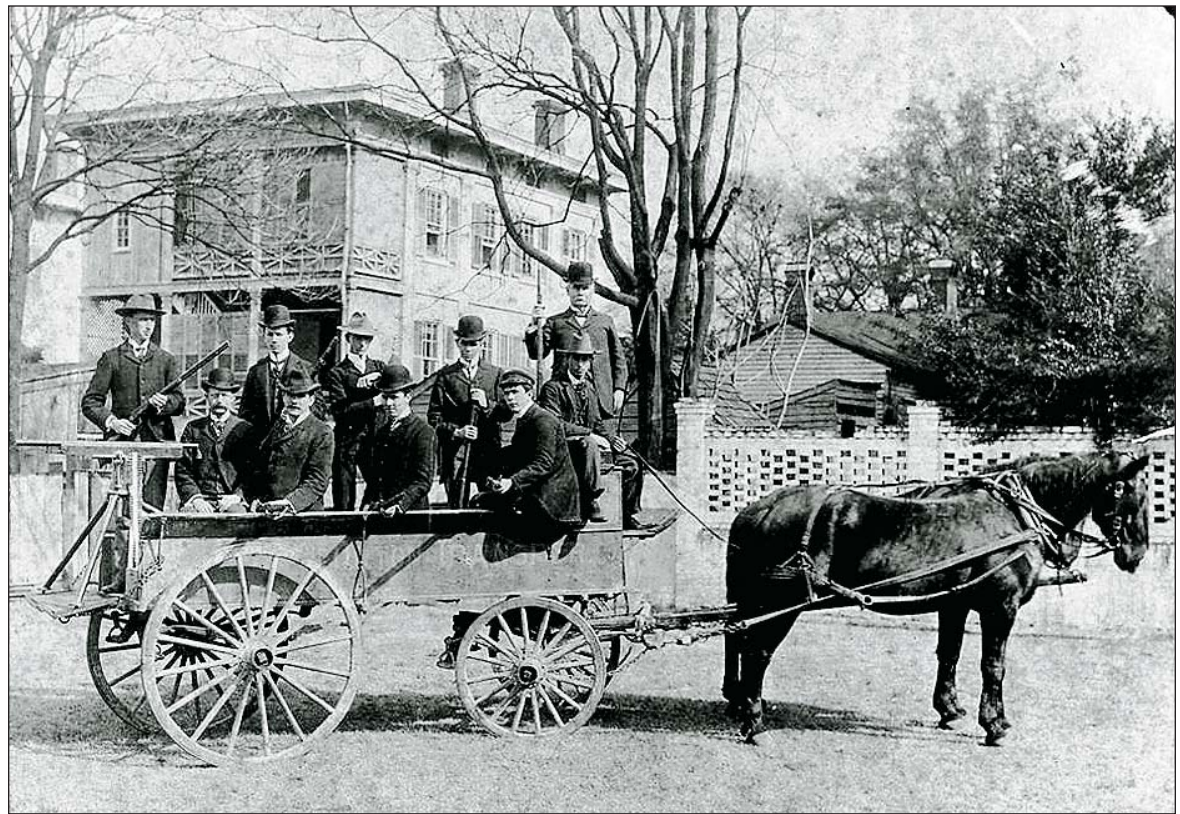
Five to “direct the execution of the provisions of the resolutions.”

The committee summoned 32 prominent “colored citizens” to the courthouse. “There the black men saw arrayed against them the real financial powers of the city,” H. Leon Prather writes, “backed by weapons superior in both number and firepower. It was clear, too, that the voice of white supremacy did not waver; there was murder in the air.”

Waddell read them the White Declaration of Independence. He firmly explained the white conservatives’ insistence that “the Negro” stop “antagonizing our interests in every way, especially by his ballot,” and that the city “give to white men a large part of the employment heretofore given to Negroes.” He demanded that the *Record* stop publication and its editor leave the city. The African-American leaders struck a compliant pose, as their options were limited. Waddell gave them a 12-hour deadline, an empty gesture, since the Democrats had already stolen the election, editor Manly had already fled the city and the *Record* had already ceased publication.

The following morning at 8:15, Waddell met a heavily armed crowd at the city’s stately white marble armory. He lined up the Committee of Twenty-Five at the head of the procession, shouldered his Winchester rifle, and assumed the head of the column, his white hair flowing in the light breeze. Passing up Market Street, a swelling crowd of men marched to Love and Charity Hall, the black community center on Seventh Street between Nun and Church streets, where the *Record* had been published. Led by Waddell, the mob battered down the door of the two-story frame structure, dumped kerosene on the wooden floors and set the building ablaze. After it was destroyed, some of the whites posed for a photograph with their guns in front of the blackened building to commemorate the moment.

But soon the streets filled with an-



gry blacks and whites. Red Shirts on horseback poured into the black community. Sporadic gunfire quickly turned to disciplined military action at the intersection of Fourth and Harnett streets. “Now, boys, I want to tell you right now I want you all to load,” T.C. James, who commanded one group of foot soldiers, reportedly told them, “and when I give the command to shoot, I want you to shoot to kill.”

Thomas Clawson, editor of the *Wilmington Messenger*, was standing nearby with a group of newspaper reporters, and wrote that “a volley tore off the top of a [black] man’s head and he fell dead about 20 feet in front of the news-hawks.” The initial orderly barrages quickly fell toward a swirling cacophony of gunfire, as white men randomly chased black citizens through the streets and fired into homes and businesses.

Sometimes the white marauders targeted particular blacks. A howling mob surrounded the home of Daniel Wright, a well-known black politician, whom some accused of having fired on the mob. By the time they had managed to haul Wright out of his house, a large crowd had gathered and murder mutated into amusement. Someone knocked Wright down with a pipe. “String him up to a lamp post!” a member of the mob yelled. But the white men who wanted Wright to run the gantlet prevailed. The mob turned him loose, chanting “Run, nigger, run!” Wright ran for 15 yards or so until about 40 shots ripped him to pieces. “He was riddled with a pint of bullets, like a pigeon thrown from a trap,” one observer wrote.

Red Shirts and other vigilantes romped through the black sections of town to “kill every damn nigger in sight,” as one of them put it. “What have we done, what have we done?” one black man cried. And George Rountree, an architect of the campaign, found himself unable to answer, since “they had done nothing.”

Eventually, Gov. Russell was notified of the violence and, from his office in Raleigh, called out the Wilmington Light Infantry to restore order. However, the horse-drawn rapid-fire Gatling gun under the command of Capt. William Rand Kenan brought more fear than peace to black neighborhoods.

At the end of the day, no one knew how many people had died. The *New York Times*, then a conservative paper, put the death toll at nine. Waddell, writing in his memoirs, estimated about 20 black casualties. Rountree, MacRae and J. Alan Taylor put the number at 90. Local historian Harry Hayden, an admirer of the white supremacy campaign, reported that some of his white sources boasted that they’d killed “over 100” black folks.

Echoing the oral traditions of their grandparents’ generation, some African-Americans in Wilmington believe that an honest body count would have exceeded 300. Since about 1,400 blacks fled Wilmington in the wake of the massacre and coup, it will probably always remain impossible to determine the body count. The only certainty in the matter of casualties is that democracy in North Carolina was gravely wounded on the streets of Wilmington on Nov. 10, 1898.

### Wilmington Light Infantry with rapid-fire gun, 1898.

COURTESY N.C. OFFICE OF ARCHIVES & HISTORY

### INTIMIDATING FIREPOWER

Leaders of the white supremacy movement signaled their deadly intentions both before and during the riot through their machine gun squad.

Weeks before the election, local business interests purchased a gun capable of firing 420 rounds per minute. The weapon was trumpeted in the press and its power demonstrated to black leaders in an exhibition Nov. 1.

Just two days before the riot, the Naval Reserves acquired a Hotchkiss gun that could fire 80 to 100 shots per minute. On the day of the riot, both guns were wheeled through black sections of Wilmington and aimed at crowds under orders to disperse.

J. PEDER ZANE

# Chapter 8

## BANISHMENT AND COUP



Wilmington Light Infantry and Naval Reserves members escort captured blacks. Fusionist leaders were marched to the train station.

COURTESY N.C. OFFICE OF ARCHIVES & HISTORY

While the streets became a killing ground, the Committee of Twenty-Five launched a coup d'état in the corridors of City Hall, forcing the mayor, the board of aldermen, and the police chief to resign at gunpoint. By 4 p.m. that day, the committee had replaced elected Fusionist city officials, both black and white, with its hand-picked white appointees. The new mayor, fresh from leading the mobs in the streets, was Col. Alfred M. Waddell. In short, the paramilitary force that wealthy conservatives had built to seize power in North Carolina now ran the city of Wilmington.

For days after the coup, hundreds of African-Americans who had fled the white mobs huddled in the forested thickets around Wilmington. Many had escaped too quickly to bother with coats or blankets, and slept on the ground in the wet November woods. "Bone-chilling drizzling rain falls sadly from a leaden sky," Charles Francis Bourke of Collier's Weekly wrote from the scene. "Yet in the swamps and woods, innocent hundreds of terrified men, women and children wander about, fearful of the vengeance of whites, fearful of death, without money, food, [or] sufficient clothes." Children whimpered in the cold, their parents reluctant to light fires for fear that the mobs would find them. "In the blackness of the pines," Bourke observed, "I heard a child crying and a hoarse voice crooning softly a mournful song, the words of which fell into my memory with the air: 'When de

battle over we kin wear a crown in the new Je-ru-sulum.'

But the work was not complete in this new Jerusalem along the Lower Cape Fear. Everyone seemed to understand that a purge was in order. "Immediately after Waddell became mayor," H. Leon Prather writes, "the Secret Nine furnished him with a list of prominent Republicans, both white and black, who must be banished from Wilmington."

The white mob gathered at the city jail to watch soldiers with fixed bayonets march Fusionist leaders to the train station. Those local citizens slated for banishment fit three rough categories: African-American leaders who insisted on citizenship for their people or who openly opposed the white supremacy campaign; black businessmen whose prosperity offended local whites; and white politicians who had, as the Wilmington Morning Star wrote of

the soon-to-be-exiled United States Commissioner R.H. Bunting, a "political record of cooperating with the Negro element."

Silas Wright, the white Republican mayor whom Waddell had deposed, fit the same "white niggers" category as Bunting and stood among the first names on the banishment list. George Z. French, another white Fusionist stalwart and a deputy sheriff, narrowly escaped lynching. A raging mob placed a noose around his neck and started to string him up from a light pole on North Front Street. Frank Stedman, a member of the Committee of Twenty-Five, saved the white law enforcement officer's life, but the mob dragged French to the train station and told him to "leave North Carolina and never return again upon peril of his life."

Chief of Police John Melton, a staunch white Populist, found himself accosted, The News and Observer reported, by a mob that would have lynched him but for some soldiers who intervened. One local white Democrat recalled that he would "never forget" how Melton looked when "one of the boys went upstairs and took a rope with a noose in it and threw it at his feet, [and Melton] turned just as white as a sheet." The mob dispatched him and two other white Fusionists on a train to Washington, D.C., amid cries of "white nigger."

The black men who were hustled to the train station at the point of a bayonet included Salem J. Bell and Robert B. Pickens, who operated a successful fish and oyster business.

Ari Bryant, who owned a butcher shop, was "looked upon by the Negroes as a high and mighty leader," the Wilmington Morning Star mocked, by way of explaining Bryant's banishment. The most prosperous exile may have been Thomas C. Miller, who had been born in slavery and yet had become a financial force in Wilmington, dealing in land, loaning money and entering mortgages with blacks and whites alike. One member of the detachment that took Miller recalled that he was "one Negro that we could not make keep quiet and he talked and talked until Ed McKoy's gun went 'click click' and when we told him to shut up, he kept a little quieter."

Like most triumphant revolutionary governments, having silenced its principal opponents, the new administration declared its devotion to public order. They fired all the black and Fusionist city employees, starting with firefighters and police officers. They declared that school committees henceforth would be composed "exclusively of white citizens," even in black districts. The white terror in the streets persisted, even though Waddell notified whites "who seem disposed to abuse the opportunity of carrying arms which recent events afforded" that "no further turbulence or disorderly conduct will be tolerated." In an article he wrote for Collier's Magazine two weeks after the riot, Wilmington's new mayor explained that "there was no intimidation used in the establishment of the present city government."

### 'WHITE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE'

Flush with victory in the stolen election, Alfred Waddell unveiled the "White Declaration of Independence" on Nov. 9. Given that Wilmington's politics and economy were controlled by whites before and after the election, the declaration's seven main points suggest the wide gap that existed between reality and rhetoric in the city that fall.

Here are excerpts from the declaration:

**"First** That the time has passed for the intelligent citizens of the community owning 90% of the property and paying taxes in like proportion, to be ruled by negroes.

**"Second** That we will not tolerate the action of unscrupulous white men in affiliating with the negroes so that by means of their votes they can dominate the intelligent and thrifty element in the community, thus causing business to stagnate and progress to be out of the question.

**"Third** That the negro has demonstrated by antagonizing our interest in every way, and especially by his ballot, that he is incapable of realizing that his interests are and should be identical with those of the community. ...

**"Fifth** That we propose in the future to give to white men a large part of the employment heretofore given to negroes ...

**"Sixth** We are prepared to treat the negroes with justice and consideration in all matters which do not involve sacrifices of the interest of the intelligent and progressive portion of the community. But are equally prepared now and immediately to enforce what we know to be our rights.

**"Seventh** That we have been, in our desire for harmony and peace, blinded both to our best interests and our rights. A climax was reached when the negro paper of this city published an article so vile and slanderous that it would in most communities have resulted in the lynching of the editor. We deprecate lynching and yet there is no punishment, provided by the courts, adequate for this offense. We therefore owe it to the people of this community and of this city, as a protection against such license in the future, that the paper known as the "Record" cease to be published and that its editor [Alexander Manly] be banished from this community."

# Chapter 9

## THE AFTERMATH

Despite Mayor Waddell's assertion of "no intimidation," martial celebrations seemed in order. On Nov. 11, a military parade of five companies marched throughout Wilmington, displaying two rapid-fire guns and the Hotchkiss gun of the Naval Reserves. It was not merely a celebration of white supremacy but an assurance that the new regime was firmly in charge. The *Morning Star* called the parade "a formidable demonstration of the resources for the maintenance of order."

Three days later, the statewide Democratic Party flung a huge street party in Raleigh after nightfall. More than 2,000 torches illuminated the cheering throngs, and 500 barrels of burning tar along the parade route filled the air with plumes of colored smoke, creating a carnival atmosphere. The victorious Democrats assembled a booklet, "North Carolina's Glorious Victory, 1898," that trumpeted the white supremacy campaign and highlighted its leaders.

On Sunday, Nov. 13, the white Christians of Wilmington filed into their churches and heard celebrations of the slaughter. The Rev. J.W. Kramer declared that the mobs in the streets had been "doing God's service." At First Baptist Church, congregants heard the Rev. Calvin S. Blackwell compare the victory of white supremacy to the triumph of the Lord and his heavenly hosts over Satan and his "black robed angels." He dismissed the killings as "a mere incident" and observed, without much originality, that "you cannot make an omelet without breaking a few eggs. The primary purpose was not to kill but to educate."

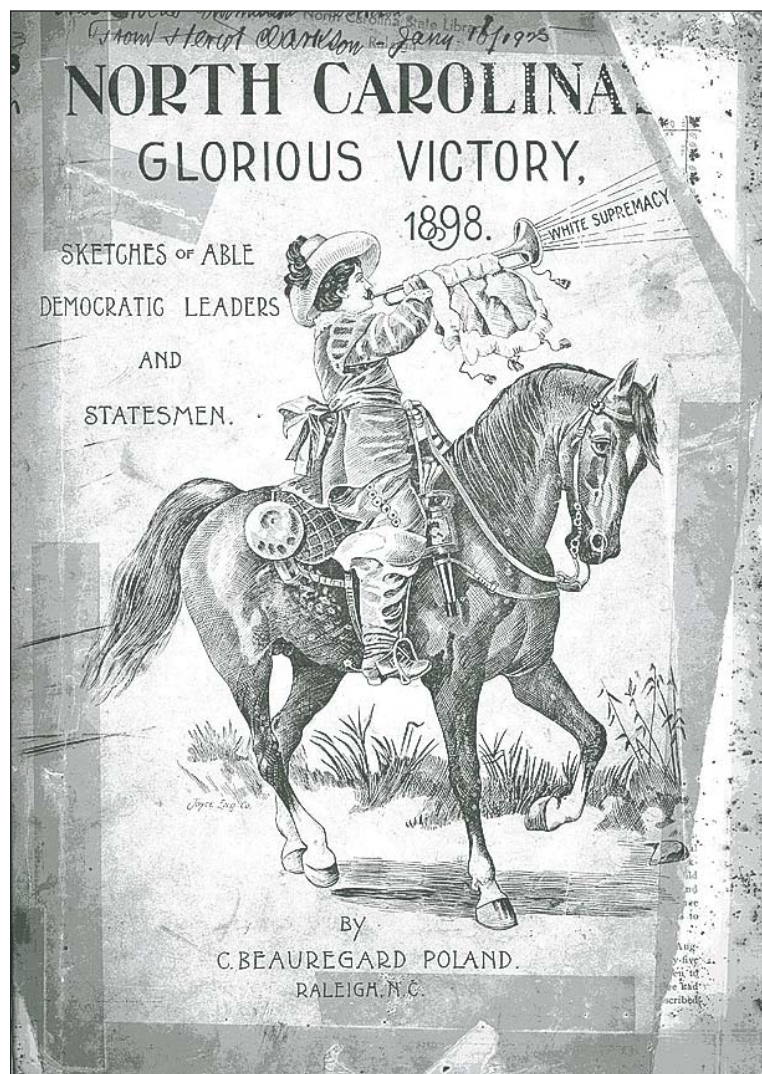
In his own defense of mass murder, the Rev. Payton H. Hoge at First Presbyterian Church parsed a passage from Proverbs: "He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city." The author of Proverbs plainly was endorsing self-control, as opposed to the taking of cities, but Hoge had his own interpretation. "Since last we met in these walls, we have taken a city," crowed Hoge. "To God be the praise."

The public silence of those who opposed the massacre said as much as the celebrations of those who supported it. Though besieged by visitors and telegrams begging for help for black North Carolinians, Republican President William McKinley said nothing. The lack

of federal response sent the unmistakable signal that conservative white Southerners ruled at their own whim and the nation would no longer quibble about who killed whom.

The following year, the bloody hands that welcomed Red Shirt terror in 1898 moved to take the ballot away from black North Carolinians forever. The first order of business in 1899 was to disfranchise blacks and many poor whites, making certain that an alliance of "low-born scum and quondam slaves," as a *News and Observer* editorial put it, would never again threaten elite white rule.

The Democrats introduced a constitutional amendment that cre-



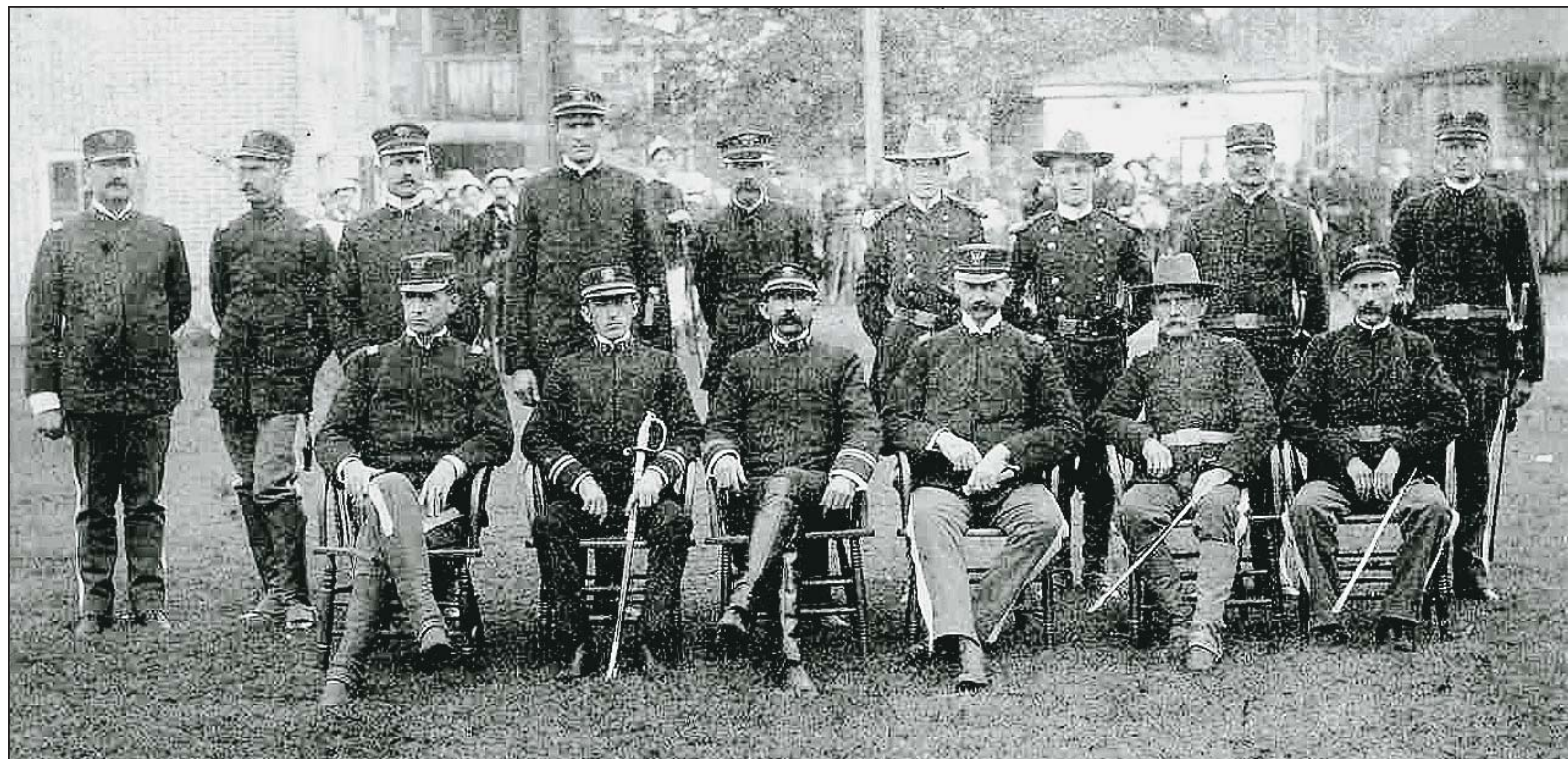
This Democratic Party booklet trumpeted the white supremacy campaign and highlighted its leaders.

COURTESY N.C. OFFICE OF ARCHIVES & HISTORY

ated literacy tests for voting and placed a poll tax on aspiring voters. The "grandfather clause" protected illiterate whites for a time; any lineal descendant of a man eligible to vote before 1867 — a white man — need not prove his literacy. Even so, the suffrage amendment eventually removed voting rights from nearly all blacks and many whites. In 1896, 85.4 percent of North Carolina's electorate had cast a ballot. By 1904, less than 50 percent would vote.

It was not only in the South that democratic horizons narrowed. In a 1900 editorial about the disfranchisement campaign, *The New York Times* stated: "Northern men no longer denounce the suppression of the Negro vote in the South as it used to be denounced in Reconstruction days. The necessity of it under the supreme law of self-preservation is candidly recognized."

Its "necessity" seems less evident to most of us today, but the Wilmington race riot of 1898 stands among the most important events in the history of North Carolina and is a pivotal moment in the history of the United States. It was nothing less than a counter-revolution against interracial democracy, and it reverberated far beyond the state. Its aftermath witnessed the birth of the Jim Crow social order, the end of black voting rights and the rise of a one-party political system in the South that strangled the aspirations of generations of blacks and whites.



A militia unit in Wilmington. Immediately after the election of 1898, military might showed that the new regime was firmly in charge.

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# Chapter 10

## THE IMPACT OF 1898



A scene of the segregated South, taken in 1938 at the Halifax County Courthouse in northeastern North Carolina.

PHOTO BY JOHN VACHON/FARM SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

The Wilmington race riot did not invent segregation in the South but instead cemented it. Right after the Civil War, Southern whites had attempted to segregate public life, often modeling their efforts on laws passed in the North in the 1840s. Newly freed black Southerners chose to build their own worlds of community and aspiration, though they steadfastly resisted any segregation that smacked of exclusion. In Fusion-era North Carolina, blacks and whites had attempted, in their halting and imperfect way, to practice multiracial politics. But the white supremacy campaign slammed the door on democracy and installed a new order.

The new social order was frequently referred to as “Jim Crow,” after a stock minstrel show character whose antics demeaned African-Americans. The power of white skin in the Jim Crow South was both stark and subtle. White supremacy permeated daily life so deeply that most white people could no more ponder it than fish might consider the wetness of water.

The racial etiquette that emerged from the white supremacist violence of 1898 was at once bizarre, arbitrary and nearly inviolable, inscribed in what W.E.B. Du Bois called “the cake of custom.” A white man who would never shake hands with a black man might refuse to permit anyone but a black man to shave his face, cut his hair or give him a shampoo. A white man might share his

bed, but never his table, with a black woman. Black breasts could suckle white babies, and black hands could pat out biscuit dough for white mouths, but black heads must never try on a hat in a department store, lest it be rendered unfit for sale to white people. Black maids washed the bodies of the aged and infirm, but the starched white uniforms they were compelled to wear could not be laundered in the same washing machines that white people used.

The folkways of white supremacy made it permissible to call a favored black man “Uncle” or “Professor,” so long as he was not actually your uncle or a real college professor. Thus the titles contained a mixture of mockery and affection. But a black man must never hear the words “mister” or “sir” from white lips. Black women were “girls” until they were old enough to be called “auntie.” Under no circumstances should they ever hear a white person of any age address them as “Mrs.” or “Miss.”

The eternal racial views of almighty God were well-known to white North Carolinians in the Age of Jim Crow.

Most white Christians came to believe that white supremacy was the will of God; the Lord himself had placed them above the “sons of Ham,” whose appointed purpose was to be hewers of white people’s wood and drawers of white people’s water.

This was the genius of white supremacy. Though it was a social order imposed and maintained by force, its defenders made it seem not only natural but even divinely ordained. Any challenge to white supremacy, North Carolina’s superintendent of schools told an auditorium filled with black college students in 1927, would represent “a violation of God’s eternal laws as fixed as the stars.”

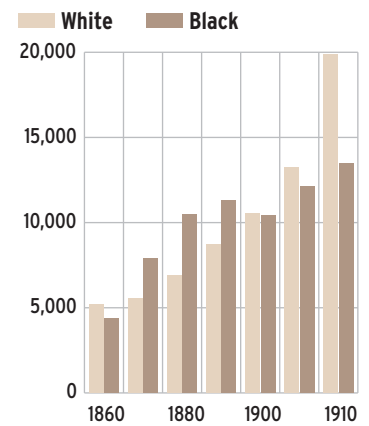
This was the world shaped by the men who had overthrown the Fusion government and ensured that white supremacy would reign in North Carolina. In the years following the campaign, they crowed about it. “We have fought for this issue and against that policy,” Charles Aycock told supporters before he died in 1912, “but everywhere and all the time we have fought for white supremacy.”

### MEASURING THE EFFECTS OF WHITE SUPREMACY

It is impossible to fully measure the effects of the white supremacy campaign on blacks, but these statistics begin to suggest them:

Wilmington becomes a white-majority city.

Wilmington population by race

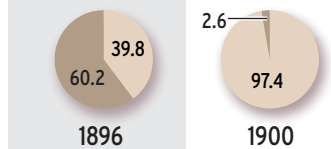


North Carolina becomes a one-party state.

Percent of votes for governor

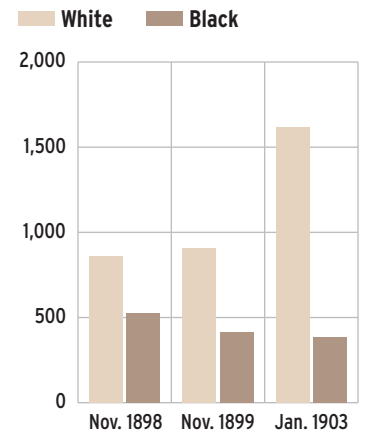


Percent of votes for president



African-American education suffers.

Wilmington city school disbursements



Source: 1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission Report

The News & Observer

C M Y K

13H, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2006

90  
80  
70  
60  
50  
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30  
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10

# Chapter 11

## THE MEMORY OF 1898

For decades afterward, participation in the 1898 campaign became the irreplaceable political credential; at least five of the state's next six governors were drawn from its ranks. As late as 1920, Cameron Morrison campaigned on his laurels as a Red Shirt Democrat in the "party of white supremacy."

And yet, even as white supremacy tightened its grip on North Carolina, the memory of what that victory had entailed — murders, banishments, stuffed ballot boxes — soon became murky. The central episode was gradually cleansed from our state's history, from our textbooks and our memories. Eventually, Charles B. Aycock became known as the education governor.

However, the raw violence of Wilmington was not completely forgotten. It could, of course, be seen every day, everywhere, in the Jim Crow world it had made. More than 60 blacks were lynched in North Carolina between 1900 and 1943. Whites would often raise the specter of 1898 when mounting demands from African-Americans for justice made it necessary to remind them of what could happen. "Sometimes," historian Glenda Gilmore writes, "murder does its best work in memory, after the fact."

During World War II, black protests against racial discrimination blossomed, especially among black men in uniform. Black soldiers stationed at Camp Davis, 30 miles north of Wilmington, overturned buses at Grace and Second streets in Wilmington to protest segregation policies that limited black seating. Mayor Bruce Cameron pleaded with Gov. J. Melville Broughton to "tell them as long as you are governor the colored people will have to behave themselves."

On July 11, 1943, Broughton mounted a podium beside the Cape Fear River that Alfred Waddell had promised to clot with black bodies. In language evoking the inflammatory tirades of 1898 against blacks preying on white women, Broughton condemned "radical agitators" who he claimed were seeking "to advance theories and philosophies which if carried to their logical conclusion would result only in a mongrel race." Then he cut to the chase: "Forty-five years ago, blood flowed freely in the streets of this city." It was hard to escape the conclusion that if the

"radical agitators" persisted, it could happen again.

Broughton was not simply a pandering politician intent on maintaining law and order. He reflected the view of much of North Carolina's elite, who still understood the violence upon which their world rested.

During the war, Josephus Daniels' sons, Jonathan and Frank Daniels, often conferred about race relations in North Carolina. Jonathan worked as an assistant to President Franklin Roosevelt on race relations. Alarmed at "the rising insistence of Negroes on their rights," Jonathan favored small concessions in order to maintain white domination. "We thought we had to get a little justice [for blacks] just to keep them in line," he said later.

Frank Daniels, who stayed in Raleigh to publish *The News and Observer*, took a harder stance. If African-Americans continue to "keep on insisting for more privileges," he wrote, "a worse condition is going to exist in North Carolina before very long than the period from 1895 to 1902, because white people just



After a violent demonstration by black soldiers in Wilmington during World War II, Gov. J. Melville Broughton made a speech invoking the 1898 riots.

NEWS & OBSERVER FILE PHOTO



A Rights of White People meeting at Hugh MacRae Park in Wilmington, 1971. 'What we need in this town are some dead agitators. They should be shot and left in the streets ...,' a white man said.

PHOTO BY ANDY HOWELL/WILMINGTON STAR-NEWS

aren't going to stand for it." If blacks continued to press for "equality," Daniels insisted, "white people are going to rise in arms and eliminate them from the national picture." In the end, Daniels warned, continued civil rights activism would "mean that all of [the blacks] that can read and write are going to be eliminated in the Hitler style."

Despite several riots and persistent black protests across the state, the bloodbath some predicted did not occur. Newly committed to America's image as a beacon of democracy, the federal government, the national Democratic Party and many newspapers, including *The News and Observer*, began to actively oppose white terror after the war.

Lynching was no longer a viable political option, though it continued to happen occasionally. When a black man in Jackson, N.C., miraculously escaped the clutches of a lynch mob in 1947, Gov. R. Gregg Cherry attempted to prosecute members of the mob, though he failed. When the Klan committed dozens of kidnappings, whippings and shootings in Eastern North Carolina in the early 1950s, 60 Klansmen were indicted. During the 1960s, white terrorism persisted but rarely won public applause.

And yet from the very first hints of the modern black freedom struggle, the memory of violence haunted Wilmington. Hubert Eaton, an African-American physician who pressed for integration in Wilmington for many years, recalls a 1951 school board meeting in which he was rebuffed by the board's attorney, who alluded to the violence of 1898 "as an effort to intimidate — to warn that it could happen again."

In 1971, when the upheavals over school integration tore through Wilmington, a white man at a Rights of White People rally in Hugh MacRae Park told the *Wilmington Morning Star*: "What we need in this town are some dead agitators. They should be shot and left in the streets as a reminder for three days and then bury them. I've got my gun."

When Wilmington's streets raged with violence in early 1971, one black woman recalled, her schoolteachers warned her about what had happened at the turn of the century. "Those old experienced teachers," she told an interviewer, "... talked in hush-hush tones about 1898." But the ghosts along the river persisted in their whispering, and that is what

echoed in our church in 1971 when an African-American woman told my father, the Rev. Vernon C. Tyson, "They say that river was full of black bodies."

It is no wonder that the furious conflict that marked the black freedom movement in Wilmington in 1971 brought back memories of bodies drifting in the current of the Cape Fear. Wilmington's African-Americans realized that the legacy of the racial massacre still haunted the city. And this is only a little less true today. Far beyond North Carolina and 1898, the tragic events that transpired in Wilmington force us to contemplate the meaning of America's racial past and its hold on the living.

From our vantage point more than a century later, we can see that the white supremacy campaigns of the 1890s and early 1900s injected a vicious racial ideology into the heart of American political culture. Our separate and unequal lives attest to its persistence.

If 1898 has saddled us with its legacy, it also suggests how we might overcome it. Its central lesson is this: Human beings make history. The mistakes that North Carolinians made in 1898 can be mended if we choose.

# Epilogue

**BUILDING FROM THE PAST**



Modern Wilmington has risen on the banks of the Cape Fear River.

PAUL STEPHEN/WILMINGTON STAR-NEWS

**A**s a historian, I find it easier to understand what happened in the past than to draw easy lessons for the future. We cannot go back and change the history and yet, as William Faulkner observed, “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”

What I do know is that in order to change the past, we must understand and confront it. I first heard about the Wilmington race riot of 1898 in 1971, soon after I entered Roland-Grise Junior High School in Wilmington. Some

friends and I were playing baseball in Hugh MacRae Park. As day dimmed toward dusk, we huddled in a dugout to smoke cigarettes and discuss the mysteries that seventh-graders ponder. As we chattered away in the dark, we began to hear engines racing and car doors slamming. At first, we assumed that it was only the stirrings of a Little League game. But when we peered out of the dugout, hundreds of white men and a few women had gathered on the baseball diamond, many brandishing rifles and shotguns and others waving U.S. and Confederate flags. Several held a banner that proclaimed the name of their organization: The Rights of White People.

Their leader, Sgt. Leroy Gibson, walked up to the makeshift microphone and began belting out how the “niggers” and “nigger lovers” had all the rights and white working

people had none. “The niggers keep talking about how Waddell said in 1898 they were gonna fill up the river with carcasses,” he said. “I don’t know if they did or not. But if this integration and rioting business doesn’t stop, we’re going to clog that river with dead niggers this time, and I mean it.”

What I saw that day was hatred. What I have seen too often since then is the neglect of public schools and civic responsibilities. What I learned in the years that followed was that the venom and the apathy were an inheritance, passed down through the generations from days of slavery and the riot of 1898. It was only much later that I learned that this sad epic in our state’s and nation’s history harbors stories of hope. In their imperfect way, the losers of 1898 — the leaders of the Fusion movement who tried to practice in-

terracial politics and create strong public institutions — offer examples that we can learn from. We have made great strides since 1898, but the effort to separate people into “us” and “them” continues.

A new Fusion movement, one rooted in hope and generosity, and encompassing not only blacks and whites but new immigrants to the state, could still redeem the best dreams that have made us. We look to Wilmington in 1898, then, not to wring our hands in a fruitless nostalgia of pain, but to redeem a democratic promise. And so we hold fast to what Charles Chesnut, an African-American from North Carolina and one of our great writers, called “the shining thread of hope,” which permitted him, over a century ago, to close his own story of the Wilmington catastrophe: “There’s time enough, but none to spare.”

**WHAT WE TOLD THE CHILDREN: TEXTBOOKS SINCE 1907**

In the years after 1898, the state of North Carolina told the story of the white supremacy campaign to its children in a variety of ways. The earliest textbooks I have found, published in 1901, 1903 and 1906, ignored these events. The history text my son uses at his Chapel Hill middle school, "North Carolina: A Proud State in Our Nation" by W.S. Powell, is equally silent – though other contemporary textbooks mention the riot in detail. What follows is a sample of the state's official history:

**1907 – "Young People's History of North Carolina" by Daniel Harvey Hill** refers to the election of Daniel Russell, the Fusionist governor, and then notes that "in the second year of Governor Russell's term, the Democrats elected a majority in the Legislature and the State returned in part to Democratic control."

**1916 – "A Child's History of North Carolina" by W.C. Allen** instructs that the Fusion legislature "put the city largely under negro rule. ... The government of the city was badly carried on, and lawlessness prevailed." The account says that blacks fired on whites, and whites returned the fire, killing several. "After the riot was over the incompetent negro and white officers of the city were forced to resign, one by one, and competent white men chosen in their places ... a conservative board of aldermen [was] installed, negro policemen discharged ... Thus the revolution was at an end. Since that time Wilmington has greatly prospered."

**1933 – "The Story of North Carolina" by Alex Mathews with Walter Clinton Jackson** teaches: "There were many Negro office-holders in the eastern part of the state, some of whom were poorly fitted for their tasks. This naturally aroused ill feeling between the races."

**1940 – "North Carolina for Boys and Girls" by Sarah William Ashe and Orina Kidd Garber (1940)** says that under the Fusion government "negroes could hold office. The days of the Carpetbaggers seemed about to return. But the people of North Carolina remembered those terrible days too well to allow them to return."

**1958 – "North Carolina History" by Daniel Jay Whitener** states: "Negroes who came to the rallies saw the 'Red Shirts' and silently slipped away. The Negro by nature was friendly and eager to avoid trouble ... the Negroes were frightened and on election day many stayed at home. The careful planning and leadership of Simmons helped the Democrats. White supremacy was the issue. ... A few days later a bad race riot took place in Wilmington. Negroes were killed and both Negroes and white men were wounded. Many Negroes fled from the town. The revolution of 1898 restored 'white supremacy.'"

**1978 – "Carolina Quest" by Thomas C. Parramore** says: "Two days after the election a force of six hundred whites gathered at Wilmington and ushered in the new era by wrecking and burning the printing office ... In the rioting that followed, ten blacks were reported killed and many others fled the city, including black city officials. A number of blacks were jailed for 'starting a riot' and a new white administration took over Wilmington's government."

**1987 – "North Carolina: The Story of a Special Kind of Place" by William S. Powell** reports: "In Wilmington, on the night of the election, armed white men appeared on the street. They were determined to end 'Negro rule' in the city promptly. On Nov. 9 and 10 there was a bloody riot in which ten or more blacks were killed, the office of Alex Manly's black newspaper was burned, and many blacks fled. Republican rule in Wilmington came to an immediate end when Silas Wright, the black mayor, fled to New York. Three days later, the Raleigh News and Observer reported: 'Negro rule is at an end in North Carolina forever.'"

**2006 – "North Carolina: the History of an American State" by Kenneth Townsend** teaches: "At no time did blacks ever enjoy representation equal to their numbers nor did 'Negro rule' ever exist in North Carolina. Nevertheless, the Democrats used the race issue to frighten voters and regain power. ... Riding horses, wearing red shirts, and carrying guns ... Democratic ruffians broke up Fusionist political rallies, disrupted black church meetings, whipped outspoken blacks, and drove blacks from the polls when they tried to register."

TIMOTHY B. TYSON

# The future

**RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMISSION**

In May, the 13 members of the 1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission offered recommendations to "repair the wrong" done 108 years ago. Many of the recommendations would require action by the General Assembly, which returns to Raleigh in January.

The text of the commission's recommendations:

**EMPOWERMENT:** Acknowledging that the democratic process failed in Wilmington, resulting in persistent, unfavorable treatment especially to the African American community, government leadership at all levels will pursue actions that repair the wrong.

1. Acknowledge that the violence of 1898 was a conspiracy of a white elite that used intimidation and force to replace a duly elected local government; that people lost their lives, livelihoods, and were banished from their homes without due process of the law, and governments at all levels failed to protect citizens.

2. Establish a Restructuring and Development Authority including local leadership to supervise implementation of a strategic vision funded through an endowment, supported by federal, state and local governments, as well as media and businesses, especially those which benefited from the consequences of 1898.

3. Support amendment of the federal Voting Rights Act to add New Hanover County.

4. Create a study commission to examine the broader impact of slavery, Jim Crow and discrimination on the lives of African Americans.

**ECONOMIC REDEVELOPMENT:** Recognizing the long-term economic disadvantages created by banishment, loss of civil service positions and intimidation, funding from all sources will be directed by the Restructuring and Development Authority to improve economic development opportunities.

5. Support judicial redress to compensate heirs of victims who can prove loss and relationship to victims via intestacy statutes.

6. Provide incentives for business development of areas impacted by the Wilmington race riot of 1898 (e.g., establish enterprise zone; create small business incubator with tax incentives to attract minority-owned businesses).

7. Increase minority home ownership in impacted areas (e.g., use eminent domain to acquire vacant commercial properties in Brooklyn and

Southside; sell properties to low-income residents of those sections with guaranteed mortgages).

**EDUCATION:** Educational information about the events of 1898 will be made available to all ages and regions using print, audio-visual media, and the worldwide web.

8. Maintain and update the final report of the Wilmington Race Riot Commission with the N.C. Office of Archives and History; distribute the published report to appropriate local, state and national repositories, and to individuals who contributed toward the research and development of a more complete record.

9. Incorporate the 1898 events into Department of Public Instruction curriculum learning expectations; develop appropriate grade-level curriculum materials; and provide teacher workshops for effectively integrating the materials into instruction.

10. Newspapers (News and Observer, The Charlotte Observer, The Wilmington Star, The Washington Post, etc.) should acknowledge the role of media in the events of 1898 and work with the North Carolina black press association to prepare a summary of the commission report for distribution statewide. The commission calls upon said papers to study the effects of 1898 and impact of Jim Crow on the state's black press and to endow scholarships at the state's public universities.

11. Fund development for a documentary to be aired nationally, regionally and locally. The documentary should be suitable for inclusion in school curriculum materials.

12. Increase support for tutoring and mentoring programs in New Hanover County, targeting at-risk youth.

**COMMEMORATION:** Recognition of the documented events of 1898 will be conspicuously displayed and made available in prominent public locations.

13. Fund establishment of an 1898 exhibit at the Cape Fear Museum and creation of a traveling exhibit designed by the museum for use statewide.

14. Provide additional funding for the New Hanover County Public Library to make resources available relative to 1898 and its impact.

15. Erect plaques, markers and/or monuments to identify key participants and locations of 1898 events statewide and in Wilmington.

**SOURCES**

As I wrote this account, I relied heavily on the "1898 Wilmington Race Riot Report," whose principal researcher and author is LeRae S. Umfleet. This report is a groundbreaking compilation, including a full narrative of the events in their historical context and informative appendices.

In addition to a variety of archival and newspaper sources, I relied upon two books that should interest general readers. H. Leon Prather's book, "We Have Taken A City: The Wilmington Racial Massacre and Coup of 1898" (1984), is probably our best account of the tragedy. A short version of Prather's book appears in "Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and Its Legacy" (1998), an anthology of articles I edited with historian David Cecelski.

I also drew upon scholarly works, especially "The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina, 1894-1901" by Helen Edmonds (1951), which puts the race riot in a wide context, and "Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920" by Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore (1996).

"Race and Politics in North Carolina, 1872-1901" by Eric Anderson (1981) furnishes a good overview of the politics of the period. "Maverick Republican in the Old North State: A Political Biography of Daniel Russell" by Jeffrey J. Crow and Robert Durden (1977) provides similar context.

I frequently consulted "The History of A Southern State: North Carolina" by Hugh T. Lefler and Albert R. Newsome (1954); "White Violence and Black Response: From Reconstruction to Montgomery" by Herbert Shapiro (1988); "Black Wilmington and the North Carolina Way" by John L. Godwin (2000) and "North Carolina Through Four Centuries" by William S. Powell (1989).

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