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News Release

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WILMINGTON RACE RIOT DRAFT REPORT OFFERS REVELATIONS

(RALEIGH – Dec.5) – The public will get a first look at a 600 page draft report, including appendices, that examines the conditions leading up to and the consequences of the 1898 Wilmington Race Riot on Thursday, Dec. 15, at 11 a.m. at Thalian Hall in Wilmington. The riot took place in an era when similar violent attacks on black communities by white mobs occurred in Atlanta, Tulsa and Rosewood, Fla. In Wilmington, in a move unparalleled in U.S. history, a coup d’etat replaced the city’s duly elected officeholders with white supremacists. An unknown number of blacks were killed.

Created by the legislature in 2000, the Wilmington Race Riot Commission is a product of bills introduced by Rep. Thomas Wright and the late Sen. Luther Jordan. Their legislation led to the creation of a 13-member commission to initiate and review research completed by the Office of Archives and History in the N.C. Department of Cultural Resources. Citizens are encouraged to review the draft report and to make comments before the final report is completed. This report will be presented to the General Assembly with recommendations in May 2006, and will be available online at www.ncculture.com.

In the Reconstruction period following the Civil War, the white gentry class and businessmen merged to retain control of Wilmington. But the rise of black political power through alliances between Republicans – the party of Lincoln – and Populists, a grassroots political movement, led to a dramatic shift in power in Wilmington after the elections of 1894 and 1896. The 1898 riot on Nov. 10 placed white supremacists in firm control of the city.

“This research demonstrates unequivocally that the Wilmington Race riot was not a spontaneous event, but was directed by white businessmen and Democratic leaders to regain control of Wilmington,” says Dr. Jeffrey Crow, deputy secretary of the N.C. Office of Archives and History.

In elections on Nov. 8, Democrats won easily by stuffing ballot boxes and intimidating black voters. A Committee of Twenty-Five was formed, and on Nov. 9 prepared resolutions called the White Declaration of Independence. They presented the demands that day to leading black political and business leaders, known as the Committee of Colored Citizens (CCC).

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A pivotal demand to the CCC was that the community oust newspaper editor Alex Manly, who had published an article in the *Record*, the city's only African American newspaper, that challenged claims by whites regarding interracial sexual relationships. The CCC was to respond by 7:30 a.m. on Nov. 10. No response was received from the CCC at that time, and by 9 a.m. a group of men marched to the *Record* printing office and destroyed the newspaper building.

Before the day ended, a mob of up to 2,000 whites roamed the streets, armed with rifles and fueled by weeks of propaganda in newspapers and rhetoric-filled meetings. Rifles and rapid fire machine guns were fired, and black men were killed or wounded throughout the day. Estimates of deaths range from six to 100, but records from the coroner's office, hospitals or churches are incomplete, so the total remains unknown. There were no white fatalities. By 4 p.m., the Republican mayor, board of aldermen, and chief of police were forced to resign and were replaced by men selected by the Committee of Twenty-Five. All black municipal employees subsequently were fired.

Following the riot and the coup d'état, the only government overthrow recorded in U.S. history, results of the Nov. 10 elections were contested. Key to lead researcher LeRae Umfleet's findings was a document found at the Bellamy Mansion concerning the election of 1898. It detailed a court case brought by Oliver Dockery, Republican congressional candidate, who challenged the Nov. 8, 1898, victory by John D. Bellamy, Jr. Trial testimony offered insights into the riot and the period preceding the political campaign.

Through research in libraries of the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society, New Hanover County Public Library, Duke University, East Carolina University, UNC-Chapel Hill, and the State Archives of North Carolina, Umfleet was able to document the building tensions, atmosphere of violence, and conspiracy to overthrow the duly elected government. She found the composition of the "Secret Nine," a group of businessmen who orchestrated activities of two Supremacist groups, the Red Shirts and the "White Government Union" clubs. Both groups regularly brandished weapons while marching through black neighborhoods. Umfleet secured from the National Archives in Washington, D.C., letters written by blacks and others to President William McKinley asking for protection and assistance after the riot. She interviewed Wilmington residents to learn their family histories concerning the riot.

In addition to documenting the course of events before and after the riot, the report is the first to examine the economic impact on what had been Wilmington's large and prospering black community, and the shift in the city's demographics as African Americans fled or were forced out of town. The report lays to rest the myth that the 1898 Wilmington race riot was necessary to end government corruption and demonstrates that the riot was waged to reestablish white Democratic control.

The report contains 260 pages of text, plus 400 pages of maps, pictures, charts about economics and others. A limited number of the reports will be available in Wilmington on Dec. 15. The full report will be available at website <http://www.ah.dcr.state.nc.us/1898-wrrc/> and downloadable in sections.

For further information, contact the Office of Information and Marketing Services at (919) 807-7385. The N.C. Department of Cultural Resources is a state agency dedicated to the promotion and protection of North Carolina's arts, history and culture. For more information about the Department of Cultural Resources visit www.ncculture.com.

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