

## Chapter 7: Destiny of a Race

- State leaders failed to react to the violence in Wilmington. Governor Daniel L. Russell's Adjutant General was the only member of his Council of State to play a role in suppressing the violence of November 10. No state investigation took place.
- President William McKinley held a cabinet meeting to discuss violence in Wilmington and Phoenix, South Carolina, and discussed the possibility of sending troops into the state to calm the violence. No troops were sent because McKinley received no request for assistance from Governor Russell. The President was assured by Wilmington leaders that peace had been restored despite receiving numerous letters requesting help.
- A federal investigation was opened by the U.S. Attorney General's Office in response to the claim of federally appointed commissioner Robert Bunting that he was forcibly ejected from the city. The files were closed with no indictments in 1900.
- In another attempt to bring Democrats to justice, Oliver Dockery unsuccessfully challenged the election of John D. Bellamy to the U. S. House of Representatives.
- Members of Wilmington's African American community attended church on the Sunday following the violence to hear ministers deliver sermons emphasizing appeasement and obedience.
- African Americans nationwide rallied to the cause of Wilmington's blacks and held meetings to pressure President McKinley's administration into action. However, many leading black figures were split on the best solution to the "Negro problem" and no nationwide campaign materialized.
- Wilmington Democrats rationalized their actions and countered claims of Republicans throughout the country at every opportunity. Whites maintained their control over the city through intimidation and threats to Republicans and blacks.
- Democrats solidified their control over city government by securing a rewritten city charter from the new legislature in January 1899. Under the new charter, Waddell and the Board of Aldermen were officially elected into office in March 1899 with no Republican resistance.
- A new suffrage amendment to disfranchise black voters through literacy tests and poll taxes was added to the state constitution by voters in 1900. Charles B. Aycock was also elected governor that year. The Democratically controlled state legislature overturned Fusion legislation and placed control over county governments in Raleigh. New election laws were constructed to limit Republican power in the 1900 election.
- African Americans in Wilmington adjusted to the societal changes, redefining a position for themselves under Democratic control seated in the white supremacy movement and Jim Crow legislation. Among the consequences were inequities in public education funding and the replacement of black laborers by whites on the city's docks and elsewhere.

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*“The destiny of a race is not in the keeping of one President or one party or one epoch of history. I have an abiding faith in the future.”* Timothy Thomas Fortune to Booker T. Washington, December 17, 1898

The news of the riot traveled throughout the state across by telegraph and through letters. Leading the effort to publicize the events in Wilmington was Raleigh editor Josephus Daniels. The *News and Observer* carried headlines from Wilmington, Raleigh, and Washington, D. C., to show that statewide and national interest focused on Wilmington. Within a week of the violence, John Spencer Bassett, history professor at Trinity College in Durham, wrote to colleague Herbert Baxter Adams that the riot was “justifiable at no point.” Monitoring the campaign and violence from his academic tower, Bassett observed that Wilmington’s black population was “cowed” and that most whites in the state did not believe the accusations of “negro domination” thrown about by Democrats. Bassett saw the irony in the situation, writing that when Waddell, who had just led a mob to destroy the *Record* press, was made mayor, his first order of business was to demand an end to the violence: “If he [Waddell] had any sense of humor he must have split his undergarments laughing at his own joke.”<sup>1</sup>

### State and National Reaction

Governor Daniel L. Russell first learned of the crisis in the city by a series of telegrams from Walker Taylor and George Morton. He reacted by sending troops from nearby towns to the city. But Russell’s hands were tied by political maneuvers of the Democrats, who had threatened impeachment, and by Red Shirts, who had threatened bodily harm. Two days after the

riot, a newspaper observed that many “freely predicted that Governor Russell will be on his good behavior henceforth in view of the Democratic Legislature which is elected.”<sup>2</sup> After the election and the coup, Russell considered resigning his office even after Democrats relaxed their impeachment rhetoric. However, he did not resign, and the Democrats began to move forward with their agenda despite the fact that Russell still had two more years in office.<sup>3</sup>

The Democratic Party’s effort to silence and threaten Republicans and Populists was effective. Other members of state government followed Russell’s example, remaining quiet and uninvolved. As part of his Fusion campaign, Russell had tried to bridge differences in Republican, Democratic, and Populist Party leadership circles by distributing political appointments across the parties. Thus, once the Democrats began their campaign, Russell may not have been able to communicate well with some of his Council of State members. Russell regularly called meetings of his council, and, on November 10, 1898, the council met but only to discuss a printing contract. None of their official minutes address the problems in Wilmington before or after the violence.<sup>4</sup> One member of Russell’s council, Attorney General Zebulon

<sup>1</sup> John Spencer Bassett to Herbert Baxter Adams, November 15, 1898 from the Herbert Baxter Adams Papers, Johns Hopkins University as quoted in McDuffie, “Politics in Wilmington,” 749.

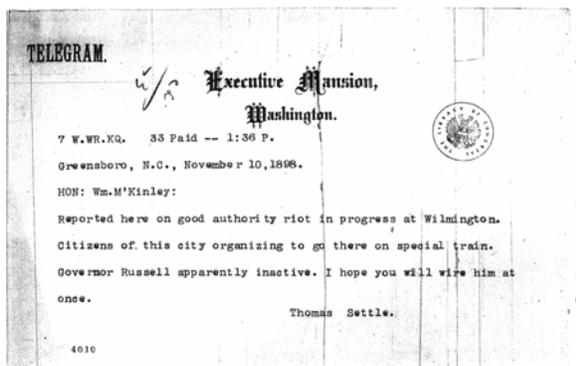
<sup>2</sup> *Morning Star* (Wilmington), November 12, 1898.

<sup>3</sup> Murmur of impeachment made it to the papers as soon as the dust settled from the election and violence. The *Messenger* asked its readers if it was possible that the newly elected Democratic legislature would impeach Russell in 1899. *Wilmington Messenger*, November 12, 1898. For more on the impact of the 1898 election on Russell’s administration, see Crow, *Maverick Republican*, 134-188.

<sup>4</sup> Minutes, 1898-1899, Council of State, Governor’s Papers, State Archives, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh.

Walser, could have followed the lead of the national attorney general and assisted in the investigation. However, it appears that no investigative action was taken by the office.<sup>5</sup> Assuming the largest role as far as state government was concerned, Adjutant General Andrew Cowles aided Walker Taylor at the request of the governor when Russell ordered out the state militia companies in the region.<sup>6</sup>

At the national level, President McKinley had been warned before the election by men such as Senator Jeter Pritchard and his appointed Collector of Customs in the Port John C. Dancy, that the city was armed and that violence was expected at any time. McKinley received word via telegram of the conflict and held a cabinet meeting to discuss the situation.



Telegram to McKinley from  
Thomas Settle, November 10, 1898.  
Image: William McKinley Papers, National  
Archives microfilm

<sup>5</sup>A review of the attorney general's records do, however, show a significant rise in litigation throughout the state regarding contested elections and the refusal of some incumbent appointed and elected officials to surrender their offices to newly elected Democrats after the November 1898 elections. State Attorney General's Office, Central Files, correspondence, Letter Books and Closed Case Files, 1898-1900, North Carolina State Archives, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh.

<sup>6</sup> *Annual Report of the Adjutant-General of the State of North Carolina for the Year 1898*; Daniel Russell Governor's Papers, State Archives, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh.

McKinley's sources were limited to newspaper reports since no communication came to the president from the governor's office. McKinley and Secretary of War Russell Alger also met for two hours to discuss the situation. In a press conference after the meeting, Alger called the affair a "disgrace" to the state. He said that they had received news of 8 dead and would have sent troops had Russell requested the assistance. North Carolina papers called the threat of sending in troops a "crime," and implied that the use of federal troops was an offense similar to military occupation during Reconstruction after the Civil War. Delegates from Wilmington on both sides of the issue, plus others acting on behalf of Wilmington's black citizens, visited and corresponded with McKinley and his staff repeatedly after the violence ended.<sup>7</sup> Over

<sup>7</sup> The *Washington Post* reported that a dozen men from Wilmington were in Washington attempting to meet with the president concerning the rioting. The men had arrived the day after the riot, and other "refugees" were scattered throughout the city staying with friends and discussing the events in North Carolina. Julian S. Carr, chairman of the Durham County Democratic Executive Committee and wealthy industrialist, penned a note to President McKinley that was published in the papers. Carr's letter explained that white men "are leading the victorious column this morning and will rule North Carolina . . . no need of troops now." The actual letter received by McKinley from Carr was much less flowery. He told McKinley not to send troops to the state and made "no apologies for being a Southern Democrat." Carr offered to help the president "in solving the question" and promised to be in Washington as soon as needed to discuss the issues. Carr staked his claim as an important businessman when he stated that he employed 1,000 men, "largely colored and they would die for me." He closed with saying that he was "in position to answer for the South and especially North Carolina" to the president. A small postscript informed McKinley that Carr paid large sums of money in taxes and, as a result, felt that "no one is more interested in good stable government." *Evening Dispatch* (Wilmington), November 14, 1898; *Wilmington Messenger* November 12, 1898; Julian S. Carr to President

the next few days, McKinley received letters written by Wilmington's African Americans begging for help and by others pleading with the president on behalf of the blacks in the South.<sup>8</sup>

The letters to McKinley reflect a spectrum of responses to the violence and the desire for governmental involvement. Out-of-state correspondents stressed the patriotism of African Americans as they appealed to McKinley's honor and implored intervention: "[I]f there needs to be a standing army, please send one." Letters from Wilmington reflected a different tone and demonstrated the fearfulness of the city's blacks: "[A]re we to die like rats in a trap?" Three days after the riot, one correspondent who said that she could not "sign [her] name and live" wrote a detailed account of the violence, intimidation and banishment campaign. At the top of her letter she asked the President to "send relief as soon as possible or we perish." In the body of her note, she explained that many in the city would gladly go to Africa because of the violence: "[T]oday we are mourners in a strange land with no protection near. God help us." Another correspondent who was "afraid to own [his] name" wrote to McKinley that blacks were overpowered "with the rapid fire of the guns, and they had

cannons, in wagons, and they set fire to almost half of the City."<sup>9</sup>

Harry Hayden of the Wilmington Light Infantry, writing well after the event, recorded that McKinley met with Mrs. A. B. Skelding, wife of one of the members of the Group Six who was privy to the plans for the coup. According to Hayden, Mrs. Skelding was a native of Ohio and neighbor to the president when they were young. She visited with the president in Washington after the violence to explain her views of the situation, and counseled that the "Wilmington Rebellion" was necessary to return the city to white rule. Hayden quoted the President as saying that he understood the issues at hand and had "neither the wish nor intention of interfering."<sup>10</sup>

November 18, 1898.

Dear Madam:

Your note of the 15th instant has been received, and in reply the President requests me to say that he will be very glad to see you to-morrow, Saturday morning, at 10 o'clock.

Trusting that this hour will suit your convenience, believe me,

Very truly yours,

*[Handwritten Signature]*

Assistant Secretary  
to the President.

Mrs. Dorothy Ames Skelding,  
Washington, D. C.

McKinley, November 12, 1898, McKinley Papers, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>8</sup> A collection of letters received by McKinley is held in the Department of Justice files for 1898 in the National Archives. One of the letters was written to Marcus Hanna, Ohio U.S. senator and McKinley confidant, by S. E. Huffman of the United States Anti-Mob and Lynch Law Association who asked Hanna to use his influence with the President to facilitate an investigation of events in Wilmington. S. E. Huffman to Marcus Hanna, November 29, 1898, Department of Justice Files, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

Record of Dorothy Skelding meeting with McKinley, November 19, 1898.  
Image: Papers of William McKinley, National Archives microfilm

<sup>9</sup> Letters to President McKinley, General Records of the Department of Justice, National Archives. For full text of this and other letters, see Appendix J.

<sup>10</sup> Hayden, *WLI*, 98.

The newspapers and Democratic Party leaders kept abreast of the events in Washington in order to prepare for the possibility of federal intervention. Two days after the riot it was reported that the president had consulted with his attorney general and cabinet on the matter but that “it was too late to interfere” since, as far as they knew, all was quiet. The president and his advisors stressed that the troops would be called out only if hostilities in the city or state began anew. Compounding the situation was the fact that hostilities had also broken out in neighboring South Carolina. Some speculated that the two unsettled areas, when taken together, could in time warrant federal intervention.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The Democratic campaign was successful in stirring violent racist sentiment throughout the state. Cities such as New Bern and Wilson expected violence at any moment, and expressed anxiety similar to the fears that gripped Wilmingtonians. On the night of November 9, a riot almost broke out in Wilson. Only after a biracial meeting on the tenth and the outbreak in Wilmington was violence averted. Prior to the election, there was a violent outbreak in the Lumberton area. Called the Ashpole Riot in the Kinston *Daily Free Press*, the violence was contained to late October. Violence broke out before election day in Phoenix, in Greenwood County, South Carolina. On November 6, 1898, four black men were lynched by about 100 white men after they were implicated in killing a white man the previous day. Further news of the violence in South Carolina reported that about ten black men and one white were killed outright, and many of both races were wounded on election day. A number of whites fled the area and made their way to Washington, D.C., to plead their case with the president. Regarding the unrest, the *New York Journal* indicated that the “race problem in the South has cast a shadow over the entire land by the recent bloodshed in the Carolinas.” Therefore, as advocates for federal intervention in Wilmington sought to thrust the city’s violence into the national spotlight, the murders in South Carolina were added to the discussions. Thus, the response was diffused as the two incidents grew to be seen as examples of a larger, endemic problem of racial friction. *New York Journal* as quoted in the *Farmer and Mechanic*

Federal troops were, in fact, moved from nearby Fort Caswell into the city, but, by the time they arrived, relative calm was re-established through martial law, and the new city leaders were working to encourage peace. Those federal troops saw more trouble later in the month when about 30 black workers who were working on the fort got into a “row” with several soldiers stationed there. The resulting fight ended with a stabbing of one soldier. Other soldiers tried to retaliate against the workers, and a guard detail had to be established to protect the black men.<sup>12</sup> Some speculation has arisen that the president failed to step in because the recent victorious end of the Spanish-American War had engendered national unity and patriotic fervor, North and South, which many did not want to upset.<sup>13</sup> Some southerners contended that

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(Raleigh), November 29, 1898; *Farmer and Mechanic* (Raleigh), November 15, 1898; *News and Observer* (Raleigh), November 11, 12, 1898; *Evening Dispatch* (Wilmington), November 12, 1898; *Morning Star* (Wilmington), November 10, 11, 18, 1898; *Morning Post* (Raleigh), November 13, 1898; *Daily Free Press* (Kinston), October 24, 1898.

<sup>12</sup> Hayden, *WLI*, 98; *Morning Star* (Wilmington), November 28, 1898.

<sup>13</sup> An example of the new bond between the North and South was a speech given by President McKinley in Atlanta as part of a “peace jubilee.” McKinley said that “sectional lines no longer mar the map of the United States” and that “the cordial feeling now happily existing between the North and the South” would be helpful if the two sections faced “new problems now pressing upon us” together. Some African Americans took exception to the speech, particularly since McKinley held an “incomprehensible silence” on the issue when he did not acknowledge the “race problem” in the South and the recent violence. Former North Carolina Republican Reconstruction politician Albion Tourgee wrote McKinley that he feared the violence heralded the opening of a new chapter in race relations in which blacks were “again placed under the heel of race prejudice in the United States.” Tourgee saw a larger sweeping national movement tied to the Spanish-American War that enabled national leaders to ignore southern blacks and leave them to the devices of southern whites. An example of northern

the advancement of federal troops into the state would be an insult similar to that of Reconstruction and would drive another divide between northern and southern interests.<sup>14</sup>

### Legal Strategies to Address Violence

In response to the troubles in the two Carolinas, U. S. Attorney General John Griggs and other Washington officials determined that an investigation was necessary. Wilmington papers reported that U. S. senator Jeter Prichard planned to propose a congressional investigation of the violence when the session reconvened in January 1899. North Carolina's Democratic press asserted that investigation by Congress would threaten a newly discovered North—South unity extolled by President McKinley and “intensify race feelings in the south and...make the negro problem still more difficult.”<sup>15</sup> At the same time, Oliver

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African American reaction to McKinley's speech was reprinted in the *Wilmington Star* after the meeting of the Afro-American Council in Washington, DC. The Council cautioned blacks that “the time has come for the colored men to act; to act with firmness, calmness and after due deliberation.” *News and Observer* (Raleigh), December 15, 1898; Timothy Thomas Fortune to Booker T. Washington, December 17, 1898 as quoted in Louis R. Harlan, ed., *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, 13 vols. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972-1989), 4:535; *Morning Star* (Wilmington), December 30, 1898; “Open letter to President McKinley by the colored people of Massachusetts,” October 3, 1898, Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, African American Pamphlet Collection; McDuffie, “Politics in Wilmington,” 750.

<sup>14</sup> Hayden recounted that a “hotheaded Wilmingtonian” had telegraphed federal officials that if troops were sent into the city, “caskets should be included in their equipment” because fellow citizens “would not brook any outside interference.” Hayden, *WLI*, 98.

<sup>15</sup> The “Negro Problem” had multiple facets. As W. E. B. DuBois observed in 1897, that although he and other contemporaries “ordinarily speak of the Negro problem as though it were one unchanged question . .

Dockery contested the election of John D. Bellamy to Congress as a representative from North Carolina's Sixth District which included Wilmington.

As a result of increased correspondence and a call to action by

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. it is not one problem, but rather a plexus of social problems, some new, some old, some simple, some complex.” DuBois attributed most of the problems faced by blacks in economics, politics and education to their collective history as slaves and second class citizens after emancipation. He later claimed that the country had experienced a re-birth of the caste system for blacks similar to that which existed under slavery. DuBois summarized three arguments by which whites justified the new caste system in which blacks were second class citizens without equal rights: enfranchisement of blacks was a mistake, African Americans are inherently inferior to whites, and a final resolution to the race problem will be “open and legal recognition” of black inferiority. Intellectuals on both sides of the color line began to use the phrase – “negro problem” or “negro question” – as a catch-all for topics ranging from education and disfranchisement to strains on north-south relations. Governor Daniel Russell biographer Jeffrey Crow defined the “negro question” as a “shibboleth for disfranchisement” by whites. Owen Aldis of Chicago wrote Thomas Nelson Page that “this North Carolina affair shows that neither this generation nor the next will ever be through with the dangers arising from the negro.” He also observed that he did not believe “that the education of the intellect of the negro will alone solve the problem.” Another writer, Thomas H. Carter of Charlottesville, concluded that “the idea of the north that the [Civil] war solved the negro problem” was wrong and that the “problem” still persisted with no answer. Discussions of the “negro problem” persisted long after the Carolina riots faded from the papers. *Wilmington Messenger*, December 6, 1898; *Morning Star* (Wilmington), December 9, 1898; W.E.B. DuBois in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 1898 reprinted in *W.E.B. DuBois Speaks: Speeches and Addresses, 1890-1919*, 2 vols., ed., Philip S. Foner (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 1:104-108; W.E.B. DuBois in the *Proceedings of the National Negro Conference* in New York, 1909 as re-printed in Foner, *W.E.B. DuBois Speaks*, 196-199; Owen Aldis to Thomas Nelson Page, November 10, 1898, Thomas H. Carter to Thomas Nelson Page, Thomas Nelson Page Papers, Duke University Library, Durham; Crow, *Maverick Republican*, 138.

leading blacks and some whites nationwide, Griggs instructed his subordinate, the United States Attorney General's District Attorney for the Eastern District of North Carolina Claude Bernard, to investigate the situation in North Carolina.<sup>16</sup> On December 3, 1898, U. S. Attorney General John Griggs directed Bernard to investigate the reports of murder and the accusations by Robert Bunting of mistreatment and forced removal from Wilmington of a United States commissioner. Griggs informed Bernard that "complaint is made that organized and armed bodies of persons, by violence, intimidation, and threats, deprived certain citizens . . . of rights and privileges guaranteed to them under the Constitution and laws of the United States." Griggs wanted Bernard to find out if Justice Robert Bunting was truly ejected from the city by force and threatened with death if he returned. If so, Griggs saw this treatment as "a most flagrant and high handed violation of the criminal law of the United States" that required "immediate and energetic prosecution."<sup>17</sup>

Bernard replied to Griggs that he had no credible information save newspaper accounts nor had he received complaints from Wilmington citizens. He did, however, request the assistance of Griggs' office in bringing justice to those who violated the

<sup>16</sup> Griggs evidently took the matter seriously and assisted Congressman George White in his efforts to propose legislation in 1899 and 1900 to make lynching and murder by mob rule treasonable offenses punishable by execution. The major impetus for Griggs' investigation was the experience of federal commissioner Robert Bunting concerning his treatment and banishment by Wilmington leaders. Benjamin Justesen, *George Henry White: An Even Chance in the Race of Life* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 278-9.

<sup>17</sup> Griggs to Bernard as quoted in McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 556-7 and found in the papers of the Attorney General's Office, General Records of the Department of Justice, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

law using "high handed revolutionary methods."<sup>18</sup> In response, Attorney General Griggs and Assistant Attorney General James E. Boyd traveled to Raleigh to provide additional support for Bernard's investigation. But by December 12, Griggs and Boyd had returned to Washington, D. C. without a call for a grand jury.<sup>19</sup> Wilmington whites were pleased to learn that Griggs entrusted the case to his assistant Boyd, a man who 30 years earlier had been arrested for support of the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>20</sup> Possibly bolstered by support from Washington and despite his lack of witnesses, Bernard soon subpoenaed several men and called a grand jury.<sup>21</sup> Men such as George Z. French, Flavel Foster, and Robert Bunting were reportedly asked to give testimony. Despite the work of Bernard to secure testimony that surely implicated many men of Wilmington, the grand jury was discharged on December 17 without hearing from those witnesses.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> B. F. McLean, attorney and U.S. commissioner of justice for the eastern district, had also written to Griggs and others in Washington just after the election to describe intimidation by the Red Shirts and to ask if those men would be liable for prosecution. Bernard to Griggs as quoted in McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 757-8 and found in the papers of the Attorney General's Office, General Records of the Department of Justice, National Archives, Washington, D. C.; McLean to Griggs, November 9, 1898, General Records of the Department of Justice, National Archives, Washington, D. C. as quoted in Prather, *We Have Taken a City*, 153.

<sup>19</sup> *Wilmington Messenger*, December 16, 1898.

<sup>20</sup> *Wilmington Messenger*, December 9, 1898.

<sup>21</sup> Records from the Eastern District Attorney General's Office do not survive to document Bernard's activities. A survey of records from the office located in the Regional Records Center in Atlanta reveals that correspondence records, grand jury records, and dockets from Raleigh have not been preserved. Details of Bernard's Grand Jury investigation can only be found in newspaper sources.

<sup>22</sup> *Wilmington Messenger*, December 20, 23, 1898.

Griggs apparently encouraged Bernard well into 1899 to persist. As a result, Bernard requested the assistance of undercover agents to infiltrate the white community and find the “rough and toughs” who were “incited and led and directed by other men of high official and social standing.” Bernard continued that the city was “the storm center from which emanated most of the election crime and intimidation, for one entire Congressional District as well as other parts of this state.”<sup>23</sup> The investigation languished until August 1900 when a new acting attorney general told Bernard to stop investigation because it was “inexpedient” to send undercover agents to the city. Bernard was instructed to justify his reasons for continuing the investigation. With the loss of federal support, Bernard closed the case files.<sup>24</sup>

Concurrent with the investigations by the United States attorney general, Oliver Dockery, the Republican candidate who lost the election for U.S. House of Representatives for the Sixth District to Wilmington Democrat John D. Bellamy, worked to overturn the election. As early as December 6, 1898, Wilmington papers said that Republican Oliver Dockery had employed attorneys to contest Bellamy’s election in the House of Representatives and in the court system.<sup>25</sup>

Dockery notified Bellamy that he would challenge the election in December of 1898 because, he claimed, the election was not fair and was conducted fraudulently in some sections of the district. Dockery then

began to take testimony from voters and election officials from throughout the Sixth District. Dockery’s attorneys sought to demonstrate Red Shirt intimidation before the election and at the polls, as well as call to task the actions of men in Wilmington during the riot. Bellamy’s attorneys aimed to remove the riot from the arguments since it occurred after the election and to show that the actual elections were carried out with little violence and intimidation. In instances where there were clear violations of election law, Bellamy’s attorneys sought to discredit the witness. Dockery’s attorneys were often frustrated by difficult witnesses favorable to the Democratic Party who would not fully answer questions. Pre-election intimidation led several Republican witnesses to acknowledge that they could not speak about all that they knew because they were fearful of the consequences for themselves or their families.<sup>26</sup> Newspapers across the state carried news of the proceedings and often reprinted portions of testimony, adding further to the public nature of the inquiry.<sup>27</sup> Despite setbacks, Dockery managed to file testimony in the House. Both he and Bellamy filed briefs on the case according to House rules, but no action was taken on the House floor on the

<sup>23</sup> Claude Bernard to John Griggs, April 22, 1899, General Records of the Department of Justice, National Archives, as quoted in McDuffie, “Politics in Wilmington,” 759.

<sup>24</sup> Acting Attorney General to Bernard, August 30, 1900, General Records of the Department of Justice, Instructions to United States Attorneys and Marshals as quoted in McDuffie, “Politics in Wilmington,” 760.

<sup>25</sup> *Wilmington Messenger*, December 6, 1898.

<sup>26</sup> For more information see *Contested Election Case of Oliver H. Dockery vs. John D. Bellamy from the Sixth Congressional District of the State of North Carolina*. The contested election case testimony has been very helpful in providing extra details of the events leading up to the violence of November tenth as well as those of that day. Most helpful was the testimony of former chief of police John Melton and several African American election officials.

<sup>27</sup> Most of the information concerning the contested election and testimony has been found in either newspaper accounts or the bound volume, *Contested Election Case*, in Bellamy’s personal library at the Bellamy Mansion in Wilmington. Some contradictory testimony, unflattering to Bellamy, not found in the bound volume or in Democratic newspapers was found in the *Union Republican* of March, 15, 1900.

matter, and Bellamy took his seat in Congress.<sup>28</sup>

### African American Reaction

In the weeks after the riot, Wilmington's black churches looked for answers while white congregations rejoiced. African American minister J. Allen Kirk noted that while a funeral was being performed at Central Baptist Church, the building was surrounded by whites who thought Kirk was in attendance. Kirk explained that the whites had visited ministers and other church leaders on the Saturday following the riot to find out what sermons would be preached on Sunday.

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<sup>28</sup> A list of contested elections filed in the House Documents of the fifty-sixth Congress listed the calendar of filings for the *Dockery v Bellamy* case. However, in 1901, another House Document, *A Historical and Legal Digest of All the Contested Election Cases in the House of Representatives*, does not list the *Dockery vs Bellamy* case as being heard by a Committee on Elections in the Fifty-sixth Congress. Further, John D. Bellamy, in his autobiography, admitted that Dockery requested that Congress not permit him to take his seat in the House, but, because of fraternal ties with many influential Washington insiders, among them Attorney General Griggs, he was able to escape investigation. An article in the Wilmington *Morning Star* in July 1899 indicated that Dockery's representative was in Washington filing papers on the case. The paper also stated that Republicans were focusing their attention on contesting the Bellamy election as well as assisting in contesting the election of Virginia Democrat, William Rhea. According to the *Digest of Contested Election Cases*, Rhea's contest was heard by a committee who ruled in his favor. United States House of Representatives, *House Documents*, "Letter from the Clerk of the House transmitting a List of the Contested Election Cases in the Fifty-Sixth Congress," Document No. 23, 56<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, December 5, 1899; Chester H. Rowell, *A Historical and Legal Digest of All the Contested Election Cases in the House of Representatives of the United States from the First to the Fifty-Sixth Congress, 1789-1901*, House Document No. 510, 56<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 1901, 581-2; Bellamy, *Memoirs of an Octogenarian*, 139-141.

Kirk, from a distance, and others in Wilmington sought to persuade blacks to "try by all means to keep the peace...ever trusting God."<sup>29</sup>

Kirk realized that the black ministers were leaders in the community and that whites planned removal of the ministers from the city to assure that the blacks who remained would be "better and obedient servants."<sup>30</sup> African American church leaders approached white leaders and were told that their services would not be interrupted. The sermons given on the Sunday following the riot contained elements of acquiescence and acceptance of their congregants' new situation as second-class, endangered, citizens. One correspondent who begged the president to interfere on her behalf informed him that "to day (Sunday) we dare not go to our places of worship."<sup>31</sup>

At Central Baptist Church, Pastor A. S. Dunston urged his congregation to "let the past bury the past" because "what is done cannot be undone." He wished for his followers to "be still, be quiet" and "all will be well." At St. Stephen's A. M. E. Church, home to one of the city's largest congregations, Pastor J. T. Lee had fled the city, and the sermon was given by Deacon L. B. Kennedy. Deacon Kennedy's sermon warned his flock to "watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation" as they did their duty to "obey God's laws," and to "do as the authorities direct." Following a similar strain of thought, Pastor E. R. Bennett of St. Mark's Protestant Episcopal Church reminded members to obey the law and Jesus' instruction to "[R]ender unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the

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<sup>29</sup> Kirk, *Statement of Facts*, 11, 15-16.

<sup>30</sup> Kirk, *Statement of Facts*, 11, 15-16.

<sup>31</sup> Unidentified author to President William McKinley, November 13, 1898, General Records of the Department of Justice, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

things that are God's." He contended that they should "obey first and argue afterwards" because "God will protect His own." Other congregations heard similar arguments, including Mt. Zion Afro-American Methodist Church where Pastor J. W. Telfair preached a funeral sermon for Sam McFarland, a casualty of the riot. Telfair described the tenth as a catastrophe wrought by God and that the congregation should "obey the law and keep the peace." Chestnut Street Presbyterian Church's pastor, J. A. Bonner, also preached submission to the will of God and white authority. At Christ Colored Congregational Church, F. C. Ragland's sermon encouraged members to "love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you and pray for them that abuse you." He also reminded the congregation of the abiding words spoken by their enslaved forefathers when he said that "God will avenge us" because "in His hands shall it rest," and that "He will act in His own good time." Ebenezer Baptist's minister also preached on following the letter of the law. St. Luke's African Methodist Episcopal Church, next door to the burned out remains of Manly's press, heard its minister, M. L. Blalock, discuss the fiery trials of Biblical figures and claim that "if the negro trusted in God and minded his own business . . . all would be well."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> It is unclear how the newspapers were able to access such detailed snippets of all the sermons given at such a wide variety of African American churches, but, in printing the passages from the various ministers, the papers reinforced submission to whites to non-churchgoing blacks and demonstrated to whites that black leaders who remained were encouraging others not to retaliate. The article containing the sermon extracts was written by a correspondent from the *Baltimore Sun* and published in Wilmington, Raleigh, and Baltimore. The article could have been another Democratic propaganda tool. *Wilmington Messenger*, November 15, 1898; *Evening Dispatch* (Wilmington), November 15,

In line with the ministers' pleas, blacks tempered their reactions in ways designed to restore peace, prevent further deaths, and encourage others to strive for calm. A letter from S. B. Hunter, a Wilmington resident and church leader, published in the papers endorsed appeasement. He explained that he voted without incident and that he believed the city's black women were as responsible as any other group for the violence. He claimed the women's threats against black men, challenging the men to violence, helped to fuel the conflict.<sup>33</sup> John C. Dancy, black Republican leader in local and state politics, explained that he tried to work with Manly to appease whites before the riot. He was quoted as saying that he was not forced out of town by whites but had left after calm was brought to the city. He urged that "people exercise good judgment" in order to relieve the "perturbed situation in the state" because he felt that "calm reason may appease."<sup>34</sup>

On the national level, following the rioting in the two Carolinas, conferences were held throughout the nation to protest against the Democrats' actions in the South.<sup>35</sup> One of the main organizing forces

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1898; *News and Observer* (Raleigh), November 15, 1898.

<sup>33</sup> *Morning Star* (Wilmington), November 15, 1898.

<sup>34</sup> Throughout the post-violence period, Dancy walked a fine line between his black community and his attempts to hold the respect of white leaders as he sought to bridge the gap between the two and prevent further violence and hatred. Dancy's son wrote his memoirs and recalled that his father had been out of town on the day of the riot and that his step-mother frantically gathered her children to evacuate the city. *Evening Dispatch* (Wilmington), November 23, 1898; John Dancy, *Sand Against the Wind*, 69-70.

<sup>35</sup> The election day violence in Phoenix, South Carolina, and Wilmington's violence two days later were viewed by many northerners as evidence of the troubled nature of Southern black/white relations. Further evidence for these reformers were the laws on the books in many states, including Louisiana and Georgia, which limited African American suffrage.

behind these meetings was Timothy Thomas Fortune, an African American editor and activist in New York.<sup>36</sup> Fortune was well known in African American circles and corresponded regularly with Booker T. Washington. He called for changes to national laws to address failures of whites to protect the lives of black citizens in southern states. Further, in response to calls for black disfranchisement, Fortune argued that if blacks were to be removed from voting, that representation in the House of Representatives should be reapportioned to reflect the diminished voting population of southern states.<sup>37</sup>

An issue of the *Literary Digest* published in New York at the end of November, combined the violence of the two states when it opened its long article on "Race Troubles in the Carolinas" with the statement that "more than thirty persons are said to have been killed . . . in North and South Carolina." "Race Troubles in the Carolinas," *Literary Digest* (New York), November 26, 1898.

<sup>36</sup> The *Raleigh Morning Post* noted that there was a concerted effort in many major cities to coordinate meetings throughout the northern states. At a meeting in New York, the city's ministers met to condemn the riots, and some argued that new Wilmington mayor Alfred M. Waddell, South Carolina politician Ben Tillman, and Wilmington's new police chief Edgar Parmele should be lynched. The ministers also took up collections to help Wilmington blacks. Meetings were held in Buffalo, New York, to press the president to "interfere in behalf of oppressed negroes in North and South Carolina." Yet another meeting took place in Asbury Park, New Jersey, in which Alex Manly figured prominently. Manly spoke at the meeting and explained his editorial. Attendees prepared a resolution to be sent to the president asking for assistance and took up a collection to help Manly. According to a telegraph sent to the *Wilmington Star* from someone in New York, Manly was not asked to speak at some meetings because it was claimed that "his ideas are of a somewhat radical nature and after a conference with him it was decided that he had better not deliver an address as his feelings might get the better of his prudence." *Morning Star* (Wilmington), November 17, 24, 25, 1898; *Raleigh Morning Post*, November 15, 1898.

<sup>37</sup> *Morning Star* (Wilmington), November 13, 1898; *Chicago Tribune*, November 18, 1898; *New York*

The largest of the meetings was held on November 17, 1898, in New York at the Cooper Union. At the meeting, arranged by Fortune to coincide with similar meetings in other states, over 6,000 people Fortune and other African American leaders speak on the violence. Accounts of the "indignation meeting," as it was called by the Democratic press, were circulated to a multitude of outlets, including North Carolina papers. The meeting adopted a series of resolutions that protested the violence, derided state governors of North and South Carolina for



Editorial Cartoon, *New York World*,  
November 13, 1898.

Image Courtesy of Cape Fear Museum

their inaction, and pressured politicians for justice. One of the leading proposals that came from the meeting was an amendment to the U. S. Constitution to enable the president to step in and protect citizens from

*Times*, November 14, 1898; McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 751; *Wilmington Messenger*, December 2, 1898.

mob rule without requests for assistance from governors.<sup>38</sup>

One of the speakers at the Cooper Union gathering who gained national and local attention was white activist Elizabeth Grannis. Grannis' speech challenging the color line was, like Manly's editorial, misquoted throughout the South, and she was ridiculed in the press. Hatred of Grannis grew to the point that secret meetings were held in Virginia and North Carolina to formulate speeches proclaiming white male disgust at her remarks. News of the organized hatred reached Grannis, and, on December 2, 1898, a letter from her was published in the *Wilmington Messenger*. In it, she defended her position even as she explained the mis-quote. The editor appended to her letter his own paternalistic observations that Grannis had simply chosen to be in the wrong place and in the wrong company.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> The powers of the president to step into state matters were limited by both the Constitution and historical precedent. The rights of states to manage their own affairs were still hotly debated topics decades after the Civil War. President Theodore Roosevelt's failure to intervene following the Atlanta Riot in 1906 was attributed by some analysts to precedent set by McKinley. Following suit, McKinley's precedent should have been the action of President Cleveland in 1894 when he called out Federal troops to intervene in a railroad labor strike. Cleveland's crutch for calling out the military was that the mail services were being interrupted by stopped rail traffic. McKinley had no such recourse except for the intervention of the mob in their removal of federal commissioner Robert Bunting. *Chicago Tribune*, November 18, 1898; *New York Times*, November 14, 1898; Charles Crowe, "Racial Massacre in Atlanta, September 22, 1906," *Journal of Negro History* (April 1969): 167.

<sup>39</sup> Peter Mallett of Fayetteville noted in his day book that he read in the papers of an "excited meeting of negroes last night at Cooper Union." He also noted that they were "enflamed to wild excitement by a speech of Mrs. Grannis an old abolition hussy—should be lynched." Day book entry, November 18, 1898, Peter Mallet Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library,

Other speakers, while just as controversial, did not attract equal attention. The Reverend W. H. Brooks believed the trouble was rooted in the white upper classes and that, when a few blacks "of the worst sort committed outrages," the whole of the black population suffered. Referring to Wilmington, he said that whites were "too strong" by virtue of the use of guns, telephones, and telegraphs. He urged blacks to remain vigilant and strong: "[O]ut of his trials and difficulties shall yet be developed a honest manhood" – bide their time but not to "die alone" in the last resort.<sup>40</sup>

Fortune's grassroots offensive against white supremacy faltered. Other black leaders seeking to ease tensions began to push for a stop to such meetings because, as one editor phrased it, "over zealous indignation meetings do the race irreparable harm."<sup>41</sup> William Henry Baldwin Jr., railroad magnate and Tuskegee trustee, wrote Booker T. Washington that he thought "Fortune and his kind are wrong . . . and, if they are allowed to go on as they have been, [they] will cause a bad setback to their people." Although some believed that Fortune was going about matters the wrong way, he shared the view that something should be done to address the violence. He expressed sympathy for Washington's position as a peacemaker and lamented that Washington had not been invited to speak on the issue in any major forum. Baldwin also noted that in Virginia, black railroad employees were being forced out of their jobs—"it never would have occurred but for the Wilmington troubles."<sup>42</sup>

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Chapel Hill. *Wilmington Messenger*, December 2, 1898; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 21, 1898.

<sup>40</sup> *New York Times*, November 14, 1898.

<sup>41</sup> Letter to editor from black editor, *Washington Post*, December 4, 1898.

<sup>42</sup> William H. Baldwin, Jr. to Booker T. Washington, December 4, 1898, as quoted in Harlan, *Booker T. Washington Papers*, 4: 525-6.

The Wilmington violence held far-reaching implications for blacks nationwide. The response of national black leaders such as Fortune and Washington was split between radical and conservative elements. The division, largely one of personal philosophy among black intellectuals, but it was also a boon to whites who sought to divide black opinion. A good example can be found in the *Washington Post* where Fortune was cast as an anti-Booker T. Washington radical and was misquoted. Fortune apologized to Washington, with whom he had a close relationship, about the *Post* interview, realizing that white newspapermen were sometimes less than honorable in their intentions.<sup>43</sup> The divide between black activists and intellectuals continued for years and reduced cohesion among black leadership.<sup>44</sup> Still, black

leaders across the country united in advocating better treatment of blacks in the South—"we deplore the sad and barbarous incident at Wilmington, N. C. which has blacked the fair name of the Old North State."<sup>45</sup>

When local and national efforts failed to relieve pressures exerted by Democrats, Wilmington blacks left the city. The exodus continued into December, with the newspapers reporting that over 1,000 blacks had left since the violence in November. Reports said that many bought railroad tickets to points north of Richmond and south to South Carolina and Georgia, while others moved to rural New Hanover and surrounding counties. White men who depended upon rental income from black tenants saw a n immediate drop in revenue, particularly in the Brooklyn neighborhood. The paper sought to put a positive spin on the article by observing that many whites were filtering into the city to replace the lost black population. The editor surmised that as many as 250 to 300 whites had arrived recently in the city from other counties and that those new arrivals were filling the rental houses and searching for jobs "of all classes" vacated by blacks.<sup>46</sup>

### Democrats Practice Damage Control

Wilmington Democrats sought in every way possible to counter the claims made by blacks nationwide. Alfred Moore Waddell's narrative in *Collier's Weekly*, published on November 26, 1898, became the standing story—whites performed an act of revolution to wrench the city from the

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<sup>43</sup> Timothy T. Fortune to Booker T. Washington, November 30, 1898, as quoted in Harlan, *Booker T. Washington Papers*, 4:523-4.

<sup>44</sup>In a December 1898, article in the *Wilmington Messenger*, a black editor of the Africo-American Presbyterian in Charlotte "rakes" Booker T. Washington and "the able men of the black race who are in sympathy with that wise man" in an article. Another foreboding observation about the Charlotte editor is that the white press noted that he wrote "pacifically in places but the general tone leaves the impression of sore-headedness and growling," indicating that whites were paying close attention to black press and the tone of its product. In January 1899, Booker T. Washington was informed by Edward Clement, one of his white supporters in Massachusetts, that opposition to Washington's methods was growing among blacks. Clement told Washington that he was "impressed with the protests of such men as Dubois and Dunbar against the new outburst of intolerance in the South." Fortune's meetings, plus the networks established by men such as Washington and Dubois, provided the groundwork for what would eventually lead to the formation of other organizations such as the Urban League and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in the twentieth century. Edward Clement to Booker T. Washington, January 2, 1899, as quoted in Harlan, *Booker T. Washington Papers*, 5:5; *Wilmington Messenger*, December 23, 1898.

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<sup>45</sup> The Afro-American Council and several conferences of the African American Methodist Episcopal Zion Church met in the spring of 1899 and issued proclamations and memorials denouncing the violence. *Wilmington Messenger*, May 16, 1899, *Morning Star* (Wilmington), May 5, 1899.

<sup>46</sup> *Wilmington Messenger*, December 6, 1898.

brink of lawlessness and chaos.<sup>47</sup> Others, such as William Chadbourn, the white Wilmington Republican and businessman who converted to the Democratic Party under immense pressures, traveled to Chicago to dispute claims published by Wilmington exile William Henderson in the *Chicago Daily Blade*. Henderson was not banished from the city by force but was told to leave within hours of the first shots during the riot. An African American attorney, Henderson recounted his experiences for *The Freeman*, an Indianapolis paper. Henderson challenged the Democratic claims of negro domination of municipal offices and suggested that the reason for the violence was that the Democrats craved power. Henderson described the violence, as well as the flight from the city for his family.<sup>48</sup> In response, Chadbourn maintained that the unrest in Wilmington was due to the inefficient Fusion government and the Manly article. He said that he knew of no reason for Henderson to leave, countering Henderson's claims of threats against his life. Chadbourn contended that the solution to the problem was to establish limits on black suffrage. Ever the businessman, as leader of the city's chamber of commerce, Chadbourn's interview closed with claims that Wilmington was one of the most progressive cities in the south.<sup>49</sup> A. G. Ricaud, a former mayor and law partner of Governor Daniel Russell, gave an interview to the Baltimore

*Sun*. Ricaud had relocated to the North and was a respected businessman but was enlisted to throw his support behind Waddell's administration. Ricaud's interview expressed his support for white supremacy but denounced bloodshed even as he favored a suffrage amendment to limit black voting rights.<sup>50</sup>

White Democrats also worked to ensure that their banishment and intimidation campaign succeeded in preventing the return of men who could effect change. The *Messenger* on December 20 warned banished men that to return would be to "tread on dangerous ground" and singled out Republican George Z. French. Another article justified the banishment process as law: "[P]ublic sentiment is primary law; primary law banished certain corrupt and offensive men from this community." The paper also warned blacks who might have "failed to comprehend or have forgotten the 10<sup>th</sup> of November" that "white men are determined to govern this city and county" and that "the 10<sup>th</sup> of November will prove to have been child's play to what the consequences will be to the negroes" if "insolent lawlessness" or "midnight devilry" arise. The paper urged "decent" black residents to rid the community of troublemakers.<sup>51</sup> When one banished man, African American butcher Ari Bryant, returned home in June 1899, he discovered that whites were still willing to kill black men who challenged their authority. After the whites held a meeting to plan reinforcement strategies, armed white men surrounded Bryant's home with the intent to whip him and, if he had not escaped

<sup>47</sup> For a discussion of narratives of the riot, including that of Waddell, see Appendix M.

<sup>48</sup> Henderson recorded his life experiences in a diary that is currently in possession of family members. The diary was not available for research in the course of this report but, according to excerpts read by a descendant during the 1998 centennial commemorations in Wilmington, it contains valuable information relative to the riot, his escape, and life after Wilmington.

<sup>49</sup> *The Freeman* (Indianapolis), December 3, 1898; *Morning Star* (Wilmington), December 25, 30 1898; *Wilmington Messenger* December 27, 1898.

<sup>50</sup> *Evening Dispatch* (Wilmington), November 16, 1898. The article states that Ricaud had served as mayor from 1891 to 1893.

<sup>51</sup> *Wilmington Messenger*, December 20, 1898.

before their full arrival at his home, killing him.<sup>52</sup>

### Legislation to Affirm Coup

As protests against the actions of November 10 spread throughout the country, and local whites marshaled arguments to justify their actions, the newly elected North Carolina legislature opened its first session in January 1899. One of the new legislature's central goals was to reverse Fusion reform at every level. Wilmington's leaders took a pivotal role in some of the changes, including a complete overhaul of the city's charter because, under the existing charter, Governor Russell could again nominate Republicans to posts on the Board of Aldermen at the next election in March, 1899.

Anticipating the changes to the charter, the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce met on December 1, 1898 to discuss proposals for the upcoming legislative session. The chamber saw opportunity to lobby for other projects at both the state and national levels, including appropriations to improve the harbor and navigation along the river.<sup>53</sup> At their meeting, the Chamber appointed a five-

member committee to draft a new city charter, and "confer and advise with the representatives to the General Assembly."<sup>54</sup> As soon as the new legislature convened, George Rountree introduced the changes to the charter, and, after some dispute in both Wilmington and the legislature, the new charter was passed into law on March 4, 1899.<sup>55</sup> The changes were a complete repeal of the Fusionist alterations to the charter in 1895 and 1897. The 1899 charter solidified Democrats' control over the city. Aldermen were to be popularly elected from each ward, primaries were to be held in response to public demand, voter eligibility could be more easily challenged, and safeguards against voter fraud were strengthened. A lucrative salary was re-established for the mayor.<sup>56</sup> Further, the charter empowered the mayor to force unemployed "vagrants" to leave the city or work on the city's streets for thirty days if they failed to find a job.<sup>57</sup> Subsequent to the legislature's changes to the city charter, municipal elections were held in March 1899, and the new Board of Aldermen was elected to serve for a two-year term. Few blacks registered to vote in the election, and no Republican candidates were nominated in the two predominantly black wards, thereby

<sup>52</sup> Some reports circulated through town that Bryant had been forewarned of the arrival of the mob and had been "harbored" by A. J. Taylor, white businessman. Taylor subsequently proclaimed he was not involved other than encouraging Bryant to leave the city. Bryant felt that instead of just administering a whipping, the mob intended to "pepper him with bullets from Winchesters." Another report from earlier in 1899 warned former chief of police John Melton not to return because another exile had tried to return and he had been frightened into leaving again because "one night voices were heard and forms were seen ominously circumambulating around his house . . . [it was] never learned whether it were Rough Riders or ghosts that made the manifestations." *Wilmington Messenger*, March 31 and June 18, 21, 23, 1899.

<sup>53</sup> *Wilmington Messenger* December 6, 1898.

<sup>54</sup> *Wilmington Messenger* December 6, 1898.

<sup>55</sup> Party infighting among Wilmington Democrats led to some problems in the months immediately following the violence and coup. McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 771-773.

<sup>56</sup> The 1866 charter established the mayor's salary at \$2,000 per year, but the 1895 and 1897 changes lowered the annual salary to \$1,000. The 1899 charter raised the salary to between \$1,200 and \$2,000 per year. *Public Laws of North Carolina, 1866, 1895, 1897*. For more notes on the changes to the city charter over time, see Appendix C.

<sup>57</sup> As Mayor, Waddell received an annual salary between \$1,200 and \$2,000 according to the 1899 charter. Subsequent changes were made to the charter at the 1901, 1903, and 1905 sessions. *Private Laws of the State of North Carolina Passed by the General Assembly at its Session of 1899* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton and E. M. Uzzell, 1899), 591-596.

giving the Democratic ticket no opposition. Therefore, with the changes to the charter made by the legislature at the recommendation of the city's leaders, the coup was affirmed, and those men brought to power as a result were legitimized in their positions for another two years in office.<sup>58</sup>

To further solidify Democratic control over county governments statewide, on March 6, 1899, the legislature ratified "An Act to Restore Good Government to the Counties of North Carolina." The act applied to New Hanover and 12 other counties, primarily those with black majorities or near majorities. The law removed the election of county commissioners from popular vote and placed the responsibility with justices of the peace appointed by the General Assembly. This Act singly rejected local self rule by popular vote as created by Fusionists and replaced it with local government controlled by the legislature. Democrats, as a result, were able to ensure the success of their agenda and their candidates in future elections.<sup>59</sup>

The Democrats also laid plans to carry the 1900 elections. The legislature of 1899 moved quickly to revise statewide election laws for the 1900 elections. At the head of the Democrats' election reform agenda was a plan to vest control over elections in both a seven-man State Board of Elections and in local county boards of elections. The new boards would have the

power to appoint registrars and other election officials and redraw precinct lines as they saw fit. Further control over voting structure came as the Democrats redefined registration processes to make voter qualification and registration more difficult and make challenges to voter eligibility easier for Democrats.<sup>60</sup>

Fulfilling campaign promises, the Democratic legislature passed its first measures to legislate segregation. The first of the new Jim Crow laws—segregation of train compartments—was passed by the 1899 legislature after debate and discussion over wording. The action ushered in a series of "separate but equal" legislation efforts wherein virtually all aspects of interaction between African Americans and whites were legally codified.<sup>61</sup> In Wilmington, Jim Crow legislation was immediately applied to the trains and trolleys but was later applied to other aspects of life, including the courts. In 1903, a local court judge ruled that blacks and whites must use separate Bibles when being sworn in to give testimony.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *Public Laws of North Carolina, 1899*; McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 784-5.

<sup>61</sup> Legislation associated with Jim Crow, or segregation, eventually applied to all aspects of life. Politicians sought to segregate textbooks for schools, cadavers sent to white and black medical schools, all public facilities and, eventually, they sought to force blacks into separate housing and communities. Helen Edmunds, *Negro in Fusion Politics*, 189-190; James Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 137; C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 100-102; Williamson, *Crucible of Race*, 253-254; Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 429.

<sup>62</sup> Wilmington whites consistently reworked the rules for segregating the city's street cars and, in 1907, after passage of a new street car law, blacks boycotted the system, reducing patronage by 50 to 75 percent. The transportation companies were concerned about the impact the boycott might have but were reassured that it would not last because similar boycotts in other cities had been only temporary. Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle*, 268-269.

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<sup>58</sup> The new Board of Aldermen were C. L. Spencer, J. M. Woolard, William E. Springer, Henry P. West, Hugh MacRae, J. A. Taylor, C. W. Worth, John Harriss, C. C. Parker, F. A. Montgomery, and J. F. Littleton. Alfred Moore Waddell was unanimously elected mayor. Minutes of the Wilmington Board of Aldermen, 1899, State Archives, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh; *Morning Star* (Wilmington), March 14 - 24, 1899.

<sup>59</sup> McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 775-776; House Journal, 1899; *Morning Star* (Wilmington), March 1-6, 1899.

## Disfranchisement

After the euphoria of election victory settled and the state returned to relative calm, calls for disfranchisement of the black vote arose. The *News and Observer* proclaimed that the “the lessons of the recent past teach that it is neither prudent nor wise to delay a permanent solution of the suffrage problem.” As the voice of the Democratic Party, the paper acknowledged that “the people have voted to put an end” to black suffrage and its complement of “problems” for white voters. Further, the paper saw the overwhelming Democratic victory as a mandate for the new legislature to “settle once and all time the question of regulating suffrage.”<sup>63</sup>

In response to the call by Democratic Party leaders for limits on suffrage, the General Assembly manufactured legislation under the hands of George Rountree, Francis Winston, and others as a solution to the perceived “problem” of black voting.<sup>64</sup> The suffrage amendment went through several mutations before it was ratified by the General Assembly on February 21, 1899. The amendment was based on similar legislation passed in other states and relied on recent court decisions that supported the rights of states to disfranchise citizens through literacy tests.<sup>65</sup> Opposition to the

bill came from Populists who claimed that the scheme’s plan to disfranchise those who would fail to qualify to vote possibly would ensnare some white men and remove their ability to vote. Democrats conceded that some whites would have to sacrifice their vote for the greater good of the white population. The final version of the suffrage amendment required voters to pass a literacy test and pay a poll tax. To assure skeptics that illiterate whites would not be disfranchised, the amendment included a grandfather clause: “[N]o male person who was on January 1, 1867, or at any time prior thereto, entitled to vote under the laws of the state in the United States wherein he then resided, and no lineal descendent of such person, shall be denied the right to register to vote at any election in this State by reason of his failure to pass the education qualification.” A codicil to the grandfather clause was that it was only effective through December 1, 1908. After that date, all men who were not already registered would have to pass the literacy test. The amendment as constructed in the legislature went to the voters for passage during the November general elections.<sup>66</sup>

Blacks reacted to the suffrage amendment in various ways, reflecting the ideological split between various national factions. Men such as Wilmington’s John C. Dancy, who sought peaceful accommodation of the stronger white demands for limited suffrage, voiced their concerns cautiously. Over 80 of these men, including Dancy and Congressman George White, met in Raleigh ask that legislators not “blunt our aspirations, ruin our manhood

<sup>63</sup> *News and Observer* (Raleigh), November 23, 1898.

<sup>64</sup> In this context, the “negro problem” centered on the rights of blacks to vote, and the argument was made that blacks should not have been given the right to vote as soon as they were granted freedom after the Civil War, but, instead, the right to vote should be earned through dutiful employment and proper education. For an argument posited by whites concerning black suffrage, see Rountree’s “Memorandum of My Personal Reasons for the Passage of the Suffrage Amendment to the Constitution” in the Henry G. Connor Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill.

<sup>65</sup> In an 1898 court case, *Williams v. Mississippi*, the United States Supreme Court sanctioned the right of

a state to disfranchise its citizens by means of a literacy test. The primary purpose of the test was aimed at eliminating the black vote, but the court declared it legal because the law never mentioned race. Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 304.

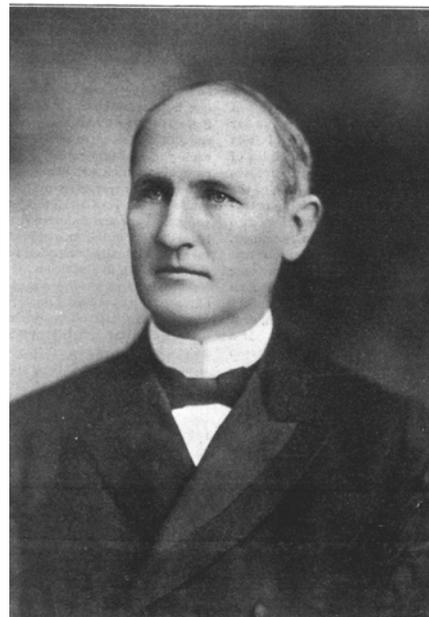
<sup>66</sup> *Wilmington Messenger*, December 2, 1898; McDuffie, “Politics in Wilmington,” 780-9.

and lessen our usefulness as citizens, but guarantee us an equal chance with other men to work out our destiny.” The request represented a compromise within the black community because more radical leaders such as George White preferred to promote emigration from the state should the Democrats make their lives in the state “intolerable.”<sup>67</sup>

Despite the efforts of black leaders to temper Democratic Party leaders in the legislature, the suffrage amendment went to the voters as a referendum in 1900. Because of the 1899 legislature’s multitude of changes to Fusion legislation—all intended to reverse the gains made for average voters—blacks were unable to use their collective voice at the polls in 1900. And because few were willing to brave the Red Shirt intimidation and register to vote, the overall outcome favored the Democrats.<sup>68</sup>

### 1900 Election

The 1900 election season and subsequent Democratic victory closed the door on Republicans and their involvement in state politics. At the top of the election season agenda was ratification of the suffrage amendment to limit black voting. Furnifold Simmons led the Democratic campaign that again manifested itself in print, speeches, and intimidation. The *Raleigh News and Observer* led the way among newspapers; popular speaker and gubernatorial candidate Charles B. Aycock traveled throughout the state with other speakers to preach the Democratic Party mantra of white supremacy; and Red Shirts again were on the ride, using intimidation



Governor Charles Brantley Aycock  
On November 11, 1898, Aycock wrote that the 1898 election victory was “a glorious victory that we have won and the very extent of it frightened me. We shall need wisdom to prove ourselves worthy of it.” He concluded his letter by stating that he “regret[ted] the Wilmington affair of yesterday greatly.”

Charles B. Aycock to Henry G. Connor, Henry G. Connor Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill.  
Image: North Carolina State Archives.

and fear to maintain solidarity of whites and repression of blacks.

As a result of the violent and well-organized Democratic campaign of 1898 and the ensuing changes to state government, Populists and Republicans were in disarray. Both parties acknowledged that the issue of race was problematic and minimized the topic in their campaigns. Even as early as October 1898, Populists had realized that courting black voters had once been necessary, but, in light of the success of the white supremacy platform, such methods were now “inadequate and

<sup>67</sup> White eventually relocated to the north and founded Whitesboro, New Jersey for the resettlement of Wilmington refugees. McDuffie, “Politics in Wilmington,” 782.

<sup>68</sup> Crow and Hatley, *Black Americans in North Carolina and the South*, 149.

unadvisable.”<sup>69</sup> In Wilmington, Benjamin Keith tried unsuccessfully to revive the Populist Party for the 1900 elections through attempts to unite men who were opposed to the activities of Red Shirts. Populists saw much danger in the Red Shirt campaign and feared that further encouragement of Red Shirts by Democrats would lead to voter intimidation statewide, as well as “riot, slander, abuse, physical violence and general anarchy.” They attempted to diffuse the crux of the Democratic Party’s campaign—white supremacy and fear of “negro domination”—by removing it from the stage. Fusionist Jeter Pritchard acknowledged that “candidacy of colored people at this time for local offices would do more to assist the Democrats in their unjust and unwarranted assertions, than all other causes combined.”<sup>70</sup>

Governor Daniel Russell and the Republicans also strove to counter Democratic assertions of negro rule. In early 1900, Russell said that if Southerners had accepted more readily the early terms of Reconstruction, Congress would not have been forced to press black suffrage on southerners in the Fifteenth Amendment. He argued that the suffrage amendment proposed in North Carolina sought to negate the federal amendment and challenged northern Republicans to become more involved in assuring the rights of blacks as they had done after the Civil War. Russell’s arguments were misinterpreted by many whites in North Carolina, who chose to believe that he was, at heart, in support of the suffrage amendment. The resulting squabble in newspapers separated Russell

further from the Republican Party. Because of such misunderstandings, the disjointed party could not mount an offensive against the emboldened and more powerful Democratic campaign leader Furnifold Simmons.<sup>71</sup>

Simmons and his Democratic Party workers followed the same plan as 1898, adding the suffrage amendment into the mix. Red Shirts, White Government Unions, rallies, and print campaigns followed much of the same pattern. However, the tone was stronger and focused on maintaining the upper hand gained by victories in 1898. In a July 1900 rally, speakers proposed to remove the black vote from politics through “peaceful methods” but reserved the option of force “if a conflict comes.”<sup>72</sup>

Throughout the 1900 campaign, Wilmington was quiet because Republican, Populist, and black opposition had already been crushed. Non-Democratic whites still were intimidated and blacks continuously were told not to let troublemakers into their community. The Democratic tickets in the county were unopposed, and only a few eligible black voters who remained in the city registered to vote. New Hanover had the fewest votes of any other county in the state against the suffrage amendment with only two votes cast against it and 2,967 cast for it.<sup>73</sup> Democrats also manipulated the gubernatorial election: New Hanover had returned a Republican majority in every governor’s race from 1868 until 1896 with only one exception but in the 1900 election,

<sup>69</sup> Joseph M. King to Marion Butler, October 25, 1898, Marion Butler Papers, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>70</sup> Hal Ayer to Marion Butler, December 30, 1899, Marion Butler Papers, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Jeter Pritchard to Charles N. Hunter, January 26, 1900, Charles N. Hunter Papers, Duke University Library, Durham.

<sup>71</sup> Crow, *Maverick Republican*, 145-148.

<sup>72</sup> *Washington Post*, July 27, 1900.

<sup>73</sup> The overall state totals in November, 1900, for approval of the amendment was 182,217 votes for the amendment and 128,285 against the amendment. The counties where the amendment was defeated were western counties with black minorities such as Wilkes, Rutherford, Anson, and Henderson. *Wilmington Messenger*, August 5, 1900; R. D. W. Connor, ed., *A Manual of North Carolina*, (Raleigh: Ussell & Co., 1913), 1016-1018.

the county was overwhelmingly Democratic for Aycock as governor. The violence, plus changes to the charter, election laws, and county government had all combined to eliminate the black voice in political matters. Not one of the “black” counties voted against the suffrage amendment, showing the wide-reaching effects of the birth of white supremacy in 1898. The result—one party rule—took root in the state and Republicans did not elect another candidate to statewide office for 70 years.

### Historical Voting Statistics for New Hanover County

#### Governor

Year	Total Vote	% of Vote Democrat	% of Vote Republican	% of Vote Other	Plurality Dem/Rep
1868	5,799	38.5	61.5		1,337 (R)
1872	5,875	38.5	61.5		1,353 (R)
1876	4,610	35.2	64.8		1,366 (R)
1880	3,708	36.74	63.3		990 (R)
1884	4,629	37.8	62.2		1,127 (R)
1888	4,740	39.7	60.2	0.1	976 (R)
1892	3,960	61.8	33.5	4.7	1,121 (D)
1896	2,218	40.8	57.8	1.4	927 (R)
1900	2,966	99.9	0.1		2,960 (D)

#### President

Year	Total Vote	% of Vote Democrat	% of Vote Republican	% of Vote Other	Plurality Dem/Rep
1868	6,258	36.6	63.4		1,678 (R)
1872	5,322	35.3	64.7		1,568 (R)
1876	4,628	35.3	64.7		1,117 (R)
1880	3,638	39.5	60.5		762 (R)
1884	4,639	37.6	62.4		1,149 (R)
1888	4,726	39.6	60.4		986 (R)
1892	3,946	61.0	38.0	1.0	908 (D)
1896	5,283	39.8	60.2		1,083 (R)
1900	2,307	97.4	2.6		2,187 (D)

Source: Donald Matthews, *North Carolina Votes: General Election Returns* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1962)

## Moving Forward

For residents of Wilmington who were not members of the White Government Union, Red Shirt brigade, or the Democratic Party, recovery from the 1898 election campaign and violence was difficult. Most of these men and women, primarily African Americans, maintained a tenuous existence as wage earners in the households or on the docks of white employers. Upper-class African American families maintained their property ownership, but their sons and daughters began to move away from the city.<sup>74</sup>

Former Democrats who had switched to Fusion tried to salvage their political and social standing. Frank Dempsey, a white man, was forced to resign his position on the New Hanover County Board of Education and later wrote in the papers that he would not “be led off as [he] was before by designing men and intend not to serve in any office in which a negro [was] with [him] in said office.” Wilmington grew increasingly hostile to white non-Democrats, and many men sought to make peace with the new Democratic power brokers or—like W. J. Harris and L. H. Bryant—to simply leave the city because of hostilities.<sup>75</sup> The Democratic Party also tried to keep other people under its thumb. When a rumor circulated that President McKinley planed to return George French to the city as postmaster, local businessmen sent a petition to McKinley—“Mr. French has rendered himself peculiarly obnoxious to the citizens here, and his presence . . . would roughly jar the peace . . . that now possesses the

community.” They also threatened French, who, they contended, was “sufficiently aware of the temper of the white people of Wilmington to know that it would not do for him to return to this city even with a United States commission in his pocket.”<sup>76</sup>

The “negro problem” continued even after the disfranchisement amendment was ratified. Many felt the answer to the “question” was two-fold—disfranchisement and proper education. Some white educators such as Charles L. Coon attempted to provide what they deemed a proper education for blacks—primarily the training to be good workers. Reflecting the sentiment in newspapers and intellectual discussions in both black and white circles, John J. Blair, white superintendent of New Hanover County schools in 1905, believed that the “solution of the race problem” was in the proper education of African American boys and girls. He thought black education should teach a student “how to live and how to labor . . . to sustain himself and aid others, to gain from his books a reasonable amount of learning and receive lasting lessons in morals and manners.”<sup>77</sup> Conversely, men such as Alfred Moore Waddell thought that whites should quit trying to educate blacks because it would not solve “social and political evils.” Such men who became known as exclusionists pointed out the failure of black education—for it made blacks more assertive. They perceived that new generations of blacks were not complacent but instead were “indifferent, unreliable, untrained, and indolent” as a result of an educational system that promoted equal education for both races.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>74</sup> For a good overview of Wilmington’s African American community, see Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle*.

<sup>75</sup> For articles demonstrating how Wilmington’s climate changed for non-Democrats, see the *Morning Star* (Wilmington), November 16, 17, 1898, and the *Wilmington Messenger*, November 16 – December 7, 1898. *Contested Election Case*, 387, 394.

<sup>76</sup> *Wilmington Messenger* August 1, 1899; *Morning Star* (Wilmington), August 3, 1899; McDuffie, “Politics in Wilmington,” 790.

<sup>77</sup> Blair quoted from *Wilmington Messenger*, June 7, 1905 as found in Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle*, 154.

<sup>78</sup> Waddell as quoted in Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 177-8.

## Changes for African American Education

Despite the differing opinions expressed regarding African American education, Wilmington boasted some of the best educational options for blacks in North Carolina. The city was home to a series of well established public and private institutions for both primary and secondary learning. Many of the city's graduates moved to universities and colleges elsewhere in the state and nation.<sup>79</sup>

Progressive educator and county school superintendent, M. C. S. Noble left the city in 1898. His departure was a setback for the city's educational system. While in Wilmington, Noble, a graduate of the University of North Carolina, proved himself to be a man of great insight and an advocate of equality in education. He left Wilmington in 1898 and moved back to Chapel Hill to become a professor. Noble understood that the education of whites and blacks should parallel each other. He thought that if whites were shown that blacks could be well educated and could use their education for the benefit of society, relationships would improve over time. He argued that Orange County should fund a black educational institute "in the shadow" of UNC because "a good, practical, successful school right before their [white students at UNC] eyes from day to day [would] be a compelling argument for negro education which [would] bear fruit when these students [took] their place as men in the public affairs of the state."<sup>80</sup> Noble

envisioned a school that would combine practical skills education, such as carpentry and trades, with literary studies. Noble's ideal school was loosely tied to the model proposed by many educators who applauded the success of the Tuskegee Institute. As a result, African American schools began to focus on trades and the goal of producing better workers.<sup>81</sup>

Analysis of the impact of the 1898 campaign and violence on schools in Wilmington and New Hanover County is difficult because many records have been destroyed over time. However, the minutes of the New Hanover County Commissioners and the records of the State Department of Public Instruction document spending for schools before and after the violence of November 1898. Better teacher pay encouraged the recruitment and retention of good teachers; low teacher pay resulted in lower teacher recruitment standards. Low

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education in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Noble apparently made the early start on his career as a result of the progressive nature of his work in Wilmington. Despite his progressive steps in the city school system, Wilmington's black students still suffered financial setbacks and reflected a larger problem for black education statewide. M. C. S. Noble, *A History of the Public Schools of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1930).

<sup>81</sup> Leloudis explained that the vocational curricula of Booker T. Washington's highly successful Tuskegee Institute offered white educators an option for improving black educational programs. Training blacks to be good workers in trades and agriculture became a major focus designed to address what whites perceived as the needs and desires of blacks. "Industrial education promised to cultivate a new sense of self and social place among African American school children, convincing them to accept their subordination as a normal and inevitable fact of life." Aiding in the development of vocational training was the arrival of Jeannes teachers in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Funded by a northern philanthropist, Jeannes teachers traveled the state and taught students and teachers on a variety of topics. Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 148, 182, 184-185.

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<sup>79</sup> For more on Wilmington's educational system, see Appendix E.

<sup>80</sup> M. C. S. Noble as quoted by James Leloudis in *Schooling the New South: Pedagogy, Self, and Society in North Carolina, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1996), 200. It is interesting to note that Noble, in writing the history of public education in North Carolina, failed to mention the growth of Wilmington's schools when discussing the progressive nature of statewide

funding also resulted in an inadequate supply of textbooks and materials. Financial disparity among the schools was legitimized in statewide legislation in 1883 and 1885 when the Democratic legislature codified local practices. The legislation authorized school districts to distribute tax revenue along racial lines. Historian James Leloudis declared that “this method of financing stood to cripple black education.”<sup>82</sup> Again, after regaining full control of state government through the 1900 election, Democrats sought to limit funding for black schools through two bills in 1901. Governor Charles Aycock felt that black education was the answer to the “negro question” and used his influence to quash the legislation. He insisted that whites could not continue to rule through “force and repression” and that whites had a vested interest in black education.<sup>83</sup> Despite attempts by men such as Aycock to advocate for educational standards, the trend of reduced school funding persisted. The only way Wilmington’s black schools were able to provide any degree of higher education to students was through northern benevolence and the determination of local African

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<sup>82</sup> The 1883 legislation became known as the Dortch law for the state senator, William Dortch of Goldsboro, who introduced the bill. The Dortch law was denounced by many African American leaders and was eventually declared unconstitutional. Subsequent legislation in 1885 reworked the Dortch law and gave leniency to local districts to distribute their wealth as they saw fit. Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 121-122.

<sup>83</sup> Aycock realized that limiting school funding based on racial taxation possibly would invite federal intervention. He also advocated that black students be properly educated through curriculum and care tightly controlled by North Carolina whites. Aycock chose to promote fully the separation of the races in education to, in the end, benefit the black race to fit them into their subordinate role, peacefully forcing the black population into a different set of rules for education. Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 177-180; Connor and Poe, *Life and Speeches of Charles B. Aycock*.

American leaders to press for the best options for their children.<sup>84</sup>

There were two districts for whites and two for blacks in the city.<sup>85</sup> Although black school-age children outnumbered white school-age children both before and after November 10, 1898, the city’s schools for black students were regularly given less funding for maintenance, books, and salaries than were the white schools.<sup>86</sup> The gap between funding for white schools and black schools grew wider after 1898.<sup>87</sup> White

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<sup>84</sup> Donations for salaries, supplies, and school buildings for Wilmington and elsewhere in North Carolina came from northern benefactors such as George Peabody, James Gregory, the American Missionary Association, and, later, from the philanthropy of Julius Rosenwald, whose funds contributed greatly to the construction of school buildings in the 1920s. Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle*, 144-173.

<sup>85</sup> The two white districts were Hemenway and Union School. The two black districts were Peabody and Williston.

<sup>86</sup> In July 1898, there were 1,763 white students (55 percent of all white school age children in the county) enrolled in Wilmington public schools and 2,290 black students (51 percent of black school age children in the county). The property values of the white schools in the county totaled \$37,250.00 and the property values of the black schools totaled \$12,850.00. Report of Superintendent M. C. S. Noble to State Department of Public Instruction, July, 1898, Superintendent’s Reports, Records of the Department of Public Instruction, State Archives, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh.

<sup>87</sup> In July 1899, the number of students of both races declined to only 1,188 white students (57 percent of all white school age children in the county) and 2,110 black students (47 percent of all black school age children in the county). However, property values increased to \$76,690.00 for white schools and \$17,500.00 for black schools. The numbers gap again deepened in 1900 and 1901. By 1901, 40 percent (1,175) of the African American school-age children in the county attended school and 63 percent (2,087) of the white school-age children attended schools. That year, white school properties were valued at \$82,600.00 and black school properties were valued at \$18,050.00. Leloudis noted that the result of low funding for black schools resulted in “overcrowded, ramshackle classrooms.”

educators, administrators and politicians justified the disparity by again referring to the amount of taxes paid by whites and blacks.<sup>88</sup> Because whites traditionally paid more taxes for property and businesses, their taxes were considerably more than those of blacks who owned little taxable property.

Statistics reflect inequity in funding for the black schools. In November 1898, white schools were given \$858.02 to operate whereas black schools were given \$523.16. Operating costs included maintenance, textbooks, wood for heat, janitorial services, and other standard operations. A year later, white schools received an average of \$909.08 per school, and black schools received \$416.50 per school. By January 1903, the figures grew still more disproportionate with white schools receiving \$1,617.26 and black schools receiving \$383.65 per school in the city district. Statewide, black teachers were paid significantly less than white teachers, and school buildings for blacks received much less funding for construction and repair. The following table shows funds provided to Wilmington schools for all expenses except teacher salaries. White schools consistently received more funding even though black

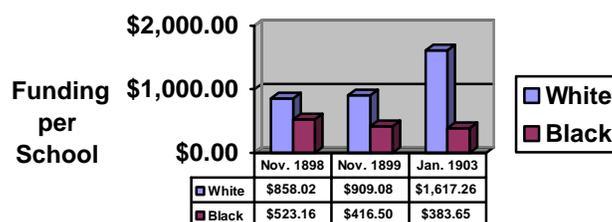
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Report of Superintendent of New Hanover County Schools to State Department of Public Instruction, July, 1899, July 1900, July 1901, Superintendent's Reports, Records of the Department of Public Instruction, State Archives, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh; Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 211.

<sup>88</sup> References to amounts of taxes paid by both races as reason for differences in school funding can be seen in contemporary literature generated by reports of the Department of Public Instruction as well as in newspapers, letters and legislative actions. Tables in the *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina for the Scholastic Years 1898-99 and 1899-1900* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1900) show the amounts apportioned to white and black schools according to taxation and property valuations for the county. Data for the report was culled from the reports filed by the county superintendent.

schools served more students. The difference grew dramatically from a gap of just over \$300 per school in 1898 to over \$1,200 per school in 1903.<sup>89</sup> Although Wilmington is at the center of this study, the effects of the white supremacy campaign did not affect the city's schools disproportionately when compared to other schools in the state.<sup>90</sup>

**Wilmington City School Disbursements**



The difficulties faced by African American schools were exacerbated by low teacher pay. Before the coup and violence of November 10, 1898, Wilmington's black teachers were paid an average of \$1.20 per month less than white teachers.<sup>91</sup> A year later, white teachers in the city received \$7.08 more than their black colleagues. By 1900 the disparity was even greater, with

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<sup>89</sup> Minutes of the New Hanover County Commissioners, State Archives, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh.

<sup>90</sup> In 1927, an article published in *The Crisis*, published by W. E. B. DuBois for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, showed that African American schools in North Carolina were still funded at rates significantly lower than white counterparts. Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 226.

<sup>91</sup> The average pay for white teachers in November, 1898 was \$36.84 and \$35.64 for black teachers. Minutes of the New Hanover County Commissioners, State Archives, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh.

**Average Monthly Salaries of New Hanover Teachers by Race**

	1897	1898	1899	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905
White	36.23	38.40	53.39	52.50	38.00	44.00	48.38	48.38	42.70
Black	35.23	35.38	38.55	36.58	29.00	30.00	32.60	30.10	35.00

**Average Monthly Salaries of North Carolina Teachers by Race**

	1897	1898	1899	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905
White	22.01	23.81	25.24	24.80	25.40	26.79	28.37	29.05	31.40
Black	19.90	20.75	21.12	20.48	22.07	22.19	22.64	22.27	23.00

Source: Annual Reports of the North Carolina Superintendent of Public Instruction

municipal white teachers earning almost \$16 per month more than blacks.<sup>92</sup> Men were routinely paid more than women, and administrators, who were also teachers, received higher pay. However, race skewed the formula. For example, Mary E. Cook, white principal at Union School was the teacher with the highest pay at \$60 for her work in November 1898. John A. Holt, black principal at Williston, was paid \$40 that same month.<sup>93</sup>

The city's African American leaders pressed the Board of Education for improvements to the school system. In 1920, a group of leaders appealed to the board to improve education across the board for the city's blacks: "The negro citizens respectfully appeal to your body for a larger, more adequate, more intensive personal interest in the education of our people by your people."<sup>94</sup> Such requests reflected a growing effort across the state to improve

traditionally African American school districts through better funding, better organization of African American teachers, and improved curriculum.<sup>95</sup>

### Employment

The "White Labor Movement," was characterized by organized groups of white workers who sought employment in fields traditionally dominated by black workers, received much attention after the coup.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Another white philanthropist, Julius Rosenwald, helped to fund the construction of around 767 schools in the state beginning in 1915, including seven in Wilmington. The North Carolina Teacher's Association, founded by Wilmington's Charles Moore in 1880, did not gain in membership and collective strength until 1900. Thomas W. Hanchett, "The Rosenwald Schools and Black Education in North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review*, October, 1988, 387-444; Percy E. Murray, *History of the North Carolina Teacher's Association*, (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, [1984]), 15-19, 33.

<sup>96</sup> The White Laborer's Union held a meeting on November 21 and persisted as an organized force into the following year. Union members sported lapel pins and adopted their goal, "to aid and assist white men in obtaining situations and work which previously had largely been occupied by negroes." The Union accomplished its objective by forming committees to visit businessmen and encourage white hiring. The Union also pressured the county into opening a night school to educate white children who were working during the day. Democratic Party leaders sought to control the Union and warned it not to get involved in politics, drawing a connection between union involvement in politics and the failures of the Farmers' Alliance. *Evening Dispatch* (Wilmington),

<sup>92</sup> Average white pay in November 1899 was \$39.83 and average black teacher salaries were \$32.75. In 1900, the average salary of white teachers was \$52.50 and \$36.58 for African Americans. Minutes of the New Hanover County Commissioners, State Archives, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh; Report of Superintendent of New Hanover County Schools to State Department of Public Instruction, July 1900, Superintendent's Reports, Records of the Department of Public Instruction, State Archives, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh.

<sup>93</sup> For more information on Wilmington's teachers and their pay, see Appendix E. Minutes of the New Hanover County Commissioners, State Archives, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh.

<sup>94</sup> *Morning Star* (Wilmington), June 11, 1920.

Not only did the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce work to ensure the hiring of whites and the firing of blacks, but others in the state watched the labor movement in Wilmington closely. Newspapers reported that the Union had secured permanent jobs for over 60 white men and anticipated placing many more with leading manufacturers in the city. Across the board, blacks saw themselves replaced by white workers, many of whom agreed to do “disagreeable and arduous work.” White laborers streamed into the city from the countryside, motivated in part by sinking prices for farm products. To promote white employment, the newspapers promised to print the names of white workers and their fields to assist employers who needed mechanics, draymen, masons, carpenters, and other skilled workers.<sup>97</sup>

Among the jobs dominated by African American labor before November 1898 were stevedores, dock workers who loaded and off-loaded goods between ships and warehouses along the shore. Beginning in 1891, stevedores had to register and post a bond to operate. Typically, there was a “boss” stevedore who organized several other men under his supervision. One of the requirements placed upon the bosses was the obligation to promptly handle contracts and

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November 21, 1898; *Wilmington Messenger*, February 7, March 5, 7, 1899.

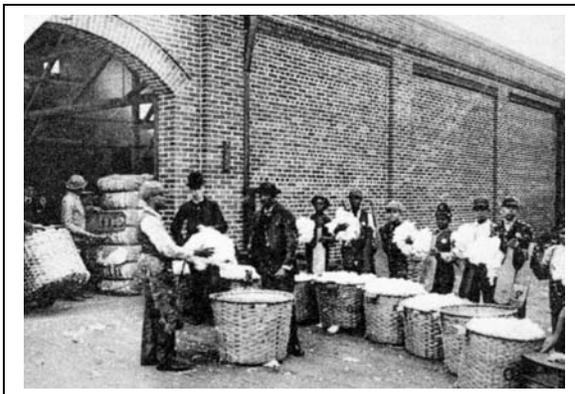
<sup>97</sup> “If Wilmington shall find that white labor can be successfully substituted for colored, other towns will not be slow to follow her lead.” The paper also noted that the topic was of statewide interest to blacks and whites alike. A brief complaint was made in the *Messenger* when it was discovered that an all-black crew led by a black foreman had secured a contract to tear down an old building on Front Street when white workers were available. Further analysis of the changes in the labor market for African Americans can be found in Chapter 8 and Appendix N. *News and Observer* (Raleigh), December 15, 1898; *Morning Star* (Wilmington), February 3, 1898; *Wilmington Messenger*, February 21, March 18, 1899.

to pay employees accordingly. Between 1891 and 1898, of the stevedore bonds issued, seven were issued for whites and three for blacks. One of the black firms was Waddell and Newkirk, operated by Cato Waddell and Thomas Newkirk. Another was operated by Andrew J. Walker and Charles Forman. The black firm with the most staying power was Lee, Starnes, and Company, operated by Joseph Starnes, Major Lee, Fred Williams, and John Turner. Joseph McFarland and Henry Robinson joined the operation in 1895. Lee, Starnes, and Company must have been one of the more organized and profitable stevedore companies because, in 1898, two of its African American principals, Major Lee and Henry Robinson, partnered with two whites, J. W. H. Fuchs and W. W. Harriss, to establish the Wilmington Stevedore Company. The Wilmington Stevedore Company soon became the major source for stevedore labor. By 1900, the Wilmington Stevedore Company was an altogether white operation with no mention of either Lee or Robinson.<sup>98</sup>

Not all employers abandoned their black laborers in the face of the pressures of the White Labor Movement. James Sprunt maintained his practice of hiring black workers at his cotton compress. Within three days of the riot, his businesses were again operating and ships were coming into port. Newspapers made a point to show that the city and its businesses were recuperating from the riot. However, all was not well in the shipping businesses since many African American draymen still had not returned to work. This point was particularly troublesome for Sprunt and his compress because Sprunt faced immediate financial loss if his crews could not off-load ships waiting at anchor. On November 13 it was reported that Sprunt

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<sup>98</sup> New Hanover County Official’s Bonds, State Archives, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh.

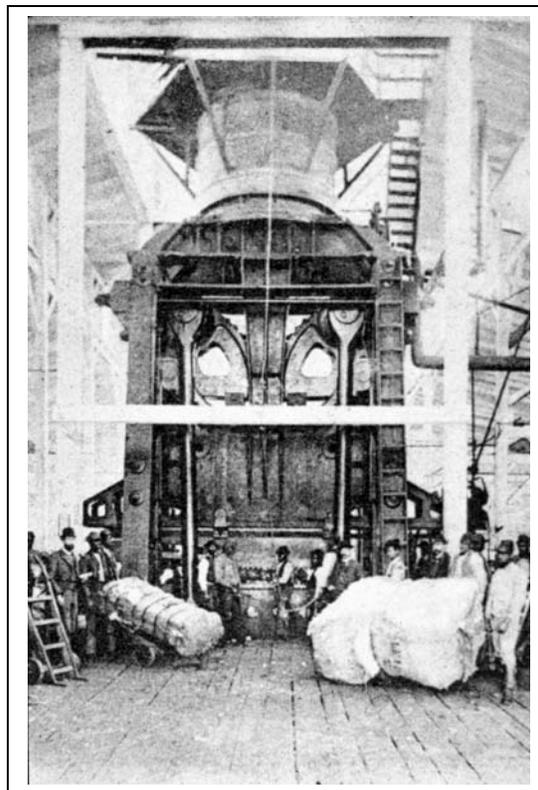


Sprunt Compress Employees

Image: New Hanover County Public Library

had only two-thirds of his workforce on hand and that shipping was being “greatly retarded” because nine ships were waiting to be cleared. It was expected that the contract for off-loading seven of those ships would expire before they could be docked. To encourage a return to normalcy for workers, Sprunt offered a rare interview to the papers in which he said that he thought quiet and peaceful blacks would not be harmed. He hoped that black workers could be convinced of their safety so they could return to work and resolve the current labor shortages. Sprunt clearly wished for his experienced, trusted, African American employees to return to work even at a time when the white labor movement was fiercely promoting the hiring of white men over black.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Further study of Sprunt’s voluminous corporate records at Duke University might shed light on the company’s labor force, although the company apparently continued to employ African American stevedores into the twentieth century. The compress ledgers have active records for accounts and receivables, as well as references to cotton brought in and shipped out for most days of November, 1898. There are no entries for November 10 because, evidently, no work was done. As indicated by other sources, work was stopped the day of the riot.



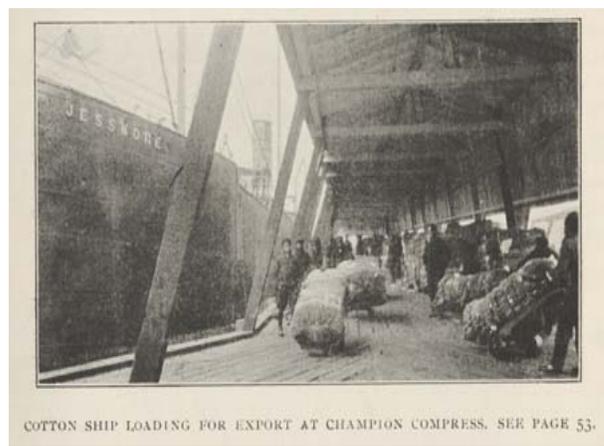
Sprunt Compress Workers

Image: New Hanover County Public Library

Entries pick up again on the next day with business as usual. Lura Beam, a northern teacher who moved to Wilmington in 1908, noted that local African Americans highly respected the “local cotton king.” A Sprunt employee recalled that Sprunt would “provide things for the black people,” particularly at Christmas time when he would fill barrels with food and give each employee a full barrel for the holiday. Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle*, 325; *Morning Star* (Wilmington), November 13, 1898; Alexander Sprunt and Son, Account Ledgers, November, 1898, Duke University Library, Durham; Lura Beam, *He Called Them by the Lightning*, 15-36; Block, *Wilmington Through the Lens of Louis T. Moore*, 251



“Weighing Cotton on Compress Docks”  
Image: Lower Cape Fear Historical Society



Sprunt Compress Workers, 1902  
**Image:** Wilmington Up-to-Date: The Metropolis of North Carolina Graphically Portrayed. Compiled under the Auspices of the Chamber of Commerce. Electronic Edition., *Documenting the American South*, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



African American stevedores, Wilmington wharf, 1920's  
Images Courtesy of New Hanover County Public Library



### Complete Change

As the Wilmington community settled in to cope with the changes wrought by November 10, one editor became philosophical: “The eyes of the world are upon us and we must keep up the record we are making as the only city on record that has overthrown corruption and established good government in the short space of eight hours.”<sup>100</sup> Other publications in the state acknowledged that the events in Wilmington marked the beginning of a larger phenomenon: “Negro rule is at an end in North Carolina forever. The events of the past week in Wilmington and elsewhere place that fact beyond all question.”<sup>101</sup> With those two sentences, the editors of the *Raleigh Farmer and Mechanic* wrote a prophetic statement—whites and blacks across the state, and arguably across the nation, watched the white supremacy campaign grow unchecked, men robbed of their civil liberties at the polls, violence and murders in broad daylight, and municipal government overthrown by force, all without consequence for the perpetrators or solace for the victims. “Negro rule,” the term for black Republican voting strength in Wilmington, was ended by the Democratic Party through violence, intimidation, and murder. Statewide, Democrats took ownership of the violence and used it repeatedly to stifle political ambitions of blacks—re-telling the tale became a feature of future campaigns.<sup>102</sup>

An indicator of the heightened sense of violence in the city can be found in the 1903 city directory. That year was one of the first in which the directory contained a

section to identify locations of fire alarm call boxes plus instructions for how many taps were needed to identify an emergency. For example, 5 taps in the box called an extra hose wagon to the fire and 6 brought an extra engine. The “riot call” consisted of 10 taps and general alarm was 12 taps. Of 34 call boxes in the city, 15 were in the north side of town with only 7 on the south side and the rest in the downtown business district or the outlying industrial areas. The locations and instructions imply that Wilmington’s officials anticipated trouble more often in the traditionally black section of town and stationed enough boxes in that area to ensure that if violence or danger erupted, a call box was nearby.<sup>103</sup>

The prospects of equal civil rights for African Americans were darkened as a result of the events of 1898. As the newly elected Democratically controlled General Assembly enacted the state’s first Jim Crow legislation in 1899, North Carolina joined the rest of the South in undermining the efforts of Republicans, both before and after Reconstruction, to equalize the races in education, employment, and political involvement. Future generations of Democratic Party politicians built upon the foundations of discrimination and economic disadvantage established in 1898.

The Democratic press heralded the twentieth century and the election of Democrats throughout the state as the beginning of a great dynasty for the state and an era of growth. Indeed, the state did prosper as Democratic businessmen, satisfied that their party was now in control of government, turned their minds from political intrigue to financial matters. However, the prosperity was short lived, limited largely to upper- and middle-class whites, and did not trickle down to the African American or poor white communities.

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<sup>100</sup> *Evening Dispatch* (Wilmington), November 12, 1898

<sup>101</sup> *Raleigh Farmer and Mechanic*, November 15, 1898.

<sup>102</sup> Leslie H. Hossfeld, *Narrative, Political Unconscious, and Racial Violence in Wilmington, North Carolina*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 6.

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<sup>103</sup> 1903 *Wilmington City Directory*.