

Chapter 3: Practical Politics

- The 1898 election season opened with Republican and Populist leaders loosing control of the Fusion movement. Both parties were fractured because of Governor Daniel L. Russell's inability to bridge Fusion to satisfy both sides. The resulting failure of Fusion spurred the rejuvenation of the Democratic Party.
- Furnifold Simmons was selected to chair the State Democratic Party campaign of 1898. Simmons and the Democrats developed a white supremacy argument as a primary campaign tool even as they pointed out shortcomings of the incumbent Fusion administration. Leading Democrat Josephus Daniels noted that Simmons used a three-prong attack to win the election: men who could write, speak and "ride."
 - Men who could write were used to create propoganda for newspapers and circulars provided by the Democratic Party. The *Raleigh News and Observer*, *Charlotte Observer*, and *Wilmington Messenger and Morning Star* led the barrage.
 - Men who could speak were sent throughout the state to inflame white voters. Statewide speakers included future governor Charles B. Aycock, Robert Glenn and Wilmington native Alfred Moore Waddell.
 - Men who could ride were recruited by clubs such as the White Government Union and Red Shirts. The clubs sought to intimidate blacks and press white Fusionists to vote for Democratic Party candidates.
- Wilmington's election campaign reflected the statewide program and leading Democrats from across the state took special interest in securing victory in the city. Added to the campaign was a series of secret meetings in which leading white businessmen planned to retake control of the city after the election. The men, called the "Secret Nine," also mapped out a city-wide plan of action in case of violence.
- Wilmington hosted a strong set of White Government Union clubs as well as an active group of Red Shirts. These men held rallies and paraded through African American neighborhoods brandishing guns on a regular basis.
- The city's major newspapers were full of Democratic campaign rhetoric and contributed to the increasing tensions by printing inflammatory articles concerning threats of black violence, reports of skyrocketing gun sales, glorified accounts of Red Shirt activity, and excerpts of speeches by men such as Alfred Moore Waddell.
- Waddell's role as a provocative speaker was central to the campaign. His speeches survive as examples of the extremes to which white Wilmington Democrats were willing to go in order to achieve victory.
- Support for the campaign grew on an almost daily basis and Red Shirt activity increased in the days just prior to the election on November 8, 1898 as a means of intimidating and frightening blacks and white Republicans.

- **Chapter 3: Practical Politics: Writing, Speaking and Riding in the 1898 Campaign**

“The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary.” -H. L. Mencken

In preparation for the 1898 elections, political parties began to develop their platforms and select candidates. As the election season began in full swing, the attention of North Carolinians was increasingly divided between national patriotism called forth as a result of the Spanish American War and the brewing political fight in the state.¹

The Spanish-American War was declared on April 14, 1898. President William McKinley had been monitoring the situation closely and politicians had impressed upon him the potential financial rewards for the U. S. upon entry into the conflict. By the first of May, the U.S. was engaged with the Spanish in naval operations. Two months later, after an American victory at the Battle of San Juan Hill and the destruction of the Spanish fleet, the Spanish pressed for peace. As a result of a call to arms from President McKinley and Governor Daniel L. Russell, 106 Wilmington men enlisted in the service of the military as members of Company K, Second Regiment North Carolina State Troops, also known as the active component of the Wilmington Light Infantry, and another contingent left as crewmembers on the *Nantucket*. Both Company K and the *Nantucket* crew left the state in pursuit of conflict but neither saw action. The *Nantucket* remained in port in South Carolina and Company K drilled and marched in Raleigh and Georgia. The men

had returned home on furlough by the fall.² A large number of African Americans from North Carolina also enlisted to fight in the war after Governor Russell authorized the creation of a black battalion in April 1898. Russell appointed Major James H. Young as commander of the battalion, later mustered into service in July as the Third Regiment of North Carolina Troops. Unlike the Second Regiment, the Third remained in camp and service until 1899, when it was mustered out in February.³

The Democratic machine began to get more organized after the 1896 election even as the Fusionists became more and

² The final act that precipitated war was the February 15th sinking of the U.S. battleship *Maine*, which was docked in Havana, Cuba following rioting in the city between Cubans and the Spanish government. Most of Company K was mustered into service on May 13, 1898, and were mustered out on November 18, 1898. Donald MacRae brother of Hugh MacRae, was Captain. DeRossett, *Pictorial and Historical New Hanover County*, 89; *Roster of the North Carolina Volunteers in the Spanish-American War, 1898-1899* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton and E.M. Uzzell, 1900), 79-81.

³ Wilmington’s contribution to the roster of the Third Regiment was 40 privates, 16 officers, 1 musician and 2 wagoners. The Third Regiment was camped near Fort Macon in the summer and fall of 1898 and its men would often visit Wilmington and other coastal towns. When the men visited, they enraged whites by demanding “equal treatment.” The men were transferred from the coast to Tennessee in September where they remained throughout the rest of the campaign season. Some have speculated that if the men of the Third Regiment had also been furloughed and back in Wilmington by the fall of 1898, the election and ensuing violence would have been different. *Roster of NC Volunteers in the Spanish-American War*, 92-117; Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., “North Carolina’s Negro Regiment in the Spanish-American War,” *North Carolina Historical Review*, October, 1971, 370-387.

¹ During a white supremacy rally and parade, it was noted that ladies along the parade route waved both U.S. and Cuban flags. *Wilmington Messenger*, November 4, 1898.

more fractured and their cohesion eventually dissolved. Despite attempts by Governor Russell and Senator Marion Butler, splits between Populists and Republicans and within their respective parties grew throughout Russell's administration. Republicans and Populists expected the Democrat's campaign lines as, for example, when, in 1897, the Democratic State Committee declared that the state had "fallen on evil days" that recalled "the days of reconstruction."⁴

As the incumbent party with their leader as Governor, the Republicans should have been confident in their re-election possibilities. However, the party was fractured and Russell garnered little support because of his "maverick" attitudes. He was seen by various factions as either a Populist or a Republican but not solidly either. Further complications arose because many Republicans, particularly African Americans, disliked Russell's decisions to appoint Populists to prominent positions. At the beginning of the 1898 election campaign season, Russell feared that he could not control an outright Republican convention as he had in the past and that a convention would result in a rejection of Russell's influence.⁵ His fears were realized when in July the party held its convention and Russell was not invited to speak or participate in the proceedings. At the convention, the Republicans attempted to woo the Populists for another Fusion victory. In the face of mounting Democratic Party strength, the two parties managed a

weak Fusion late in the campaign, long after the Democrats had begun their white supremacy mantra.⁶

The first to hold their convention in May 1898, in Raleigh were the Populists. At that convention, arguments for cooperation with both the Republican and Democratic parties were bandied about but, in the end, the party chose to set its own platform and began to chart its own path, waiting as it had in the past to court, and to be courted by, the other two parties. Dr. Cyrus P. Thompson and Marion Butler led the Populists during the campaign and repeatedly attempted to point out that the Democrats failed to address real issues facing North Carolina. Further, the Populists, through a special supplement to *The Progressive Farmer* late in the campaign, sought to prove that the Democratic Party's campaign issues were contrived to support the agenda of a few "Democratic bosses."⁷

Following the Populist convention by only weeks, the Democrats also held their convention in Raleigh. Leader Furnifold Simmons was bolstered by influential men such as Charles B. Aycock, Claude Kitchin, Locke Craig, Cameron Morrison, George Rountree, Francis D. Winston, Alfred Moore Waddell, and Josephus Daniels. A proposal of fusion with the Populist Party was soundly rejected by the convention and, instead, a platform was adopted that reviled the two previous Fusion legislatures and their actions as part of "Negro domination" and promised "rule by the white men of the State."⁸

⁴ Crow, *Maverick Republican*, 117.

⁵ Not until later in the 20th century did North Carolina governors have the option to run for a second term. However, outgoing Governors traditionally wielded influence within their parties over selection of a successor candidate. Russell had lost control of the party through a series of conflicts related to Fusion politics and renewed African American distrust. McDuffie, *Politics in Wilmington*, 552; Crow, *Maverick Republican*, 123-4.

⁶ A. E. Holton was Executive Committee Chair of the Republican Party during the 1898 campaign. Crow, *Maverick Republican*, 124-5; Daniel, *Editor in Politics*, 285.

⁷ McDuffie, *Politics in Wilmington*, 525-533; Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 285; *The Progressive Farmer*, October 25, 1898.

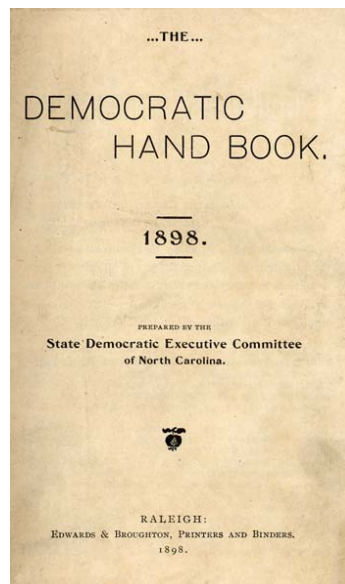
⁸ McDuffie, *Politics in Wilmington*, 537-8; State Democratic Executive Committee of North Carolina,

Development of the Democratic “Machine”

Furnifold Simmons led the development of the Democratic Party into a tough, well-organized competitor for political offices beginning with the 1898 campaign. Nominated to serve as chair of the State Democratic Party in 1898, Simmons had long been involved in state and national politics. A New Bern attorney, he had served as chair of the Democratic Party during the successful 1892 campaign but resigned before the 1894 season and subsequent Democratic defeats in 1894 and 1896.⁹

Simmons used his organizational skills to rally supporters and press others into the Democratic fold. The approach, credited to Simmons as chair of the party, was to use newspapers, speakers rallies, and coercion to achieve victory. In the *Democratic Party Handbook* for the 1898 campaign and other literature generated by Simmons, he promoted a singular topic – incumbent bad government by the Republican Party – and developed themes along that topic, many related to white man’s rule. He depicted whites who voted for Russell and Fusion as men who had been led astray and simply needed to be brought back to the Democratic ranks.

The Republican Party was characterized as the party of scandal and poor results, leading to debt, ineffectual government and abuses by officials. Further, the handbook asserted that the Republican Party was dominated by blacks, who forced white Republicans to accede to black wishes in order to advance to political office. The end result of this black/white relationship, according to Democrats, was



Democratic Handbook, 1898
Image:
Documenting the American South,
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

that unscrupulous and incompetent men of both races were allowed to rule state and local governments during Russell’s administration.¹⁰

Further developing the argument, the handbook claimed that blacks outnumbered whites in several eastern counties even though the state featured a white majority overall. Their conclusion – “It is, therefore, manifest that the negro must enter as a factor into any plan, scheme or purpose for the administration of the public affairs of the State.”¹¹ The party stated that “this is a white man’s country and white men must control and govern it” because they could manage government better than African Americans, who had demonstrated through Republican rule their inability to manage themselves and others.¹²

Using these themes, Simmons developed a strong anti-Republican, anti-black stance for the Party. Like previous platforms of the Democratic Party, the 1898 strategy focused on accomplishments of the Democrats when in power and preached the pitfalls of black officeholding. But, the 1898

Democratic Party Handbook, 1898 (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1898).

⁹ Rippey, *Statesman of the New South*, 21.

¹⁰ *Democratic Party Handbook*, 35.

¹¹ *Democratic Handbook*, 37.

¹² *Democratic Handbook*, 38.

campaign also took new paths in planning and preparation for the November elections. Simmons made effective uses of manpower through better party organization and control of county Democratic Party committees. County committee chairs received weekly correspondence from the state headquarters plus quantities of posters and circulars – some two million documents statewide throughout the campaign.¹³ Simmons' successful 1892 campaign was the organizational framework for the 1898 campaign, as he united business interests and average citizen voters using claims of corruption by “Republican-Negro rule.”¹⁴



Furnifold
Simmons
*Image: North Carolina
Collection, University
of North Carolina at
Chapel Hill*

Through unification of various factors that traditionally supported the Democratic Party, Simmons achieved victory. To fund his programs, Simmons quietly called on businessmen from throughout the state and promised that the Democrats would not raise business taxes if his candidates were elected.¹⁵ Josephus Daniels, a hearty supporter of the Democratic Party's white supremacy platform, recalled that Simmons was “a genius in putting everybody to work – men

who could write, men who could speak, and men who could ride – the last by no means the least important.”¹⁶ Thus, victory was to be achieved through the unification of newspapers, traveling campaign speakers and violent bands of men behind a singular argument – white supremacy.

Wilmington's position as the state's largest city governed by Populists and Republicans bolstered by a large black voting majority made it a perfect test case for Simmons' propaganda program. His print and speech program focused on the city with claims that it was under “negro domination.” Articles from the city's pro-Democratic Party papers regarding local leaders were picked up and expounded upon by the *News and Observer* and the *Charlotte Observer* to demonstrate to the rest of the state the perils of non-Democratic Party leadership. To fuel the argument for the redemption of Wilmington, the *News and Observer* sent a correspondent to the city regularly to generate more fodder for the white supremacy fever.¹⁷ Some Wilmingtonians prided themselves that the Democratic Party's star speechmaker, Charles Aycock's, proclaimed that the city was “the center of the white supremacy movement.” After hearing speeches at a party rally in Goldsboro in October, Josephus Daniels observed that “the cause of Wilmington became the cause of all.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 284.

¹⁷ McDuffie, *Politics in Wilmington*, 583; Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 283-312.

¹⁸ A large rally was held in Goldsboro in October with prominent speakers including Aycock and Waddell. Waddell's speech outlined numerous examples of “negro domination” in Wilmington and what he considered to be examples of bad Fusion government in the city to rally support for the campaign. Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 301; *Hayden, WLI*, 68; *Wilmington Messenger*, October 28-29, 1898; *Wilmington Morning Star*, October 28, 1898.

¹³ Poland, *Glorious Victory*, 4.

¹⁴ James Fred Rippey, *F.M. Simmons: Statesman of the New South, Memoirs and Addresses*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1936) 19, 22-3.

¹⁵ Crow, *Maverick Republican*, 125.

Men Who Could Write

One of the most visible components of the 1898 Democratic campaign was the use of newspapers. Simmons enlisted the help of Josephus Daniels as editor of the *Raleigh News and Observer* to be the “militant voice of White Supremacy.”¹⁹ Daniels, a long-time Democrat, was well-connected to others in the state’s ruling elite and, in 1894, collaborated with Julian Carr to purchase the *News and Observer* as a tool for the Democratic Party in its fight against Fusion. Using the *News and Observer* first as a barometer of public opinion and then as a weapon, Daniels and Simmons worked together to develop a strong argument against Fusion and in favor of white supremacy in order to win the 1898 election. The paper slowly introduced the white supremacy issue to its readers, fed stories to other papers and worked the reading public into a frightened and tense frenzy. Especially powerful were the *News and Observers’* editorial cartoons. Daniels had hired Norman Jennett to draw occasional political cartoons for the paper during the 1896 election season and, by the 1898 season, Jennett’s cartoons were ever present – both Daniels and Simmons considered the cartoons to be “one of the greatest factors in winning victories.”²⁰ Daniels asserted that

he used “every act and argument that we thought would serve to influence the white people” and credited his paper with headlines that “sealed the doom of Fusion.” Later in life Daniels admitted that the paper was occasionally excessive in its bias toward Democrats and that stories were not fully researched before publication and probably could not be “sustained in a court of justice.” He bragged that, because of the print campaign, “people on every side were at such a key of fighting and hate that the Democrats would believe almost any piece of rascality and the Fusionists got into the habit of denying everything.” By the end of the campaign, the *News and Observer* was a powerful force in campaign rhetoric and portions of its articles were published nationwide.²¹

Other editors held up the white supremacy banner and did all within their power to publicize the actions of Republicans and Democrats as part of the larger campaign. One vocal reporter, in some respects a tool of Daniels, was H. E. C. “Red Buck” Bryant of the *Charlotte Observer*. Bryant traveled the state to document the activities of the Democrats and to point out what he perceived as pitfalls of Fusion government, including much investigative work in Wilmington. In an

¹⁹ Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 295.

²⁰ Just as Carr had assisted in the start-up of the *News and Observer*, he assisted Jennett’s efforts as well. Jennett attended art school in New York with funding provided by Carr, and, by the time of the 1898 campaign, his newfound skills were highly prized by his North Carolina backers. Daniels called Jennett’s cartoons “hard-hitting” and claimed it was the first example of “cartooning in a North Carolina paper.” After the election, Jennett returned to New York to work for the *New York Herald*. Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 147 – 150. The North Carolina Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has digitized Jennett’s cartoons and a sample of his work will be seen on subsequent pages. Access to the digitized cartoons is part of a larger website that

explains the 1898 election:

<http://www.lib.unc.edu/ncc/1898/1898.html>

²¹ Historian Helen Edmonds claimed that the paper “led in a campaign of prejudice, bitterness, vilification, misrepresentation, and exaggeration to influence the emotions of the whites against the Negro.” She further explained that the “cartoons were no less exciting and calculated to strike terror to unsuspecting whites.” Daniels’ impact on the 1898 campaign was so over-arching that one writer claims Daniels was the “precipitator of the riot.” Edmonds, *Negro in Fusion Politics*, 141; Alexander Weld Hodges, “Josephus Daniels, precipitator of the Wilmington Race Riot of 1898” Honors Essay, Department of History, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1990; Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 284-5, 295-6.

effort to enflame white sentiment against “negro domination,” he published an article about Wilmington that named black Fusionist office holders in the city.²²

Though the print campaign was successful, Furnifold Simmons was not satisfied with just circulating papers only to paying customers. As a method to entice newspapermen and spread the campaign further, Simmons solicited funds from within the Democratic Party to pay for subscriptions for those who otherwise would not have had access to papers such the *Raleigh News and Observer* or *Wilmington Messenger*. After the campaign, Simmons explained that he sought to reach the large number of voters who were “not immovably wedded to any party, but who love their State and will vote right if they are made to see what is to the best interest of the people and themselves.” Simmons observed that many voters rarely read papers or attended speeches and that “if these good people could be reached and given the facts and thus brought to understand the horrible conditions of misrule, corruption and extravagance under the Fusionists they would certainly cast their votes to discontinue in power this unholy combination.”²³ Supported financially by men such as Durham industrialist Julian S. Carr, Simmons and his committee paid for 25,000 weekly papers to be sent directly to selected voters until the elections. The

²² There are also indications that the *News and Observer* worked closely with editors and writers from the *Atlanta Constitution* and the *Washington Post*. Bryant later recalled that Wilmington’s Chief of Police John Melton had “damned him” and that some in the city blamed his activities for instigating the race riot. “Simmons Hands Lady-Like Touch Strong as Steel,” n.d., H. E.C. Bryant Papers, North Carolina State Archives; Thomas J. Farnham, “Henry Edward Cowan Bryant, *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, 264-5; “Red Shirts Organized,” London Papers, North Carolina State Archives.

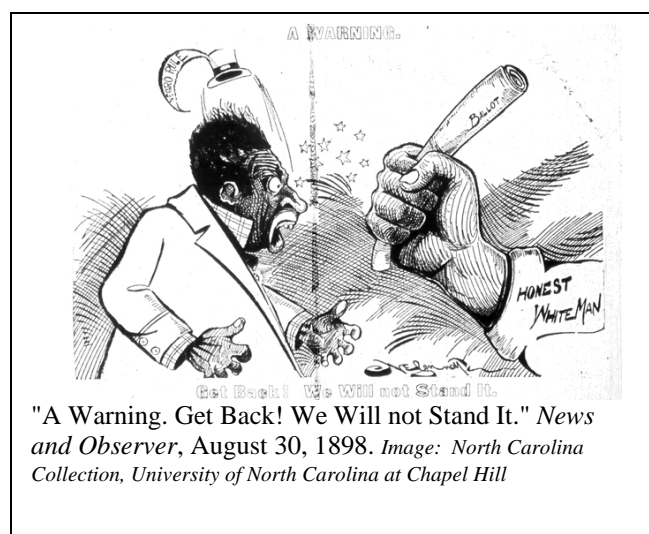
²³ C. Beauregard Poland, *North Carolina’s Glorious Victory, 1898* (Raleigh, 1899), 3.

project was seen as a success, and more names were added to the subscription list. By the time of the election, the number of papers circulated through Democratic Party funds reached 40,000. In addition to pre-paid subscriptions, newspaper printers were also paid for the development of 50,000 four page supplements to regular editions that were sent out with weeklies for the last two months of the campaign.²⁴



"A Serious Question -- How Long Will This Last?"
News and Observer, August 13, 1898.

Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



"A Warning. Get Back! We Will not Stand It." *News and Observer*, August 30, 1898. Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

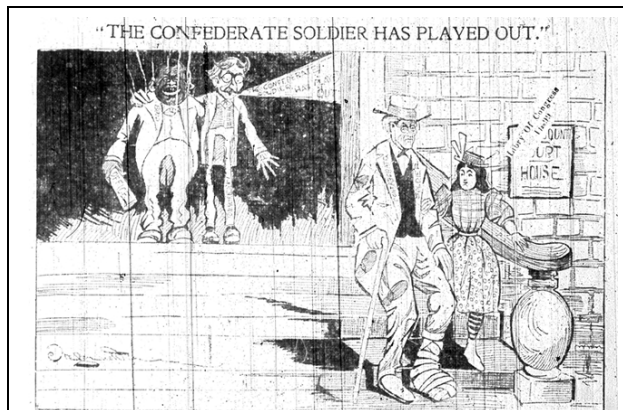
²⁴ Poland, *Glorious Victory*, 3-5.



The Goddess of Democracy Welcomes Home All Honest White Men.

"They are Returning." *News and Observer*, September 16, 1898.

Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



The Wake Commissioners Kick Out a Wounded Confederate Soldier to Make a Place for a Negro Politician.

"The Confederate Soldier Has Played Out." *News and Observer*, October 6, 1898.

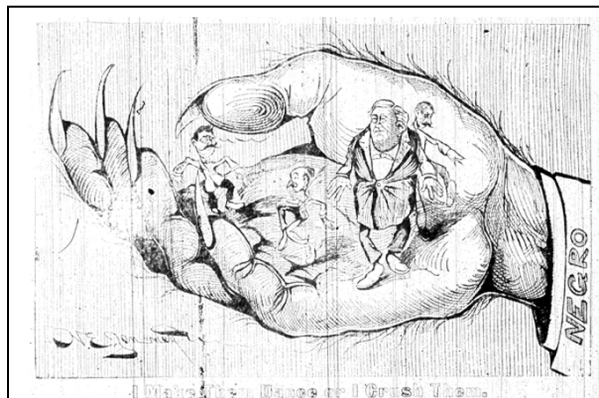
Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



The Vampire that Hovers Over North Carolina.

"The Vampire that Hovers Over North Carolina ." *News and Observer*, September 27, 1898.

Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



I Make Them Dance or I Crush Them.

"I Make Them Dance Or I Crush Them." *News and Observer*, October 12, 1898.

Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



The Source of the Governor's Inspiration.

"The Source of the Governor's Inspiration." *News and Observer*, September 30, 1898.

Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



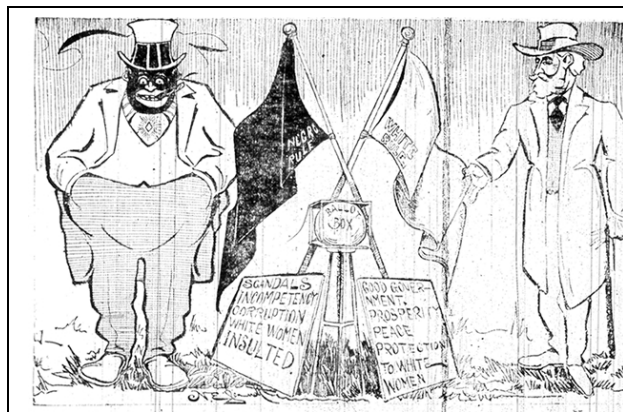
The New Slavery.

"The New Slavery." *News and Observer*, October 15, 1898. Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



"They Can't Wash it Out." *News and Observer*, October 22, 1898.

Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



"Under Which Flag?" *News and Observer*, November 1, 1898.

Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



"Don't Be Tempted By The Devil." *News and Observer*, October 26, 1898.

Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

DON'T BE TEMPTED BY THE DEVIL.



"Good Morning! Have you voted the White Man's Ticket?" *News and Observer*, November 8, 1898.

Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina

Good Morning! Have you voted the White Man's Ticket?



"Why The Whites Are United." *News and Observer*, October 28, 1898. Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



"The Game Is Ended." *News and Observer*, November 10, 1898.

Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Men Who Could Speak

Another of Simmons' tools was his de facto speaker's bureau. Popular orators such as Charles B. Aycock, Robert Glenn, and Henry G. Connor traveled the state at Simmons' behest to boost the white supremacy platform. Simmons planned for most of the speechmaking to take place in the fall, aiming for early speeches to "keep up a running fire, and not enough to tire the people" in August and September even as the print campaign was already moving to educate readers as to the campaign's main tenets. During the last weeks of the campaign, Simmons had speakers whose rhetoric was peppered with local tales of the evils of Fusion rule and "negro domination" in every available town hall and commons. Particularly useful in this category was Wilmington native Alfred Moore Waddell, who spoke to rallies late in the campaign and pointed out numerous instances of the injustices heaped upon Wilmington as a result of Fusion rule.²⁵

Charles Aycock, a veteran speaker from earlier campaigns, traveled the state on behalf of the Democratic Party as its "voice." In May 1898, just before the Democratic State Convention convened, he "sounded the keynote of the 'white supremacy' campaign" in Laurinburg.²⁶ Because of his dedication to the Democratic Party, combined with his proven record of approval by the state's voters, Aycock was groomed for a reward in 1900 with the Governor's office.²⁷ Another well known

speaker – one who possessed restraint regarding racist strains of the 1898 campaign – was Henry G. Connor. Connor's correspondence and speeches repeatedly indicated that he was "willing to go a very long way to remove the negro from the politics of the state" as he was "managing a campaign of which I shall never be ashamed." Although definitely on the side of white supremacy, Connor reflected the concerns of conservative Democrats when he hoped "that the present conditions may pass away without violence or bloodshed and that our whole people may be wiser and understand each other better." He fully felt that once the Democrats regained power over the state, they should earnestly seek to improve the lives and education of blacks.²⁸

Men Who Could Ride

The newspapers and the speaker's circuit facilitated Simmons' goal to reach all types of people in the state. Illiterate or working class people without subscriptions to papers responded well to speechmaking. Businessmen, clerks, and others with access to newspapers were given ample opportunity to read about the campaign's promises, Republican corruption, and their moral duty to vote for the Democratic ticket. The last component of the three-part campaign

suffrage and educational reform. Oliver H. Orr, Jr., "Charles Brantley Aycock," *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, Vol. 1*, 73-5.

²⁸ Connor wished "to speak to the negroes and let them understand how I feel towards them but, just now I would not be understood." In the 1898 campaign, Connor was elected to the state House of Representatives from Wilson County. He was rewarded for his work in the campaign with the post of Speaker. Connor to George Howard, November 11, 1898 and Connor to George Howard, October 20, 1898, Connor Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Josephus Daniels, "Henry Groves Connor," 1929, 7-9. Poland, *Glorious Revolution*, 34.

²⁵ Poland, *Glorious Victory*, 4.

²⁶ R.D.W. Connor, *The Life and Speeches of Charles Brantley Aycock* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1912), xii.

²⁷ Connor, *Life and Speeches of Charles Brantley Aycock*, 61-72. Although he had been a candidate for governor and other political office in previous elections, Aycock was not a candidate for office in the 1898 campaign. He was elected governor by a large majority in 1900 on a platform of white

strategy was Simmons' goal to unite men who could "ride." Ostensibly, these men would assist in Simmons' plan to bring Populists back to the Democratic voting ring through "practicable and honorable means."²⁹ To establish the first (and most organized) collaborative groups, Simmons enlisted the aid of Francis Winston of Bertie County to found White Government Union clubs. The Democratic Party Headquarters in Raleigh planned the White Government Union (WGU) movement for eastern counties with black voting majorities such as New Hanover, Craven, and Pitt. The WGU's popularity grew and eventually had over 800 chapters statewide.³⁰



WGU Campaign Button
Image: Cape Fear Museum

Through the WGU, Democrats emphasized individuals and their ability to make a difference in local politics. Further, the Unions were a tool of the Democratic

²⁹ Preface inside WGU Handbook: "Our State is the only community in the world, with a majority of white voters, where the officers selected to administer the Government are the choice of negroes and not of the whites. This condition has been brought about by an unfortunate division among the white people; and it is likely to continue until that division is removed, and unity again prevails among them as it did prior to 1892. The necessity for a closer union of the white people of the State is so apparent that it requires management and that necessity has called for the organization of THE WHITE GOVERNMENT UNION." *Constitution and By-Laws of the White Government Union, 1898*, (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1898), 2, Henry B. McKoy Papers, Lower Cape Fear Historical Society, Wilmington, N.C.

³⁰ Poland, *Glorious Victory*, 4.

Party as members were charged to work in multiple capacities: guarantee full participation by all white voters in the Democratic Party, report to local and state Party chairmen concerning "doubtful and floating" voters who would be targeted for "efforts of the Union to win the votes of such voters for the party," and to attend polls all day on election day. The WGU operated with a constitution and by-laws to define their goals and procedures. Produced and managed by the Democratic Party, the WGU was a well-oiled machine that featured four subcommittees: Committee on Registration, Committee on Campaign Literature, Committee on Speakers, and Committee on Challenges and Polls. The first three committees were to ensure all white men registered to vote, received campaign literature, and were treated to speeches. The fourth committee sought to challenge illegal voter registration, deflect challenges against Democratic registrants, and to attend polls on Election Day to ensure that all white men voted for the Democratic Party.³¹

The WGU movement began in earnest in August and gained momentum as the election drew near. Other spin-off organizations that featured similar goals were formed in much the same manner as the WGU. One such organization was the Young Men's Democratic Club of Wilmington.³² Another, more visible and violent, was the Red Shirt, or Rough Rider, organization.³³ The arrangement of men

³¹ *Constitution and By-Laws of the White Government Union, 1898*, 2-8. Henry B. McKoy Papers, Lower Cape Fear Historical Society, Wilmington, N.C.

³² Roster of Young Men's Democratic Club of Wilmington, n.d. Merchant Account Book, Private Collection, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina.

³³ There has been no definitive differentiation drawn between the Red Shirts and Rough Riders. The Rough Riders expression was drawn from the 1st

into bands of Red Shirts was unknown in North Carolina until the 1898 campaign. Prior to 1898, the Red Shirt phenomenon had originated and grown into a powerful white supremacy force in South Carolina under Ben Tillman and Wade Hampton.³⁴ The first appearance of Red Shirts in North Carolina occurred in Fayetteville in October 1898. At that rally, Tillman attended a parade that featured thousands of spectators and 200 Red Shirts. Also participating in the rally and parade were many White Government Union clubs and their guests, including delegations from Wilmington and other towns.³⁵

With but a short-lived rule in North Carolina politics, the Red Shirts were characterized by their distinctive red outfits, unconcealed weaponry, and blatant public displays of white supremacy propaganda.

United States Cavalry Regiment organized during the Spanish American War under Lt. Col. Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt's Rough Riders were instrumental in American victory at the Battle of San Juan Hill and their bravery became widely celebrated.

³⁴ Alfred Williams, in his history of the Red Shirts in South Carolina, explained that the common explanation for the development of the red shirt as a uniform emerged during the 1876 campaign. In response to the use of bloodied shirts of murdered blacks as banners to rally Republican supports, South Carolina Democrats countered the "bloody shirt" argument by wearing red shirts of their own in order to mock and belittle the Republican symbolism. Alfred Williams, *Hampton and His Red Shirts: South Carolina's Deliverance in 1876* (Charleston: Walker, Evans & Cogswell Co., 1935), 105. For more on Tillman, see Francis Butler Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman, South Carolinian* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1944) and Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Politics of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

³⁵ A recognized statewide leader of the Red Shirts was future Governor Cameron Morrison. Leon Prather, "The Red Shirt Movement in North Carolina, 1898-1900" *Journal of Negro History* April, 1977, 174-5; London Papers, Private Manuscript Collection, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina.

Although all levels of society participated in the Red Shirt brigade, from wealthy businessmen to working class farmers and laborers, the loudest and most visible members were considered hoodlums – making the Red Shirts effectively a terrorist arm of the Democratic Party. According to a contemporary, their unifying insignia, the red shirt, was of varying style and material, made of "calico, flannel or silk, according to the taste of the owner and the enthusiasm of his womankind."³⁶



Red Shirt that belonged to Charles B. Aycock. It is unclear if he wore this shirt or if it was presented to him in 1898 or 1900.

Image courtesy of the North Carolina Museum of History, Raleigh.

³⁶ Just as the Ku Klux Klan had a short-lived usefulness for the Democratic Party, the Red Shirts were found for only the 1898 and 1900 elections. Prather, "Red Shirt Movement," 175; Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 293.



Armed Red Shirts in Laurinburg on Election Day, 1898

Image: North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh

Red Shirt and Rough Rider brigades typically paraded or rode horses in plain view in black communities, brandishing rifles and pistols. Because their actions were well known among African Americans, most either hid in their homes or left, making neighborhoods appear to be vacant. Josephus Daniels observed that the psychology of Red Shirt activity was successful since it was believed that speechmaking and other forms of intimidation failed to keep black voters away from political activity as effectively as did the Red Shirts. Throughout southeastern North Carolina, the Red Shirts rode day and night to intimidate black voters and to bully white Populists and Republicans into voting for the Democratic Party.³⁷

Although the organizational structure of the Red Shirts is unclear, the brigades were carefully orchestrated displays of Democratic Party militancy, used at intervals both to stir up white sentiments and to oppress black or Republican voters. The Red Shirt movement likely grew out of, or

was managed by, the White Government Unions founded by the Democratic Party. Red Shirt rallies coincided with WGU activities and featured many of the same speakers as those who stumped throughout the state on behalf of the Democratic Party.³⁸

Thus, Simmons rallied together men who could speak, write and ride to support the white supremacy campaign in a well-organized statewide effort. Daniels summed up the campaign when he observed that “every white man who could talk was on the stump; every white man who could write was writing, and every white man who could ride and could influence a vote was enthusiastically at work.”³⁹

Simmons and his committee took still more steps, including use of the clergy

³⁷ Several instances of Red Shirt intimidation of whites can be found. Most notably are the references given by Benjamin Keith in his autobiography and in testimony given during the 1899 Contested Election. Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 292-5; Prather, “Red Shirt Movement,” 176.

³⁸ Henry Hewett, Wilmington printer, testified that he was a member of the White Government Union and that he rode in the parade attributed to the Red Shirts and attended the speeches that followed in Hilton Park. For details of the planning and events surrounding the Laurinburg and Wilmington Red Shirt rallies, see articles in the *Wilmington Messenger* and *Dispatch* November 1-10, 1898. Further, John Bellamy testified that he knew “there were men, and they were gentlemen, many of them men of property and character and influence, who wore a red shirt at some of their political meetings as a simple badge of their Democratic club. *Contested Election Case*, 219-220, 252-3.

³⁹ Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 294.

and women's influence, to convince white male voters that duty and responsibility obligated them to cast a Democratic vote. In a later campaign, Simmons wrote that he disliked "politics in the pulpit," he felt the use of the clergy was an important tool when in a campaign that threatened the "very foundations of our social order and morality." Simmons also understood the usefulness of women in campaigning and included ladies at every opportunity.⁴⁰ The WGU recruited women members. As visual reminders of the responsibility of white men to protect them, women were invited to attend and even speak at political rallies – uncommon occurrences in North Carolina politics up to that point. Other women participated in parades, fashioned banners for the cause and cooked quantities of food for rallies.⁴¹ Simmons carefully orchestrated the campaign, opening discussions through printed media and a few speeches in late summer followed by fall speechmaking spectacles with parades and feasts in the last five weeks of the campaign.

Republican Reaction

After the Republicans and Populists realized the futility of working separately against the Democrats, a weak Fusion of their parties came late in the election season but was ineffective in combating the well organized Simmons machine.⁴² Republican and Populist leaders watched the Democrats gain steam but failed to organize themselves, scheduling few speeches and lacking a cohesive, strong print campaign. Russell warned his compatriots that they

⁴⁰ R. L. Watson, "A Political Leader Bolts – F. M. Simmons in the Presidential Election of 1928" *North Carolina Historical Review* (October 1960) 529, 539.

⁴¹ Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 98-99.

⁴² Edmonds, *Negro and Fusion Politics*, 143.



Unidentified Wilmington woman, probably used as propaganda item.

Image courtesy of Bonitz Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

were in a "fight for our lives" because a "Democratic Legislature here means an orgy of deviltry the like of which has not been seen."⁴³ Butler and other Populists reacted to the Democratic campaign by pointing out that the Democratic Party speakers did nothing but "howl 'nigger' from one end of the State to the other, hoping under the cover of the negro cry, to get men elected to the legislature" who would place corporate interests ahead of the needs of the average citizen.⁴⁴

African American Republicans also feared the outcome of the Democratic Party

⁴³ Quote of Russell from Crow, *Maverick Republican*, 126.

⁴⁴ Raleigh, *Caucasian*, September 22, October 27, 1898 as quoted in Crow, *Maverick Republican*, 127.

campaign. Early in the campaign season, black leader James Young cautioned that if the Democrats returned to power, blacks would be disfranchised.⁴⁵ As a response to the rhetoric of the Democratic campaign, Republican Congressman George H. White and Populist representatives met with President McKinley at intervals to warn the President about the “unholy war that Democrats are making on the color line” and to ask for assistance. Democratic partisans picked up on the visits and made headlines out of the visits to Washington. One rumor circulated that North Carolina Senator Jeter Pritchard had visited with President McKinley and had requested federal troops for the state to ensure a fair election. Pritchard replied that he had not requested troops but, instead, had alerted the President to the situation in the state and had stressed to the President that Governor Russell should exhaust his resources before Federal troops were called in. Another headline circulated that Pritchard had written to United States Attorney General John Griggs asking for assistance in the form of troops – evoking the specter of Reconstruction. It was reported that the President’s cabinet discussed the idea and it was decided that no troops would be sent unless Governor Russell requested them or if mail was disrupted. The editor of the *Wilmington Star* added that “Federal troops cannot legally be ordered to any State to preserve the peace until both civil and military powers of the State have been exhausted.” President McKinley reportedly handed the matter over to his Attorney General for consideration. In an interview, Griggs was quoted as saying that “if necessary to

⁴⁵ Young became a target of Daniels and the Democratic Party. Daniels later admitted that he was harsh on Young during the campaign. Crow, *Maverick Republican*, 124.

preserve order troops will overrun the State.”⁴⁶

Added to the political troubles facing the state’s leading Republicans and Populists were threats to their personal safety. Populist Senator Marion Butler endured being pelted with rotten eggs while giving speeches and both Governor Russell and Butler were threatened with personal violence. More than most politicians, Governor Russell was the target of Red Shirt hatred. As a result of his treatment, Russell resorted to using armed bodyguards to protect him even in the Governor’s Mansion. A culminating event occurred while returning to Raleigh after a trip to Wilmington on Election Day to cast his ballot. Upon his return to Raleigh, Russell’s train was stopped and boarded by Red Shirts in Hamlet and Maxton. Russell’s life was spared only because railroad officials were warned of the impending threat and helped move the governor to the rear of the train into a baggage car.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ *Wilmington Morning Star*, October 25, 1898; McDuffie, “Politics in Wilmington,” 637; Crow, *Maverick Republican*, 124, 127; Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 302; *Wilmington Messenger*, October 26, 1898.

⁴⁷ At the stop in Maxton, Russell and the railroad employees were warned by Red Shirt leader and future governor Cameron Morrison that his life in danger. Morrison and some of his men remained on the train and when the train was searched in Hamlet, Russell was hidden for his safety. According to the newspapers, Russell was met by approximately 100 Red Shirts in Maxton. The *Wilmington Messenger* reported that the Red Shirts “appeared to be in for a good time” and that Russell “took their visit good naturedly.” This article appears to refer to Morrison’s activity. Prather, *We Have Taken a City*, 101-2; *Wilmington Messenger*, November 10, 1898; Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 290, 303-4; Crow, *Maverick Republican*, 134; Douglas C. Abrams, “A Progressive-Conservative Deal: The 1920 Democratic Gubernatorial Primaries in North Carolina,” *North Carolina Historical Review*, October 1978, 426..

Wilmington's Democrats Organize

Simmons worked to control county Democratic Committees' local campaigns as he directed by Wilmingtonians often chose their own course. In New Hanover County, Colonel Thomas W. Strange in April was selected to serve as chair of the local committee and worked closely with others developing facets of the white supremacy campaign in the city.⁴⁸ Although Simmons sought to tightly control his county committees, Democrats in Wilmington used the statewide campaign to their benefit and modified components of Simmons' scheme to fit their needs. As a result, Simmons sought to rein in Wilmington's leaders for fear that they might make "some deal that they [the Democratic Party State Executive Committee] would not approve of." In response, local Democratic Party leader George Rountree informed Simmons that he might "go to H - - -, as we were going to run the campaign to suit ourselves down here."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ George Rountree recalled that about twenty of the city's best businessmen were organized into a campaign committee to support Strange's activities. Additionally, Rountree was selected to join Frank Stedman, E.G. Parmele, and Col. Walker Taylor in running the campaign. Further, the campaign committee raised "a considerable amount of money" for the benefit of the campaign. Rountree, "Memorandum of My Personal Recollection of the Election of 1898" Henry G. Connor Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁴⁹ Rountree was born in Kinston and was educated at Harvard. A successful attorney, Rountree lived and worked in New York and Richmond before returning to his native Kinston to operate law offices there. Rountree married Meta Davis of Wilmington in 1881 and the couple moved to the city in 1890. Some speculation regarding Rountree has surfaced that indicates he may have been brought into the fray as a strategic move by Democratic Party leaders. Particularly useful for Democrats, Rountree purportedly had first hand experience with white supremacy campaigns and disfranchisement movements in Georgia. Rountree, "Memorandum,"

Following the statewide example, other organizations such as the White Government Union and Red Shirts emerged in the city. Clandestine groups also began to script plans to assist in Democratic victory. All of the movements of the various groups were carefully managed by the local Democratic Party to orchestrate a tightly woven white supremacy, anti-Republican campaign.⁵⁰

Essential to the rhetoric of the New Hanover white supremacy campaign was the statewide refrain of bad incumbent government. The Democrats also linked local Republicans to the sinking ship of Fusion. To accomplish this goal, local Democrats refused to cooperate with Populists who sought to create a Democratic-Populist fusion. The Democrats identified and discredited the actions, businesses, and character of leading Populists and Republicans.⁵¹ They targeted chiefly the "Big Four:" Mayor and physician Silas P. Wright, northern politician George Z. French, business leader William H. Chadbourn, and northern businessman Flavel W. Foster. They accused these men of rallying black voters behind candidates in order to achieve political victory at all costs. Democrats raised the specter of "negro domination" to mean not just a black voting majority in the city or black officeholding, but the capability of blacks to dictate candidates and platforms because of their voting strength.⁵²

Albert Cowper, "George Rountree," *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, 257-8.

⁵⁰ *Wilmington Messenger* May 1, 1898.

⁵¹ McDuffie, *Politics in Wilmington*, 537.

⁵² "Negro domination does not mean that the government in every part of the entire State is under control of negro influences – few negroes live in the western part of our State. When the great controlling element is the negro vote, and when that vote and its influences name the officials and dictate the policy of a town, city or county, then it is dominant. When it elects negro officials of a town or county, there is negro domination." Newspaper circular, [1900],

The Democrats also targeted wealthy businessman Benjamin F. Keith and a host of other Populists and Republicans, regardless of race. He held fast to his principles throughout the 1898 campaign, refusing multiple attempts to threaten him into joining the Red Shirts. As the 1898 election drew near, Keith wrote his Populist compatriot Marion Butler to explain that “they have not killed or run me out of town yet although they hate me with all the hatred that corporation influence can aspire. I trust that things will turn out all ok.” After threats failed to intimidate Keith, he was “visited” by a mob that forced their way into his yard at night only to be met with Keith, his wife and his eleven year old son all well armed and ready to open fire. When physical intimidation failed, the Democrats and Red Shirts targeted his business, forcing it into ruin by intimidating customers and traveling agents alike. Keith was also slandered in the papers and, as a result, he retaliated with a fist fight to defend his honor against James Fore, who was also his neighbor.⁵³

Smithwick Papers, North Carolina State Archives; Hayden, *WLI*, 58-9.

⁵³ Benjamin Keith was a prominent businessman and reluctant politician in the city and, like Waddell, Sprunt and others, had a long family tradition of prominence in southeastern North Carolina. However, Keith sought to improve his city and state through third party politics and as a member of the Board of Aldermen appointed by Russell. Years after the campaign was over, Keith was respected for his fortitude but still held deep resentment for his treatment at the hands of Democrats. Even as late as 1921, Keith was still battling with Democrats over his patronage position as Collector of Customs in the city. In a letter to President Warren G. Harding, Keith recalled the 1898 campaign for the President, providing details of the threats and dangers he and his family withstood. Keith recounted that when the Democrats realized they “could not buy with offices or could not intimidate me to join their red shirt mob,” he was notified that, unless he joined, he “would be killed and put in the Cape Fear River unless I left the city at once.” Keith believed Fore

As the campaign progressed in both speechmaking and print outlets, the four leaders were expanded to six as “Remember the Six” handbills and posters were circulated around town. According to one of the men, they knew they were marked for death. Two additional men were recognized as Chief of Police John Melton and white attorney Caleb B. Lockey. Governor Russell was also added to the invective as yet another leader of the city’s black voters. According to W. J. Harris of Wilmington, the men of the “Big Six” were to be shot because they worked “for the interest of the Republican Party.”⁵⁴

One of the “Big Six,” Republican William Chadbourn, was Postmaster and a member of a wealthy family that operated Chadbourn Lumber Company and employed white and black workers in seasonal jobs. In response to the Democrat’s white supremacy campaign issue of “negro domination” in newspapers, Chadbourn penned a letter to Republican Senator Jeter Pritchard on September 26, 1898 to explain that Wilmington did not have such domination. Chadbourn also observed that the primary

had written an article that was published statewide discrediting Keith and, as a result, went to Fore’s business, where Keith claimed 40-50 Red Shirts were employed and pummeled Fore by himself. Fore was partner in the Fore and Foster Planing Mill with Flavel Foster, one of the men of the “Big Six.” As a result of the unbiased slander, Fore lost favor in the city and left for the remainder of the campaign. B.F. Keith to Marion Butler, November 2, 1898, Marion Butler Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Benjamin F. Keith to President Warren G. Harding, July 5, 1921, photocopy of original in possession of Thomas J. Keith on file in Research Branch, Office of Archives and History; Benjamin F. Keith, *Memories*, (Raleigh: Bynum Printing Company, 1922), 79-111; Sprunt, *Chronicles of the Cape Fear River*, 595-597; Crow, *Maverick Republican*, 131; Connor, *History of North Carolina V*, 117-121; *Contested Election Case*, 361; Keith, *Memories*, 107-8; Hill’s 1897 Wilmington City Directory.

⁵⁴ *Contested Election Case*, 390.



“Remember the Big 6,” *Wilmington Messenger*, October 16, 1898

motivation for the Democratic campaign in the city was a desire among Democrats to regain control of political offices in the city. The letter was acquired by the Democratic press and was published. After pressure from Democrats, Chadbourn retracted his statement and decided that he was “for white supremacy.”⁵⁵ After Chadbourn’s switch, the “Remember the Six” was changed to a five in the newspapers and he was then

⁵⁵After the pressure from the Democrats and his capitulation, Chadbourn left the city to visit relatives in Maine and returned just before the election. In a jovial manner James Worth wrote his wife that Chadbourn and his family had “gone to Maine for his health.” Chadbourn’s conversion was so complete that he allowed his Democratic Party employees to use his horses and buggy on voter registration day, presumably to get as many people to registration sites as possible. *Contested Election Case*, 390; McDuffie, “Politics in Wilmington,” 630; James S. Worth to Josephine, November 4, 1898, James S. Worth papers, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

“immune from the slaughter.”⁵⁶ Rountree and other Democrats targeted another one of the six, Flavel Foster, during an hours-long late night visit in which they compelled him to sign a letter similar to Chadbourn’s second letter.⁵⁷

Other Wilmington Republicans and Populists were also thoroughly intimidated by the Democrats. James Worth, a Democratic Party member and businessman, wrote his wife the week before the election to give her details on the city’s affairs since she left town. Worth said he spoke to several different Fusionists in the city and reported their replies to her. In almost a laundry list of Democratic Party targets and written in language reflective of the larger campaign, Worth informed his wife about matters. He informed her that white George Lutterloh had changed his mind and has promised not to vote; African American Junius Murray and “his whole gang” didn’t register; and African American Jim Howe had promised not to vote, that his father and

⁵⁶ McDuffie, *Politics in Wilmington*, 605; *Contested Election Case*, 361.

⁵⁷ Chief of Police Melton testified that Foster’s account was published as a letter in the paper on October 21, 1898, but that he didn’t believe that Foster authored the piece. The article, published with prominence in the *Messenger*, indicated that an unnamed reporter interviewed Foster “ascertaining his views upon the present condition of affairs in our city.” The article explained that Foster “recognized the fact that the situation here was extremely grave, with imminent danger of trouble between the races” and that “he believed the city would not recover from the ill effect of such a conflict in years to come.” Although Foster was portrayed as a staunch Republican, he was quoted as saying that “it would be best at this time for the Republicans not to put a county ticket in the field.” The author was hopeful that Foster’s standing within the Republican community would influence others and took care to explain Foster’s role as “one of our most public spirited citizens and no man here has been more earnestly interest in the up building and prosperity of our city.” *Wilmington Messenger*, October 21, 1898; *Contested Election Case*, 378; Rountree, “Memorandum.”

brother felt the same way and that Howe claimed to be able to locate at least another 150 men “only too glad . . . not to vote.” Worth continued his account as he explained that George French planned to go to Maine after voting just as “Foster, Rice and the others were to leave on short notice.” Worth concluded his thoughts on the campaign as he claimed that “the small fry leaders such as Lockey and his gang were told that no ‘monkeying’ would be taken from such ‘small potatoes’ and that if he undertook to help the niggers or if he failed to support in every way Russell’s pledge that no second notice would be sent to him.” Worth observed that Lockey “came down at once like the cur that he is.” Simultaneously, a short note from A. J. Costin to Douglas Cronly stated that “all the gentlemen that you requested me to call on have signed the paper – Mr. Parsley, declined to sign at first, but afterwards did so – making a promise.”⁵⁸

Increasingly throughout the campaign, white men who were perceived as leaders of the Republican Party were targeted and vilified through speeches and newspaper articles. The recollections of James Cowan of the *Wilmington Dispatch* reflect the criticism and hatred shown toward the men. Cowan claimed that the “lily white” leaders of the Republican party were “scum and trash, remnants of the carpet bag regime . . . interested only in their own nefarious plans and objectives” and

“used the negroes votes for their own purposes.”⁵⁹



“5” *Wilmington Messenger*, October 20, 1898.

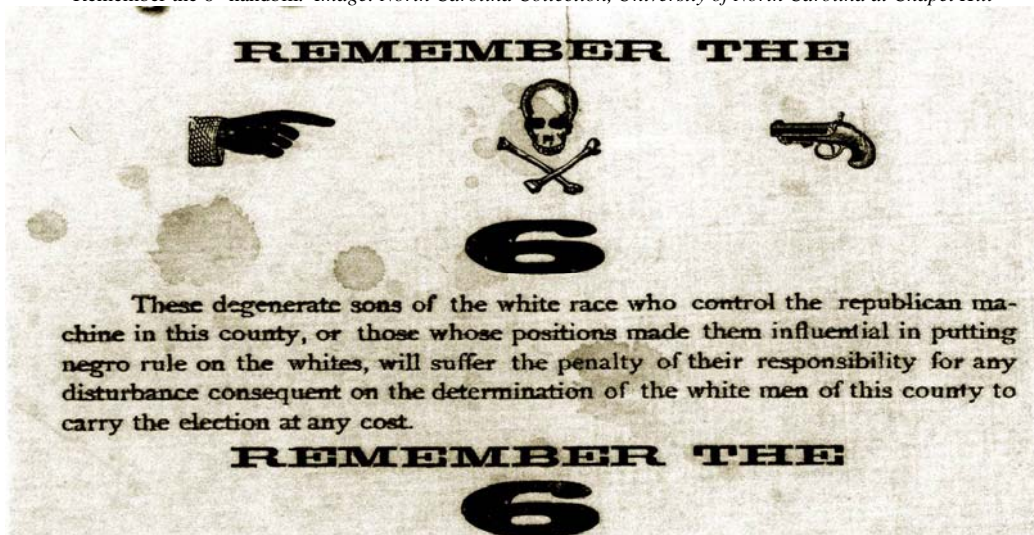
Following this train of thought – that white Republican leaders fully controlled black voters – Republican leaders received multiple letters and circulars that featured “crossbones” and notification that, “if there was any trouble with the negroes,” the leaders would be killed.⁶⁰ As the campaign

⁵⁸ Costin enclosed other papers with the undated note that were not found in the collection. The note indicates that signatures on any one of the circulars featuring the names of “prominent citizens” could have been coerced. Various accounts, some exaggerated, indicate that the coercion was both physical and verbal. James Worth to Josephine, November 4, 1898, James Spencer Worth Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. A.J. Costin to Mr. Cronly, Cronly Family Papers, Duke University.

⁵⁹ James H. Cowan, “The Wilmington Race Riot” Louis T. Moore Collection, New Hanover County Public Library.

⁶⁰ George Rountree penned an explanation of his fears regarding white Republican control of black votes. He claimed that he observed on Election Day in 1894 the change in votes among black voters at a Brooklyn precinct according to the whim of Daniel Russell. Rountree charged that black voters “exercised no choice” but changed their voting patterns in response to a call from Russell for the election of George French over Thomas Strange. Rountree claimed that a black voter was an

"Remember the 6" handbill. Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



drew to a close, statewide Republican and Populist leaders such as Governor Russell and Senator Butler scheduled a rally in the city on October 29 but cancelled it after they were threatened by the Democrats who warned them that if they came to speak, there would be bloodshed. Republican Congressional candidate Oliver Dockery came to the city anyway but did not speak because of the hostile climate.⁶¹

“automaton” and that election was proof for him of “absolute control by the leaders of the negro vote.” Rountree, “Memorandum of my personal reasons for the passage of the suffrage amendment to the Constitution,” n.d., Henry G. Connor Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 311-12.

⁶¹ Rountree recalled that once it was discovered that Fusion leaders planned a rally in the city, Democrats feared that “if they spoke and the negroes became inflamed, and had a brass band and a torch light procession, there certainly would be a riot.” A committee was appointed to “have an interview” with Russell, Butler and Prichard to “point out to them the extreme danger of a race riot that would follow an attempt on their part to speak.” Rountree opposed “harsh” language in the warning to the Fusionists but provided subtle approval of the committee led by T.M. Emerson and their ability to influence the Fusionists. Rountree, “Memorandum;” *Contested Election Case*, 360-362; McDuffie, “Politics in

Although Simmons appeared to have the state Democratic machine under his control, the Democratic leaders of Wilmington most likely worked independently of Simmons, using his tactics and connections to their benefit. According to Thomas Clawson, editor of the *Wilmington Messenger*, “for a period of six to twelve month prior to November 10th, 1898, the white citizens of Wilmington prepared quietly but effectively for the day when action would be necessary.”⁶² How effective and well-organized this and other clandestine organizations were is debatable since many of the overt actions attributed to the groups are found in newspapers and accounts and reflect the overarching themes and characteristics of the statewide campaign. No doubt leading white men determined to win the election worked together to lend a distinctive cast to the Democratic campaign in the city but it must

Wilmington,” 639-640; *Wilmington Dispatch*, October 25, 1898.

⁶² Cowan of the *Dispatch* also echoed Clawson’s claims that the citizens had planned the coup for up to a year prior to the 1898 election. Thomas W. Clawson, “The Wilmington Race Riot in 1898, Recollections and Memories,” Louis T. Moore Papers, North Carolina State Archives; Cowan, “The Wilmington Race Riot.”

be remembered that various members of these “secret” groups were also well-known and visible leaders of the county Democratic Party.⁶³

The “Secret Nine” as defined by Hayden was composed of a group of men who met first at the home of Hugh MacRae and then regularly at the home of Walter L. Parsley. The nine were: Hugh MacRae, William A. Johnson, Walter L. Parsley, J. Alan Taylor, L. B. Sasser, Pierre B. Manning, Hardy L. Fennell, William Gilchrist, and Edward S. Lathrop. At their meetings, the men developed a city-wide campaign that dovetailed with Furnifold Simmons’ statewide white supremacy movement. In addition to their plans to establish protection for the city’s white women and children in the event of unrest, they understood that they were also planning

⁶³ Much attention has been paid to the activities of a group of white leaders known as the “Secret Nine” and their conspiracy to return the city to Democratic Party control. Using recollections of participants and observers, local historian Harry Hayden described the actions of the “Secret Nine” in his history of the Wilmington Light Infantry and *The Story of the Wilmington Rebellion*. Other historians have followed his lead. Under close scrutiny, many of the writers who have discussed the actions of the city’s white leaders have described the same men performing many of the same actions but with different perspectives based in the writer’s bias or perspective. Hayden’s timelines fall apart when scrutinized, particularly regarding some of the pre-election scheming of the Secret Nine. It must be acknowledged that the men of Hayden’s Secret Nine and Group Six were also visible leaders who very well could have merged their social and political agendas, using all of the tools at their disposal. There is no doubt that a central group of men managed the Democratic campaign and planned the ensuing *coup d’etat*. Such organization of so many disparate groups could not have taken place without the firm control of a group of close-knit, well-placed individuals. Historian Helen Edmonds acknowledged that “a certain element of preparation stood out in the activities which preceded the riot indicating strongly that” there was a degree of conspiracy and preparation. Edmonds, *Negro in Fusion Politics*, 166.

a “revolt” to overthrow city government. Even as the Secret Nine planned their activities, another group of men, called “Group Six” by Hayden, met at the home of another prominent Wilmington leader, William L. Smith. The other members of “Group Six” were: Col. Walker Taylor, Henry G. Fennell, Thomas D. Meares, John Beery, and William F. Robertson. These two groups of men shared multiple business and family connections. For example, the Taylor and Fennell families had members in both organizations. Walker Taylor was a member of the Democratic Party County Campaign Committee and leader of the state’s regional guard unit. Further, the groups worked with Democratic Party leaders to fuel the campaign, particularly in organizing the citizens of the city into proactive units ready for whatever unrest might arise from their plans. Once the campaign was in full swing, some of the activities of the “Secret Nine” and “Group Six” apparently merged with the official Democratic Party, the White Government Union and the Red Shirts.⁶⁴

The county Democratic Committee organized itself to provide a framework for the development of the White Government Unions and the Red Shirts. Spokes of the Democratic wheel included the Chamber of Commerce, churches, the Wilmington Light Infantry, the Merchant’s Association, and a host of other civic and fraternal organizations.⁶⁵ Pulling these disparate organizations together were a handful of closely connected men who all shared similar backgrounds, political desires and social savvy. These men also followed the

⁶⁴ Hayden, *WLI*, 66-70; George Rountree, *Recollections*, Henry G. Connor Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁶⁵ *Wilmington Messenger*, November 2, 1898; *Wilmington Dispatch*, October 8, 1898.

strategy of Simmons in finding men who could write, speak, and ride.

Just as Simmons used printed media to further the statewide campaign, Wilmington's newspapers joined in the fight. Following themes of black "insolence," ineffective city government, corrupt and unqualified police and judges, and dangers to the purity of white women and girls by black "brutes," the papers published and re-printed accounts of black disrespect.⁶⁶ As the campaign progressed, Wilmington editors increasingly filled their columns with instances of black on white violence and ineffective response to that violence by city government. National news and politics were reduced in coverage on front pages and were replaced by headlines such as "White Supremacy," "Russell's Deviltry," "Republican White Elephant," and "The Negroized East."⁶⁷ Although the papers sought to report criminal cases and arrests of blacks before the election campaign, these normally trivial topics gained importance in the pages of the *Messenger*, *Dispatch*, and *Morning Star*, providing printed fuel for the white supremacy firestorm. Following the lead of Josephus Daniels in Raleigh, Wilmington papers invited correspondents from throughout the state and nation to visit their city. Whenever those reporters visited, they were treated as royalty, enjoying unfettered access to white leaders, their homes, and participation in all aspects of the campaign,

even being escorted through town in Red Shirt parades.⁶⁸ After reading the papers, many Wilmington residents were on edge and ready for the impending doom spelled out in their papers.

Again, following Simmons' example, local Wilmington Democrats brought a host of speakers to the city throughout the campaign. Not only were these individuals presenting orations to large crowds at rallies and at spots such as Thalian Hall, they also spoke to smaller groups as they stood outside Democratic Party headquarters, in the homes of prominent men and at club meetings. Not only did the standard speechmakers make their rounds, but local Wilmington leaders also pressed the issue. For example, J. Alan Taylor of the Secret Nine read a prepared statement to the Chamber of Commerce in October that was later republished in the newspapers.⁶⁹ Another speaker and Democratic Party leader, attorney George Rountree, met with a White Government Union and planned to "inflame the white men's sentiment." Rountree discovered that his prepared speech was unnecessary because the men were "already willing to kill all of the office holders and all the negroes."⁷⁰ As evidenced by Rountree's experience, the speeches and the print campaign material evolved into a valuable, effective, tool to enflame the city's residents.

Alfred Moore Waddell

While not the most prolific of the speakers for Simmons' early campaign,

⁶⁶ For more on the print campaign, see Prather, *We Have Taken a City*, 52-55; McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 574-5, 602-5; Shelia Smith McKoy, *When Whites Riot: Writing Race and Violence in American and South African Cultures* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 42; Andrea M. Kirshenbaum, "Race, Gender and Riot: The Wilmington, North Carolina White Supremacy Campaign of 1898," Duke University Master's Thesis, May, 1996, Chapter 3.

⁶⁷ *Wilmington Morning Star*, October 25, 1898; *Wilmington Messenger*, October 21, 1898, October 29, 1898.

⁶⁸ Henry Litchfield West of the *Washington Post* and P. R. Noel of the *Richmond Times* were escorted through town during a parade and seated among dignitaries at speeches. *Wilmington Messenger*, November 4, 1898.

⁶⁹ The prepared statement is perhaps the correspondence of William Chadbourn. Hayden, *WLI*, 68.

⁷⁰ George Rountree, "Memorandum."

Wilmington resident Alfred Moore Waddell proved the most cataclysmic of performers. Waddell, an aging member of Wilmington's upper class, had served in the United States Congress from 1870 to 1878, and, by the end of the 1898 campaign, had worked himself into a position of prominence as a representative of the oppressed whites in New Hanover for the rest of the state and a symbol of redemption for the county's enflamed white voters.⁷¹

⁷¹ Waddell (1834-1912) was born in Hillsborough to parents who descended from Cape Fear leading families. Well educated, Waddell graduated from the University of North Carolina and practiced law before the Civil War. Waddell attained the rank of Lt. Col. in the 41st North Carolina Regiment but resigned his position due to ill health. A political conservative, Waddell was elected to Congress in 1870 and served three additional terms. As an orator, Waddell was sought after to provide moving speeches in political campaigns and civic ceremonies. Waddell prided himself on his family lineage and, as a result, penned several works on his family's history and the Cape Fear region. Waddell's third wife, Gabrielle, noted in her journal that he gave a "great" speech at the Opera House in Wilmington on October 24, 1898. A relative wrote that there was "such demand for him all over the state since (what they call) his wonderful speech." Historians have speculated on Waddell's motivation to thrust himself into the spotlight. Leon Prather claimed that, although Waddell's exterior indicated a calm tempered man, his "speeches contained some of the most violent tirades ever uttered from the rostrum." Further, Waddell was apparently experiencing difficult financial burdens by 1898 since other Wilmington residents such as Benjamin Keith knew that Waddell was unemployed. Chief of Police Melton thought that Waddell's motivation was more to "get a position and office" since "he had been out of public life for a long time, and that was his opportunity to put himself before the people and pose as a patriot, thereby getting to the feed trough." To back up this claim, Melton later testified that Waddell was "hired to attend elections and see that men voted correctly." Waddell's wife provided additional support for the household by teaching music daily. According to Jerome McDuffie, who interviewed Wilmington residents, Waddell's law practice was in decline and he "had been seeking an office" in order to "lighten the burden of his wife." James M.

Waddell emerged in October as the fieriest of white supremacy's speechmakers after an oration he gave on October 24 at Thalian Hall. The speech was attended by a wide spectrum of Wilmington residents including a large number of Red Shirts and wives of leading businessmen. Waddell was situated on the stage alongside "sixty of Wilmington's most prominent citizens." Waddell opened calmly, explaining that if the election season were an ordinary one, he wouldn't be presenting a speech but, since he could no longer "remain silent as I have done for some years," he felt compelled to speak. As was the case for many speeches of the period, Waddell's oration was published in the newspapers. Examination of his words demonstrates his mindset regarding the campaign and race relations – reflective of the sentiment and inflammatory nature of similar speakers at the height of the 1898 Democratic Party Campaign.

Waddell claimed that it was "best and wisest for both races" that white people who worked to make the United States the "grandest country on the globe . . . should alone govern it as a whole in all its parts." Waddell suggested that blacks had been misled by people who professed to be their friends and contended that "the mass of them are ignorant and . . . have been played upon and preyed upon by vicious leaders of their own race and by mean white men who make this agitation a source of profit."

Clifton, "Alfred Moore Waddell," *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, Vol. 6, 102-3; Gabrielle deRossett Waddell Diary, deRossett Papers, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Letter to R.A. Meares, October 29, 1898, deRossett Papers, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 301; McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 579, 644; Prather, *We Have Taken a City*, 87-8; Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 109; Benjamin Keith to Marion Butler, November 17, 1898; Marion Butler Papers, Southern Historical Collection; Leon Prather, "We Have Taken A City," *Democracy Betrayed*, 25-26; *Contested Election Case*, 378-9, 381.

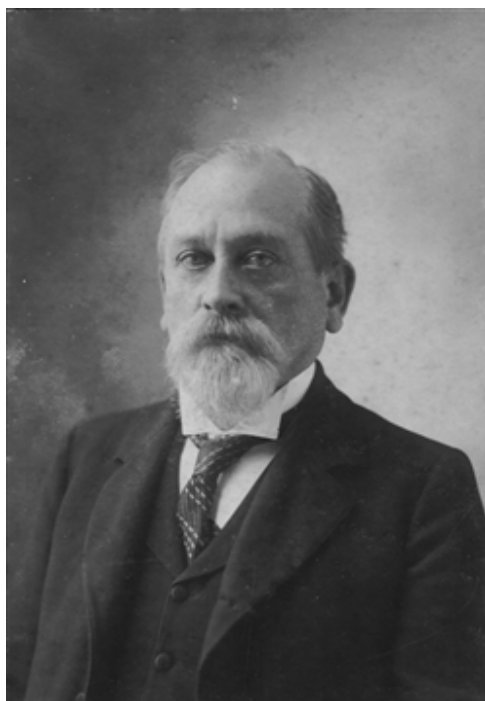
Waddell continued to stereotype and draw racist conclusions about African Americans as he claimed that if they were allowed to rule the south, “in less than a hundred years” they would return to “savagery.” Because he vested his understanding of blacks in his opinions of their intellect, he claimed that “the greatest crime that has ever been perpetrated against modern civilization was the investment of the negro with the right of suffrage.”

Moving from his analysis of the black race, Waddell claimed that “the salvation of society depends on the outcome of this election.” Waddell then emphatically stated that the present situation was due to the actions of Governor Russell – “I do not hesitate to say thus publicly that if a race conflict occurs in North Carolina the very first men that ought to be held to account are the white leaders of the negroes who will be chiefly responsible for it and the work ought to begin at the top of the list. I scorn to leave any doubt as to whom I mean by this phrase – I mean the governor of this state, who is the engineer of all the deviltry and meanness.”

Waddell stated that he hoped that violence was not to be the duty of white men but proclaimed that if violence was necessary, “I trust that it will be rigidly and fearlessly performed.” Waddell then moved to political matters as he discussed the changes in election laws wrought by the Fusionists when turned the argument for “freedom of the ballot” against them.

On the topic of “negro domination,” Waddell contended that blacks constituted a voting block that could determine the outcome of elections. To this point, he asked the crowd “who ‘dominates’ any corporation or businesses, its agents appointed to carry it on or the owners who select them?” Waddell concluded that his “heart leaps out to the man who, in this crisis, talks and acts” like an “Anglo-Saxon who, stirred by the

that he is the sovereign and the master on the soil which treads and dares all who question it to put it to the test.” The proud consciousness that he belongs to a race that dominates half the earth and destined to dominate the whole of it feels final passage of Waddell’s speech stirred patriotic sentiment in his audience and concluded with lines destined to be oft-quoted in subsequent days and years.



Alfred Moore Waddell
Image: Cape Fear
Museum

After the speech, Waddell received hearty applause and the paper claimed that the speech “electrified his hearers” as it was “the most remarkable delivery ever heard in a campaign here in the memory of this generation.” The writer was prophetic when he closed the article with the observation that the speech “will ring for all time.”⁷²

Waddell’s popularity as an eloquent speaker who could reach his audience continued throughout the remainder of the campaign as a result of his Thalian Hall appearance. He received requests for speeches almost daily. At a large campaign rally in Goldsboro on October 28, Waddell thrust Wilmington into the spotlight as he detailed the “outrages” in the city since coming under Fusion rule. Part of his Goldsboro speech included an adaptation of his famous line that Democrats would win the election if they had to clog the Cape Fear with “carcasses.”⁷³



Thalian Hall, Wilmington, N.C.

Image Courtesy of North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

“We are the sons of the men who won the first victory of the Revolution at Moore’s Creek Bridge ... who stained with bleeding feet the snows of Valley Forge ... and only left the service of their country when its independent sovereignty was secured. We are the brothers of men who wrote with their swords from Bethel to Bentonville the most heroic chapter in American annals and we ourselves are men who, inspired by these memories intend to preserve at the cost of our lives if necessary the heritage that is ours. We maintained it against overwhelming armies of men of our own race, shall we surrender it to a ragged rabble of negroes led by a handful of white cowards who at the first sound of conflict will seek to hide themselves from the righteous vengeance which they shall not escape? No! A thousand times no! Let them understand once and for all that we will have no more of the intolerable conditions under which we live. We are resolved to change them, if we have to choke the current of the Cape Fear with carcasses. The time for smooth words has gone by, the extremest limit of forbearance has been reached. Negro domination shall henceforth be only a shameful memory to us and an everlasting warning to those who shall ever again seek to revive it. To this declaration we are irrevocably committed and true men everywhere will hail it with a hearty Amen!”

Alfred Moore Waddell, Thalian Hall, Wilmington, NC., October 24, 1898

⁷² Waddell’s speech was published in its entirety in the *Wilmington Messenger*, October 25, 1898.

⁷³ *Wilmington Messenger*, October 28-29, 1898; *Wilmington Morning Star*, October 28, 1898;

After Waddell's first October speech was printed in the papers, he received praise for his stance from his cousin Rebecca Cameron in Hillsborough. Cameron's response to Waddell's rhetoric is forceful. Cameron opened her letter by informing Waddell that women were "amazed, confounded, and bitterly ashamed of the acquiescence and quiescence of the men of North Carolina at the existing conditions; and more than once have we asked wonderingly: where are the white men and the shotguns!" She continued with a full letter supporting his speech. Cameron concluded her diatribe by informing Waddell that the ladies "are aflame with anger here. I wish you could see Anna, she is fairly rampant and blood thirsty. These blond women are terrible when their fighting blood is up." She added as a last thought: "I hope it will not come to the last resort but when it does, let it be Winchesters and buckshot at close range."⁷⁴

Waddell claimed that he did not seek prominence but was, instead, "begged to make a speech and did so, and that started the fire and from that time until now I have acted entirely upon the request of the people."⁷⁵ As part of the speechmaking campaign, Democratic Party leaders pulled in Waddell in the late stages of the campaign, leading to localized rhetoric easily fueled by daily changes in the campaign. After Waddell's speeches in which he proposed violence, Democratic Party leaders decided that the "temper of the community was hot enough and needed quieting down rather than heating up."⁷⁶

Although behind-the-scenes leaders apparently tried to temper some of the rhetoric, as the campaign drew to a close, well-received, highly motivational speakers such as Waddell were seen by the populace as leaders of the Democratic Party movement.

"This I do not believe for a moment that they will submit any longer it is time for the oft quoted shotgun to play a part, and an active one, in the elections. More especially if that infamous malignant blot upon the state our chief executive Russell gets his Yankee bayonets. I do most earnestly trust if it comes to blows that he will chamber the first ball fired in that mass of valvular tissue which does duty for a heart in the gubernatorial carcass. I never thought to be ashamed of the manhood of North Carolina but I am ashamed now. We applaud to the echo your determination that our old historic river should be choked with the bodies of our enemies, white and black, but what this state shall be redeemed. It has reached the point where blood letting is needed for the health of the commonwealth and when [it] commences let it be thorough!

Solomon says "there is a time to kill." That time seems to have come so get to work and don't stop short of a complete clearing of the decks. If you have to start make a finish once for all and then we will talk about calling a convention to alter the constitution sufficiently to disfranchise now and forever all the negroes white and black. You go forward to your work bloody tho' it may be, with the heart felt approval of many good women in the State. We say AMEN to it as did our great grandmothers in '76 and our mothers in '61. "

Rebecca Cameron to Alfred Moore Waddell, October 26, 1898

⁷⁴ Rebecca Cameron to Alfred M. Waddell, October 26, 1898, A. M. Waddell Papers, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 110-111.

⁷⁵ AM Waddell to Benehan Cameron, November 16, 1898, Benehan Cameron Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁷⁶ Rountree, "Memorandum."

In Wilmington, the combined punch of the print campaign and the speeches moved beyond the standard “white men must rule” rhetoric in the city and another white supremacy tool – fear – emerged. Benjamin Keith observed that the papers had everyone “believing everything that was printed, as well as news that was circulated and peddled on the streets.” Keith saw that the “frenzied excitement went on until every one but those who were behind the plot, with a few exceptions, were led to believe that the negroes were going to rise up and kill all the whites.”⁷⁷ A correspondent explained that the whites were fearful of an uprising because blacks had received “from their churches and from their lodges . . . reports of incendiary speeches, of impassioned appeals to the blacks to use the bullet that had no respect for color, and the kerosene and torch that would play havoc with the white man’s cotton in bale and warehouse.” The correspondent who made this observation further explained that the fear of a black uprising was an “ostensible ground for the general display of arms” and even if the blacks were acquiescent, the whites still would have armed themselves as a tool to demonstrate their determination to win the election.⁷⁸ Much later in life editor Josephus Daniels acknowledged that his work helped to fuel a “reign of terror” by printing stories written so as to instill fear and anger in readers.⁷⁹

Because many white men feared that they could not protect their families in the event of trouble, white women left the city before the election. Richard and Louis Meares ushered their mother to South Carolina by November fifth, and James S.

Worth had sent his wife and children out of the city by November third.⁸⁰ In her account of the riot, Wilmington resident Jane Cronly recorded that on the evening of the election, her family heard a rumor that the blacks “disappointed in having been cheated out of the election, might set fire to somebody’s property.” She noted that “this fear was probably the outcome of anxiety on the part of those people, who having abused and maltreated the negroes were fearful of their just vengeance” and that the warning was false.⁸¹ On the other hand, Mary Parsley of Wilmington wrote to her sister Sallie in New York and apologized for a sloppy letter because her “head is so full of the scary times I don’t know what to do.” Sallie later received a letter from her mother in Wilmington who described Election Day as one of “intense uneasiness . . . no one can realize the torture or suspense until experienced.”⁸²

Other Wilmington residents were not as susceptible to the propaganda that generated much of the fear among residents. Businessman Robert Mason wrote his cousin on Election Day that all was quiet and that the situation was exaggerated by the newspapers and “in the excited minds of some of the extremists.” He expressed his hopes that the “conservative elements will keep things down.” In response to fears among his workers that a riot was imminent, Mason claimed that it was “idiotic” to close the mill since he thought that to do so would

⁷⁷ Keith, *Memories*, 97.

⁷⁸ Henry West, “The Race War in North Carolina,” 580.

⁷⁹ Daniels published his autobiography, which detailed his involvement in Democratic Party activities as editor of the *News and Observer*, in 1941. Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 288.

⁸⁰ Louis Meares to Richard Meares, November 5, 1898, Meares and DeRosset papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; James S. Worth to Josephine Worth, November 3, 1898, James S. Worth Papers, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁸¹ Cronly Papers, Duke University.

⁸² Mary Parsley to Sallie, November 2, 1898, Eccles Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Mother to Sallie, November 9, 1898, Eccles Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection.

acknowledge a threat that he perceived did not exist.⁸³ Such sentiment, reflected by the upper class businessmen, was that the threat of violence was sufficient and they hoped to avoid actual violence. Upper class insider Louis Meares wrote that he had “great confidence in the ability of our people to suppress the indiscretion of a certain class of whites who are inclined to urge a conflict and so to smooth over the pending trouble.”⁸⁴

The White Government Union emerged as a primary outlet for the dissemination of information and the organization of the citizenry in the city. Attorney William B. McKoy and other Wilmington leaders organized WGU meetings throughout the city and, by mid-August, Wilmington had a WGU in every ward and members proudly displayed their large white “White Government Union” campaign buttons. WGU meetings took place at regular intervals and the newspapers advertised meeting times and places for each ward and precinct. Most of the meetings took place in prominent locations such as the office of Congressional candidate John D. Bellamy, Jr., the office of William B. McKoy, Democratic headquarters in the old National Bank Building, or the Seaboard Air Line Railroad building. Membership was open to anyone who desired “decent government” including women who could participate in meetings but had no vote in club decisions. The night before the election, Wilmington’s WGU held a joint session at the courthouse with all individual WGU clubs in attendance under the

⁸³ Mason was the cashier for the North Carolina Cotton Oil Company. R. Beverly Mason to Bess, November 8, 1898, John Steele Henderson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; 1897 *Hill’s Wilmington City Directory*.

⁸⁴ Louis Meares to Richard Meares, November 5, 1898, Meares and DeRossett Family Papers, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

chairmanship of Frank Stedman. After speeches by Waddell and Bellamy, the group named over 150 men to attend polls in their ward and precinct all day during the election, asked businesses that employed voters who planned to vote Democratic to close, and appointed an additional group of over eighty men to represent the candidates during ballot counting.⁸⁵

The bridge between the WGU and the Red Shirt/Rough Rider phenomenon is much more evident in Wilmington. Mike Dowling, admitted leader of Red Shirt/Rough Rider activity and member of a WGU stated that the club sought to win the election “at all hazards and by any means necessary.” These methods included the use of intimidation – WGU club members would “announce on all occasions that they would succeed if they had to shoot every negro in the city.” To facilitate their goal, all members were armed and paraded the streets, day and night. Dowling reported that the red shirts worn by him and his men were provided by the county Democratic Party. Dowling, captain of the Rough Riders, provided his men with whiskey during parades to “fire them up, and make them fiercer and more terrorizing in their conduct.” Even after Mayor Silas Wright ordered the closure of saloons, Dowling claimed that congressional candidate John D. Bellamy, Jr. “distributed the whiskey from his office.”⁸⁶

⁸⁵ *Wilmington Star*, August 11, 18, 19, 25, 26, 27, 1898; *Wilmington Star*, September 2, 3, 9, 18, 21, 22, 1898; *Wilmington Dispatch*, August 24, 25, 1898; *Wilmington Dispatch*, October 8, 24, 1898; *Wilmington Messenger*, November 8, 1898.

⁸⁶ The information from Dowling regarding his activity in the Red Shirt/Rough Rider brigade as well as in the WGU was obtained by Republican Oliver Dockery, Bellamy’s opponent in the 1898 election. Dockery challenged the validity of Bellamy’s election and subpoenaed Dowling’s testimony. Dowling was rewarded with a city job after the violence but, by 1900, had several run-ins with Wilmington leaders after the 1898 campaign and had

Activities in Wilmington again mirrored the statewide campaign with the growth of a Red Shirt contingent towards the end of the campaign. According to several of Wilmington's Populists and Republicans, the Red Shirts provided a frightful, dangerous incentive to remain quiet and at home in the weeks prior to the election.⁸⁷ In Wilmington, a large Red Shirt rally was held on November 3 in which participants wearing their regalia marched or rode horses throughout town led by Chief Marshal Roger Moore and his aides. The leader of the "Fifth Ward Rough Riders" in the parade was G.W. Bornemann. Another leader of the Red Shirts/Rough Riders was Mike Dowling. The parade began downtown and, after a procession through traditionally black neighborhoods, particularly Brooklyn, ended at Hilton Park where there were a number of speakers and a large picnic.⁸⁸ Although contemporary newspaper accounts pointed to the peaceful conduct of the rally, just one day later the "Rough Riders" got out of hand. "Condemned by all true and good citizens," the "Rough Riders" spilled into South Front Street and jeopardized all of the careful planning initiated by the Democrats as they

no compulsion to protect them while giving testimony in 1900. *Winston-Salem Union-Republican*, March 15, 1900.

⁸⁷ L.H. Bryant testified in 1899 that he was a Populist and that armed men, carpenters from the railroad, visited his home and told him not to vote. *Contested Election Case*, 394-5.

⁸⁸ It is unknown how many men participated in the rally. The *Dispatch* claimed 100 Red Shirts were in the parade and that over 1,000 people gathered at Hilton Park. Henry L. Hewett testified that he rode in the procession but would not estimate the number of participants. Chief of Police John Melton also testified that on the day of the Red Shirt parade there was sporadic shooting into homes, particularly that of Dixon Toomer and into a black school on Campbell Square. Melton identified Theodore Swann as the leader of the Rough Riders. *Wilmington Dispatch*, November 3, 1898; *Contested Election Case*, 219, 360-87.

attacked "inoffensive persons" and "ran amuck" on the streets. The next day, November fifth, the newspaper reprimanded the men and explained that "in their wild rowdyism, they represented nothing but themselves" and nearly "invited riot."⁸⁹ Chief of Police John Melton received a report from two black men who had been assaulted with a sword by the Rough Riders and Red Shirts. The men "showed marks of violence on their persons" from the attacks and were later confined at home and unable to swear out warrants against their attackers.⁹⁰

Just as in the statewide campaign, Red Shirt participants were drawn from various levels of society. The makeup of the Red Shirt/Rough Rider brigades in Wilmington is somewhat difficult to ascertain. As evidenced by their leader Mike Dowling, some of the Red Shirts were Irish immigrants.⁹¹ Historian Shelia Smith McKoy observed that for some of Wilmington's Irish residents, "attaining whiteness – the process of replacing an ethnic identity for a racial identity – was

⁸⁹ Jim Worth wrote to his wife: "We had a little row last night about dark that might have brought on something worse. Some of the Fifth Ward "Rough Riders" on a spree ran foul of some darkies downtown early in the evening and maltreated several. The boys were "run in" by the police a little later and were today fined \$25.00 each and the costs. Rather expensive "fun" for that class of boys. Down on Front Street about dark last night they tackled every nigger that came along regardless and ran several across the street and into nearby alleys. Fortunately they had no arms or there might have been serious trouble as a crowd of both colors quickly formed; but very little was done except to make the boys move on." Jim Worth to Josephine, November 4, 1898, James Spencer Worth Papers, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; *Wilmington Dispatch*, November 5, 1898.

⁹⁰ *Contested Election Case*, 362.

⁹¹ In an interview with Harry Hayden, Captain T. C. James of the Wilmington Light Infantry, referred to Dowling as a "hotheaded" Irishman. Hayden, *WLI*, 75.

integral to their participation in the white riot.” Further, she contended that “the Irish embraced white supremacy in order to make their whiteness visible” in a world where the economic and social plight of poor whites was often invisible to the greater Democratic Party machine.⁹² Other rhetoric tied the Red Shirts to Scottish roots. During a speech given at a rally, Henry B. McKoy explained that the concept of the red shirt as a sign of battle originated in Scotland, where widowed Highlanders used their husbands’ bloody shirts as banners to demonstrate to the king their plight. Although a weak explanation for the use of the red shirt, in an area of strong Scots heritage, McKoy nevertheless appealed to concepts of homeland, protection of women and honor.⁹³

⁹² McKoy acknowledged Wilmington’s pre-Civil War population featured a large contingent of recent Irish immigrants and that by 1890, many of their descendants lived in sub-standard housing and were unemployed alongside more recent Irish immigrants. Shelia Smith McKoy, *When Whites Riot: Writing Race and Violence in American and South African Cultures*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 43.

⁹³ Other speculative explanations for the origin of the Red Shirt are found scattered in the historical record. J.G. deRoulhac Hamilton noted that often the Ku Klux Klan outfits were all in red, indicating that perhaps the Red Shirt movement from South Carolina was an outgrowth of that organization. In *Born Fighting*, James Webb stated that the “warrior aristocracy” of the Scotch-Irish “was still in place in the South of the late 1800’s.” Webb explained that “a significant percentage” of whites in the South “were living in economic conditions no different than blacks” and that “the diminishment of blacks” was “a device for maintaining social and economic control ordered from above at the threat of losing one’s place – or job – in the white community.” Webb continued to explain the Scotch-Irish mentality when he stated that “violence in defense of one’s honor had always been the moniker of this culture” and that even though whites “believed emphatically in racial separation, the true battle lines . . . were not personal so much as they were political and economic.” Several references to men who were members of the Red Shirts are found scattered throughout the historical record. Theodore Swann was identified as

Non-Democrats in Wilmington watched the activities of the Red Shirts with trepidation. W. J. Harris, a white “borned and bred Republican” appointed Inspector of Weights and Measures by the Fusionists, observed that “hatching of the Red Shirts” was effective since he “was right smartly intimidated” at election time. He explained that “Populists voted the white supremacy ticket through fear” even as he and others felt that the talk of guns and force by Democrats was a bluff. Harris considered the Red Shirts to be a gang, and sometimes called them a “militia,” with their strength centered in Dry Pond. Before the election he witnessed their violence against blacks on Front Street after they had been drinking “fighting whiskey,” and, as a result, he tried to stay out of the Red Shirts’ path. However, because he had held political office and was seen as a minor leader within the Republican Party, Harris explained that “the night of the election they come and give me a salute of about thirty-six guns but I didn’t let them know I was there.” The next day, one of Harris’ friends was surprised to see him alive and the Red Shirts visited him again the next night. Harris explained that he overheard two Red Shirts complaining that northern reporters had left the city the day after the election because there was no riot. Harris heard them say that the riot would be the next day, attesting to the planned nature of the impending riot and coup. Harris concluded his explanation of

a leader of the Rough Riders. Swann’s family had roots in Wilmington and he was most likely born in the city. The Swanns were carpenters and brick masons, perhaps leading to some competition and tension between the family and prominent African American carpenter families in the city. James Webb, *Born Fighting: How the Scotch-Irish Shaped America*, (New York: Broadway Books, 2004), 238-246; Hamilton, *Reconstruction in North Carolina*, 461; *Wilmington Messenger*, November 4, 1898; 1870 and 1900 New Hanover County Census for Theodore Swann and his father B. F. Swann.

the Red Shirts when he said that although the Sheriff tried to arrest rowdy Red Shirts, they would be released on bail and back to their tricks within a day – “about as well to arrest the Cape Fear River as to do anything with that [Red Shirt] gang.”⁹⁴

During the campaign the Red Shirts succeeded in intimidating many in the African American community. Nada Cotton recalled for her family that the “Red Shirt campaign was started to intimidate the negro and keep him from the polls.” She remembered that the Red Shirts paraded in the streets and that “every able-bodied white was armed.” An outside correspondent noted that a “great mass” of blacks were “in a state of terror amounting almost to distress.” Jane Cronly observed that despite “all the abuse which has been vented upon them for months they have gone quietly on and have been almost obsequiously polite as if to ward off the persecution they seemed involuntarily to have felt to be in the air.” She continued to explain that “in spite of all the goading and persecuting that has been done all summer the negroes have done nothing that could call vengeance on their heads.” On the night of the election, Michael Cronly was called out in the “cold and damp for three hours” by his block commander to defend the block against a threat of fire. Cronly remarked that they all acknowledged that it was “perfect farce . . . to be out there in the damp and cold, watching for poor cowed disarmed negroes frightened to death by the threats that had been made against them and too glad to huddle in their homes and keep quiet.”⁹⁵

On the other hand, other Wilmington residents circulated unsubstantiated rumors that the blacks were organized in efforts to band together against the intimidation. On the seventh of November Jim Worth

informed his wife, who he had sent out of town before the election, that he “wouldn’t be greatly surprised if there should be some kind of conflict with the blacks tonight.” He continued to explain that “the last two nights they were to avenge the “red shirt” wrong of a few nights ago.” He explained that “it has not as yet amounted to much except a few brickbats thrown, flourishing of a few guns and pistols and lots of talk.”⁹⁶ The Wilmington papers recounted almost daily incidents of black crime portrayed as yet another means of retaliation against white aggression. Whether true or contrived by the papers, these accounts spread throughout the state and further united Wilmington whites in their resolve to combat blacks with force..⁹⁷

Democrats also used economic pressures against their targets. The city’s leading businessmen contended that “the substitution of white for negro labor” would solve many of the city’s problems. These men needed the political contest to be over

⁹⁶ Jim Worth to Josephine, November 7, 1898.

⁹⁷ Several news accounts and manuscript records detail blacks stealing food and claiming hunger. Perhaps as a result of a hostile environment with few jobs available, men had to resort to crime in order to feed themselves and their families. Former Chief of Police Melton answered a series of questions in 1899 regarding the arson problems faced by the city and replied that the arson cases were well before the beginning of the white supremacy election campaign and that the “firebugs” had been arrested. Melton observed that during the spring and summer months when residents were out of the city at vacation homes on the beach, crime at those residences increased annually and was usually instances of young boys breaking and entering to steal minor items. James Worth wrote his wife before the election that a black man had approached his house and asked his mother for something to eat since he had eaten nothing for two days. Another letter writer, Mrs. Edward Wootten, informed her son that blacks had been “robbing pantries.” James Worth to Josephine, November 3, 1898, James S. Worth Papers, Mother to Edward Wootten, November 8, 1898, Wootten Papers, University of North Carolina at Wilmington; *Contested Election Case*, 369-70.

⁹⁴ *Contested Election Case*, 387-394; *Wilmington Messenger*, October 20, 1898.

⁹⁵ Cronly Papers, Duke.

so they could return to business. The unsettled situation was seen as “detrimental to every business interest” because of the impact upon business and capital recruitment for the city.⁹⁸ At the beginning of October, the Chamber met and passed resolutions requiring members to “exert . . . utmost influence and personal effort to effect results which will restore order” and protect property and lives. As a result, the Merchant’s Association met on October seventh and developed a plan for the establishment of a “permanent labor bureau for the purpose of procuring white labor for employers.” The group agreed to meet on a weekly basis and promised that their mission to hire more white men would not falter after the election.⁹⁹ For their part, the city’s white laborers pressured leaders to acknowledge their economic plight and organized a White Laborer’s Union to ensure their needs would be addressed once the Democrats regained power. At the end of October about thirty-five laborers organized the union. They elected Red Shirt Mike Dowling chair and stated that their purpose was to “organize a white laborer’s union with a view to replacing negro labor with white labor and with this object in view to co-operate with the Wilmington Labor Bureau recently organized as a result of the

⁹⁸ It is clear that after the city returned to Democratic control business leaders were successful in a variety of business ventures. The Delgado Mill began construction in 1899, the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad located its headquarters in the city and other businesses grew as well. The turn of the century was a period of prosperity for businessmen throughout the country, Wilmington’s business leaders were not able to capitalize on the wealth being accumulated by railroad and industry magnates until after 1898. Review of industrial schedules from the 1890 and 1900 census plus business directories and port records demonstrates the growth seen in the city following 1898 as businessmen focused on business and not politics. *Wilmington Messenger*, November 2, 1898.

⁹⁹ *Wilmington Dispatch*, October 8, 1898.

meeting of the business men and tax payers of Wilmington.”¹⁰⁰

Vigilance Committees and Para-Military Organization

Another component of the Wilmington campaign, and apparently unique to the city, was the development of a “vigilance committee” under an additional umbrella of militia-like organization led by Roger Moore and attributed to the “Secret Nine.” Also called the “citizen’s patrol,” the vigilance committee attempted to pull the Red Shirts and White Government Unions under their control. The clear lines of all the various organizations began to blur by the time of the election as the oft-repeated specter of black violence created within the city an edgy armed camp. Some of the highest ranking Democratic Party leaders in the county lost sight of some peripheral activities because, as Rountree admitted, they were “busy in other activities.”¹⁰¹ As spokesman for the Democrats, Waddell proclaimed in late October that “we are going to protect our firesides and our loved ones or we will die in the attempt.”¹⁰²

For the purposes of organized protection for homes, women and children, white leaders divided the city into sections along ward lines. Following military chain of command structures, a man was then selected to serve as ward captain in each of the five wards. Hayden indicated that two of the “Secret Nine,” E. S. Lathrop and P. B. Manning, were established as contacts for the ward captains to communicate with other leaders unknown to the captains. Further, each ward captain selected a lieutenant to

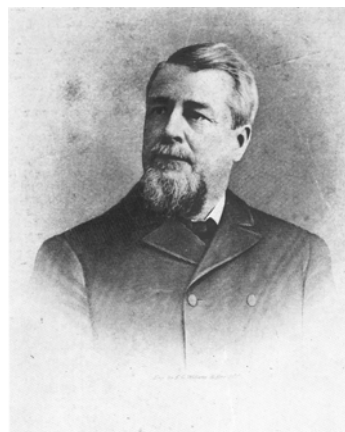
¹⁰⁰C.C. Redd, George W. Cameron, D.A. Rowan, C.W. Millis and M.G. Silva were appointed by those present to draw up a constitution and by-laws before the next meeting. *Wilmington Messenger*, October 28, 1898.

¹⁰¹ Rountree, “Memorandum.”

¹⁰² *Messenger*, October 29, 1898.

command individual blocks. Lieutenants reported daily to the ward captain the number of armed men they represented; the numbers of women, children and invalids that would need protection; and received orders to organize the men of each block for regular patrols. An outsider commented that the city “might have been preparing for a siege instead of an election” because men of all backgrounds had “brushed aside the great principles that divide parties and individuals and stood together as one man.”¹⁰³ One method used by the citizen’s patrol for identification was a white handkerchief tied to the left arm.¹⁰⁴ Democratic leader Thomas W. Strange wrote to Bennehan Cameron of Durham that the city was “like an armed camp” because of nightly street patrols.¹⁰⁵ A reporter for the *Richmond*

Times visited the city just before the election and attended a meeting at the home of “a leading citizen” who was involved in a conference with ward captains. The reporter explained that the men, some of whom were Confederate veterans, had “every detail arranged” and were not “hot-headed boys” but, instead, “the most prominent men in the city who have resolved that there shall be no further negro rule.” The reporter took pains to point out the differences between the organized businessmen and the rowdy Red Shirts even as he recognized that the Red Shirts were the “outward and visible sign of the determination here to prevent the negroes from voting.”¹⁰⁶



Roger Moore
Image: William L.
DeRossett, *Pictorial and
Historical New Hanover
County*.

¹⁰³ It is unclear as to when the patrols began. James Cowan, editor of the *Wilmington Dispatch*, claimed that the patrols took place for a year but most other accounts indicate that the patrols began in the period immediately preceding the election. In August, a correspondent of the *News and Observer* visited the city to investigate claims of “negro domination” and discovered “murmurings” of vigilance committees at that early stage. Chief of Police Melton testified that guns were carried on the street during the campaign and that armed men were posted on every corner in the city all night for a few days before the election. *Hayden, WLI*, 66, 70; Thomas Clawson, “The Wilmington Race Riot in 1898, Recollections and Memories” Louis T. Moore Papers, North Carolina State Archives; “Minutes of the Organizational Meeting of the Association of Members of the Wilmington Light Infantry, December 14, 1905” North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Henry West, “The Race War in North Carolina,” *The Forum*, January 1899, 579; Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 285; Jim Worth to Josephine, November 16, 1898, James Spencer Worth Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; *Contested Election Case*, 360; James Cowan, “The Wilmington Race Riot.”

¹⁰⁴ Jack Metts, November 9, 1898, Hinsdale Papers, Duke University.

¹⁰⁵ Historian Jerome McDuffie observed that the Vigilance Committee was associated mainly with leading businessmen and property owners, resulting

A crucial figure in the preparations of the city for the potential of violence on Election Day was Colonel Roger Moore. Moore, a former Confederate cavalry officer, was a member of the city’s aristocratic elite. His family, early settlers of the Cape Fear region, was politically and economically prominent across several

in less white supremacy rhetoric. Further, he noted that they did not hold rallies, openly brandish weapons to intimidate and that discussions of this group were “tempered” with a degree of “moderate paternalism.” McDuffie, “Politics in Wilmington,” 621; Thomas Strange to Bennehan Cameron, November 16, 1898, Bennehan Cameron Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹⁰⁶ *Wilmington Messenger*, November 5, 1898.

generations. In 1868, Moore had organized the first Ku Klux Klan efforts in Wilmington. Owing to his military background and KKK participation, Moore was selected at the age of sixty to command the para-military units of citizens. Moore's widow defended his actions in a letter to the editor after his death in 1900. Mrs. Moore claimed that her husband, with the assistance of Dr. J.E. Matthews, organized and led the "revolution" of 1898. For at least six weeks prior to the election, Moore developed "plans by which disaster could be averted" as he built up his organization. She praised the "men who spent many sleepless nights watching and guarding the safety and residents of the whole town." Her main purpose in writing the letter was to proudly attach her husband's name to the riot and prove his actions saved many lives while discrediting Waddell's role in the pre-election and pre-riot planning. The organizational framework developed by veteran Moore led to the response of Wilmington whites on November 10th – patrols manned by armed, exhausted, tense men who were unfamiliar with near-battle conditions facilitated street fighting on a large scale.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Waddell and Moore held some animosity towards each other. The root of the animosity is unknown but might stem from any number of causes, including their Confederate service record. Waddell was Lt. Col. of the 3rd Regiment, N.C. Cavalry, and resigned due to illness in August 1864. Waddell was immediately replaced by Moore who had led the regiment instead of Waddell since June 1864, after the capture of the regiment's captain. Moore's widow made a point to explain that Waddell, despite his speechmaking, did not know of the amount of planning that took place behind closed doors and only after he was appointed Mayor did he learn all the details of the coup. She also explained that Moore sought to prevent wholesale slaughter of blacks on the day of the riot at Sprunt's Compress and at the jail that night. The account given by Moore's widow is corroborated by William DeRosset in his history of the region. Correspondence of Mrs. Roger Moore, Manuscripts Collection, University of

The Wilmington Light Infantry

The Wilmington Light Infantry (WLI) boasted a long history of militia service to North Carolina, having been formed in 1853. Members of the WLI served in the Civil War after being mustered into service by the North Carolina General Assembly on May 10, 1861. After the Civil War, members returned to Wilmington and maintained the volunteer militia group as part of the State Guard under the command of the Adjutant General of North Carolina. As veteran members of the WLI advanced in age, Veteran and Reserve Corps of the WLI were organized in 1892. The Veteran Corps was comprised of men who were members prior to April 15, 1861. The Reserve Corps was comprised of members who had been active members in good standing for five years. The Veteran and Reserve Corps served to assist active members through leading by example and "inspiring them with that 'esprit de corps' so essential to the welfare of a military organization."¹⁰⁸ These men of the Reserve Corps also provided behind-the-scenes management within the WLI, connecting it with other facets of the white supremacy movement.

Members of the Wilmington Light Infantry came from throughout the city and represented a cross-section of upper and middle class families. Sons of prominent

North Carolina at Wilmington; Louis Manarin, *North Carolina Troops 1861-1865, Volume III* (Raleigh: North Carolina State Department of Archives and History, 1968), 180; William Lord DeRosset, *Pictorial and Historical New Hanover County and Wilmington North Carolina, 1723-1938* (Wilmington, 1938), 30-31; Prather, *We Have Taken a City*, 100-101; Clawson, "The Wilmington Race Riot"; James Cowan, "The Wilmington Race Riot."

¹⁰⁸ Wrenn, *Wilmington North Carolina: An Architectural and Historical Portrait*, 206-207; Hayden, *Wilmington Light Infantry*, 45; Wilmington Light Infantry, *Constitution and Bylaws* (1904) Cape Fear Museum, 15-19. See Appendix F for Roster of WLI and Naval Reserves members.

white Wilmington businessmen served in the WLI as they worked themselves up through the ranks of Wilmington businesses as clerks, accountants, and bookkeepers. Candidates for membership had to apply to join by letter and their applications were then voted on by other members; five negative votes equaled rejection. Once a member, it was required that the initiate engage in full participation in drills and meetings. Prompt payment of dues and expenses related to membership was expected. Furthermore, the corps required members to wear uniforms and were held to strict guidelines for conduct and public appearances while in uniform.¹⁰⁹



Unidentified member of WLI, n.d.
Image courtesy of Cape Fear Museum,
Wilmington

The leadership of the WLI took pains to separate themselves from the citizen's patrol even though commander Walker Taylor was a prominent member of the Democratic Party's county committee and clandestine organizations. Other members of the WLI were also members of the White

¹⁰⁹ WLI *Constitution*, 15-19; *Wilmington Messenger* November 26, 1905, December 16, 1905; Hayden, *WLI*, 45-46.

Government Union. In the literature generated by participants and witnesses, a distinction is drawn between the citizen's patrols and the official state militia in the uniforms of the WLI. As part of their role as official members of the state's home guard, the WLI sought to provide additional peace measures in the city. WLI member John Metts wrote on November ninth that the past week had been exceptionally busy. On the Saturday night before the election, he was ordered by Captain T.C. James to "order the company up" because there were reports of the blacks forming mobs in the northern and southern sections of the city. The reports proved false but still demonstrated the readiness of the WLI.¹¹⁰ In addition, there were in the city furloughed members of Company K and the Naval Reserves – men still in Federal service for the Spanish-American War effort.¹¹¹

Amidst heated rhetoric regarding the fear of black attempts to retaliate against white leaders, the men and women of Wilmington prepared for whatever violence transpired and all expected some sort of outbreak. A Richmond reporter noticed that "the whites, or some of them, would welcome a little 'unpleasantness'" since they were "prepared for it." The reporter provided a metaphor for the impending

¹¹⁰ For further indication of the differences between the WLI and the Citizen's Patrol, witness James Cowan's explanation that once the WLI was mobilized by the Governor on the day of the riot, the citizen's patrol ceased to exist because "there was no further need for their services." James Cowan, "The Wilmington Race Riot;" Jack Metts, November 9, 1898, Hinsdale Papers, Duke University.

¹¹¹ It was decided by Democratic Party leaders that Federal troops should not participate in activities because their involvement would possibly result in Federal intervention. Despite such warnings about participation, many members of the active troops participated in rallies and other activities, including the riot, wearing parts of their uniforms. Rountree, "Memorandum," *Minutes of the Association of the WLI*.

conflict as he stated that “it requires an electric storm to purify the atmosphere.”¹¹² Many whites were on edge – the city had been worked into a fever over repeated reports, true and contrived, of violence against whites by blacks. Mrs. Edward Wootten, a Wilmington resident, wrote her son on November 8th that their block captain had told her husband that he should be ready on a moment’s notice. She had her husband buy extra bread so that they would have something to eat if violence broke out. The “safe place” for her block was a nearby church but she decided that if the Presbyterian church bell sounded the alarm, she would stay at her home because each block was guarded by groups of four to eight men at each corner. She lamented that she had no gun because they were all in the hands of her male family members but did note that the “hatchets were handy.” She prepared coffee for the men guarding her block and assured them that more would be made if “trouble came.” She did not believe “the negroes will dare start so terrible a thing but if they are drinking they may do more than if sober and it would take a small match to set all on fire.” Considering herself a strong woman, she felt “truly sorry for timid women and the little children.” Her letter ended the next morning with a short statement from her husband: “All quiet – we lay by our arms all night for riot – all quiet.”¹¹³

Adding to the fever pitch was the emphasis placed on weaponry. The papers had editorialized several times during the campaign that the city needed to purchase a rapid fire gun for the general protection of the city and articles proclaimed that “guns

were still coming to North Carolina” in advance of the election. Adding to the fear of riot instilled in readers through their papers, Wilmington’s editors simultaneously ran articles reporting that everyone in the city, black and white, was armed. The city’s white businessmen acted and, “at the cost of \$1,200” they “purchased, equipped and manned a rapid fire gun” because “complete preparation would best assure protection.”¹¹⁴ Once the rapid fire gun was in the city, the gun squad assembled the gun, the squad, and black leaders of the community on a boat and demonstrated the gun’s ability on November 1, 1898.¹¹⁵

Chief of Police Melton estimated that there were between two and three thousand guns in the city by the election. Reports of accidental shootings were scattered throughout the papers. In the *Morning Star* the day of the election, two articles near each other reported that a white man accidentally shot a compatriot while “inspecting” a pistol on the street and a white “guard” was wounded by a black man with an “old fashioned rifle or shotgun loaded with buck” in Brooklyn. The day before, the *Messenger* claimed that Norfolk merchants were shipping guns to North Carolina in record numbers over the past thirty days. The *Messenger* observed that “there will be no guns or pistols publicly displayed at the voting places . . . but the bushes will be full of them.” A reporter

¹¹² *Wilmington Messenger*, November 5, 1898.

¹¹³ Such quiet female support of the campaign can be found as an undercurrent in newspaper articles, parades, attendance at speeches and WGU events. Wootten Collection, University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

¹¹⁴ John Bellamy testified that the purchase of a gun was done by the merchants for the protection of life and property “separate and apart” from the Democratic committees and that the purchase was “kept very quiet.” *Wilmington Messenger*, November 4, 1898; Iredell Meares, “Wilmington Revolution” broadside, Smithwick Papers, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh; *Contested Election Case*, 256-7.

¹¹⁵ The exhibition of the gun as it was shot down river near Eagle’s Island proved to African American leaders that if it were used against men in the streets, scores would die in a short span of time. *Contested Election Case*, 344-6.

visiting the city estimated that there were “enough small arms imported in the state in the last sixty days to equip an entire division of the United States army.” He noted that the whites were armed with Winchesters and that the blacks were equipped with “old army muskets, shotguns, or pistols.” Waddell’s pre-election night speech summed up the mood of the Democrats:

“You are Anglo-Saxons. You are armed and prepared, and you will do your duty. Be ready at a moment’s notice. Go to the polls tomorrow, and if you find the Negro out voting, tell him to leave the polls and if he refuses kill, shoot him down in his tracks. We shall win tomorrow if we have to do it with guns”¹¹⁶

In such an atmosphere, African Americans also sought to arm themselves. However, the menacing control exerted by white supremacy advocates over life in the state identified efforts of blacks to purchase weapons. One such attempt was widely publicized in local and state papers. According to Democratic newspapers, William Lee and M.H. McAllister tried to order rifles from Winchester Arms Company of New Jersey. The company referred the request to their North Carolina agent, Odell Hardware of Greensboro. Odell’s manager, Charles H. Ireland, suspicious of the order, contacted

¹¹⁶ There are conflicting descriptions of the rapid fire gun(s) in the city and there was more than just one rapid fire gun in Wilmington. The *Messenger* reported on the day of the election that a “rapid-fire Hotchkiss gun arrived here last night by the New York steamer for the Wilmington Division, North Carolina Naval Battalion.” Charles H. White testified that he assisted in operating the gun purchased by “the people of the city” and it was a Colt that could fire 420 shots per minute. *Contested Election Case*, 343-6, 362; *Wilmington Morning Star*, November 8, 1898; *Wilmington Dispatch*, November 7, 1898; Iredell Meares, “the Wilmington Revolution,” Smithwick Papers, North Carolina State Archives; Speech of Alfred Moore Waddell, quoted in *Outlook*, November 19, 1898; *Wilmington Messenger*, November 8, 1898.

Wilmington merchants William Worth and Nathaniel Jacobi. After learning that Lee and McAllister were black, Odell’s refusal to fill the order and forwarded the request to the *News and Observer* which then looked into the matter. Editor Josephus Daniels discussed the issue with Iredell Meares of Wilmington who said that William Lee was actually John William Lee, chairman of the New Hanover County Republican Executive Committee. Local Republicans denounced the claims as they were published in the *News and Observer* and local papers, particularly since the county Republican chair’s full name was actually John Wesley Lee and he claimed no knowledge of the order.¹¹⁷

Rumors circulated throughout the state that Wilmington outsiders also tried to help local African Americans protect themselves in response to white armament. The story that Congressman George White of Tarboro attempted to equip blacks through the purchase of guns via his wife received much attention. In an article published the week before the election, the *Wilmington Dispatch* declared that not only was a Wilmington black leader in Norfolk and Baltimore purchasing guns and ammunition but that other black leaders such as White were assisting the effort. The *Dispatch* quoted from the *News and Observer* that whites in Tarboro discovered that White’s wife received an “express package containing rifles, name of shipper withheld.” The paper concluded the article

¹¹⁷ The fact that the *News and Observer* was included in the matter reflects the important role that Josephus Daniels and the paper played in the 1898 campaign. It was not illegal for blacks to own or purchase guns. Local Wilmington Republicans probably denounce the rumor for the sake of peace and safety. McDuffie, “Politics in Wilmington,” 625-6; *Wilmington Messenger*, October 9, 1898; *Raleigh News and Observer*, October 8, 1898; *Wilmington Dispatch*, October 10, 1898; *Wilmington Morning Star*, October 9, 1898.

with a simple, menacing statement – “white people are ready and prepared for any emergency.”¹¹⁸

Due to indications that blacks were arming themselves, local Wilmington leaders moved to determine the extent of weapon stockpiles in the black community. Two detectives, one of each race, were hired by Edgar Parmele, George Rountree, Frank Stedman and Walker Taylor at the urging of Atlantic Coastline Railroad president John Kenly. The detectives informed the men that the blacks “were doing practically nothing.” Additionally, the “Group Six” decided to hire two black Pinkerton agents to investigate. Walker Taylor of the Group Six was informed by these two detectives that the blacks were contemplating arson instead of arming themselves.¹¹⁹

After the election, many of the city’s merchants were called to testify in a court case challenging the validity of John Bellamy’s victory over Oliver Dockery in November. Attorneys requested specifics on the numbers of guns sold in the days and weeks leading up to the election. Two merchants, Joseph Jacobi and William E. Springer, were evasive in their answers and provided little information as to the number of guns they sold. Three other merchants provided a glimpse into the total sales of weapons in the city. Charles D. Foard testified that he sold 25-30 guns and pistols between November first and tenth; Owen F. Love, member of the Second Ward White Government Union, did not believe the WGU would tolerate violence but still sold

about 59 guns. J.W. Murchison reported that he sold about 200 pistols, 40-50 shotguns, 125 repeating rifles including 75 Colt repeaters that could repeat 25 times and 50 Winchesters that would repeat about 15 times. Under cross examination by a Democratic Party attorney, Murchison stated that the sales for 1898 were similar to sales from other election years. The line of questioning for all merchants appeared to acknowledge that gun sales escalated in election years and that the weapons sold by these merchants were to whites only.¹²⁰

The election campaign of 1898 represented the beginning of the end for the Republican Party and the promise of full control of state politics by 1900 for the Democrats. The use of violence and intimidation using both clandestine and overt methods proved a successful model for the Democratic Party to disassemble the fragile framework of cooperation between white and black Republicans and Populists. In Wilmington, Democratic victory at the ballot box, whether honestly or fraudulently obtained, would be a reality. Less clear was how the hysteria and fear stimulated by the campaign would dissipate.

¹¹⁸ *Wilmington Dispatch*, November 2, 1898; Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 107-8.

¹¹⁹ William Parsley wrote a relative after the riot that “every blessed one of them [blacks] had a pistol of some sort and many of them rifles and shotguns loaded with buckshot.” William Parsley to Sal, November 12, 1898.

¹²⁰The testimony presented in the challenge to Bellamy’s election by his opponent Oliver Dockery has provided insight regarding the activities of many of the leading participants in the campaign and riot. *Contested Election Case*, 8-18.