

WILMINGTON'S LIE: THE MURDEROUS COUP OF 1898 AND THE RISE OF WHITE SUPREMACY (WINNER OF THE 2021 PULITZER PRIZE) written by David Zucchino

Soapstone's *Dismantling Racism Discussion Group* began its fall schedule with this well-researched account of an important chapter in North Carolina history unheard of by many North Carolinians. Following the Civil War, African Americans developed a professional class, founded successful businesses, gained wealth and status, and achieved local public office in the thriving seaport Wilmington, North Carolina's largest city at the time.

Fear and resentment rose in the white community, worried that "Negro" domination would result. Wilmington lawyer George Rountree and former Confederate Colonel Alfred Moore Waddell, a skilled orator, along with and many others, organized to eradicate black political and economic power in the city.

Prominent state politicians, well known advocates of white supremacy, gave aid to Wilmington's white elites. Josephus Daniels, editor of the *News and Observer*; Furnifold Simmons, State Democratic Party chairman; Charles Aycock, who would become governor in 1900; former Confederate Colonel William L. Saunders, commander of Ku Klux Klan in North Carolina--all inspired the planning of a violent attack on Wilmington's black citizens and Republican leaders.

The fuse was lit in August when Alexander Manly of the black owned *Daily Record* responded to a speech demanding lynching of black rapists by writing a sarcastic article on the taboo subject of black/white sexual relationships. Manly called out whites who were sexually active with black women but wanted to lynch any black man who dared have a sexual relationship with a white woman, even when the relationship was consensual.

Early on November 10th, a white mob burned the *Daily Record* building. Hundreds of armed whites attacked black men, women and children, burning homes and businesses, driving blacks into the swamps around Wilmington. The coroner held inquests for 14 black men shot and killed. The death toll has been estimated at sixty.

The Secret Nine, led by white Hugh MacRae, president of Wilmington Cotton Mills, created a "banishment list" of black leaders, many of whom they escorted to the train station. At least 2,000 black citizens eventually left Wilmington, most for Northern cities. They removed the Republican mayor, town council, police and black municipal employees, and replaced them with local white leaders.

National newspapers, black and white, headlined the Wilmington event. Blacks' appeals for aid to North Carolina Governor Daniel Russell and President William McKinley were ignored.

A few black elites re-established themselves in Northern cities, but the majority lost nearly everything. Wilmington, meanwhile, regained white supremacy in local government and in all aspects of its business and cultural life. When Furnifold Simmons was asked the question, "What shall we do with the Negro?" he replied, "We will do all we can to promote his best interests but by the eternal gods he shall not rule over white men!"

The white supremacist story that the city's white leaders put down a riot and black mismanagement of government was challenged in a centennial remembrance organized by local activists and UNC-Wilmington who argued it was a coup against the government and massacre of black citizens. Zucchino describes this as the Wilmington Lie corrected by the state Wilmington Race Riot Commission with its report in 2006. In our discussion, we agreed the history of the event well documented by Zucchino should be remembered correctly.