



# WILMINGTON RACE RIOT





# 1898

In 1898, the one and only  
successful coup d'etat in  
American History occurred in  
Wilmington, NC.

One and only.

Coup d'etat.

# HISTORICAL CONTEXT

WRITTEN BY:  
MRS. G

Wilmington, NC. 1898.

A Progressive town in the New South. A beacon in the hopes of those who envisioned a South of business development, opportunity for all citizens, and change.

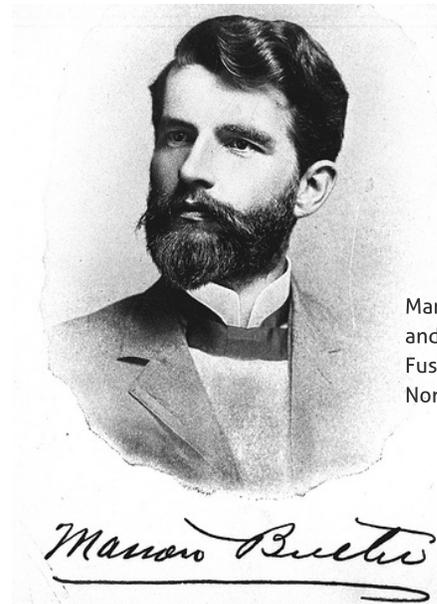
But everyone in Wilmington was not looking for a beacon of change. Some did not want change at all.

Wilmington in 1898 reflected the political divisions within NC and, indeed, throughout the South. In the late 19th century, there were three viable parties in North Carolina: Democrats, Republicans, and Populists. Democrats were white, upper class or disaffected Civil War veterans, die-hard supporters of an agrarian society who were determined to turn back changes brought to the South through the policies of Radical Reconstruction. Republicans were African Americans, out-of-state whites, and progressive business people who saw a chance for real change and economic opportunity in North Carolina. Populists in North Carolina were largely disaffected Democrats who supported the need for change in the South in recognition of the needs of small farmers in the state. In 1898, the Republicans and the Populists formed an uneasy alliance. North Carolina Republicans and Populists disagreed on some national issues like the gold standard and tariff, however they agreed on state-level issues like voting rights, education, and restoring the power of small farmers. In hopes of controlling the NC General Assembly and local governments, the Fusionists joined forces throughout North Carolina ... and in Wilmington.

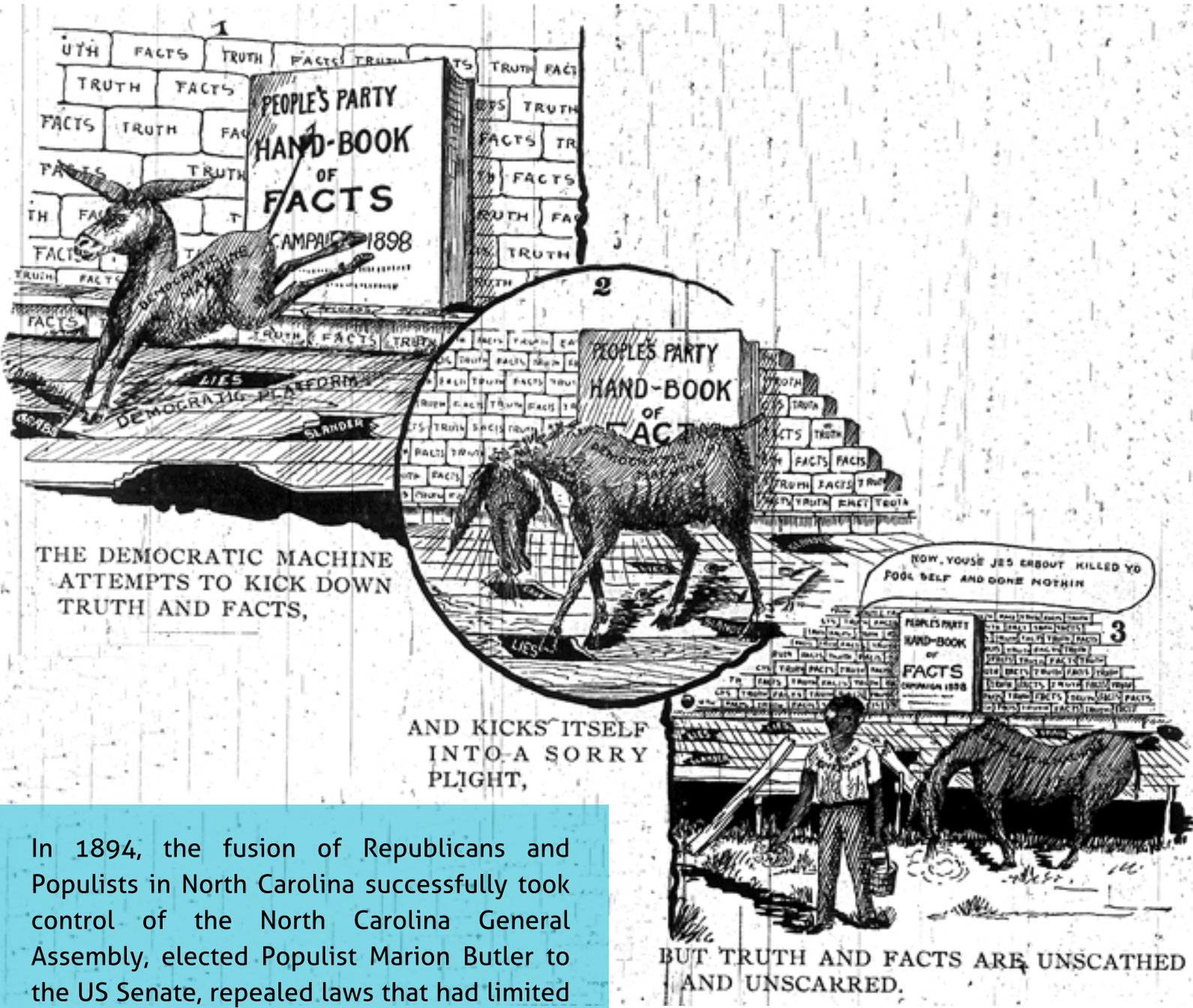


Clip from Wilmington on Fire

Explaining the use of the laws of NC to carry out the coup



Marion Butler, agriculturalist and leader of the 1890s Fusion Politics movement in North Carolina



THE DEMOCRATIC MACHINE  
ATTEMPTS TO KICK DOWN  
TRUTH AND FACTS,

AND KICKS ITSELF  
INTO A SORRY  
PLIGHT,

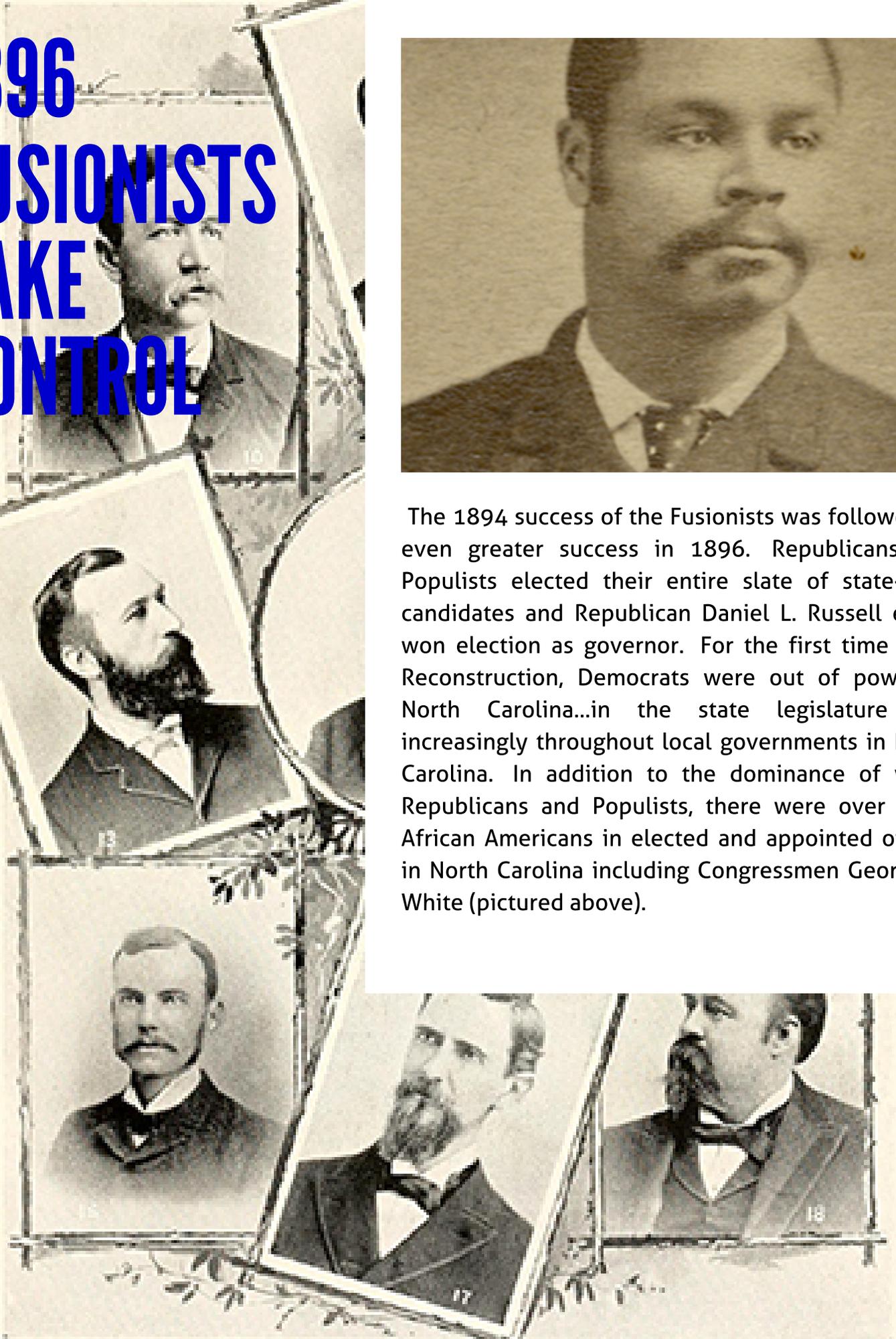
BUT TRUTH AND FACTS ARE UNSCATHED  
AND UNSCARRED.

In 1894, the fusion of Republicans and Populists in North Carolina successfully took control of the North Carolina General Assembly, elected Populist Marion Butler to the US Senate, repealed laws that had limited county government and participation of African Americans, sponsored funding for public education, and placed election judges to protect the polls. The result... 80,000 additional voters.

# 1896 FUSIONISTS TAKE CONTROL



The 1894 success of the Fusionists was followed by even greater success in 1896. Republicans and Populists elected their entire slate of state-wide candidates and Republican Daniel L. Russell easily won election as governor. For the first time since Reconstruction, Democrats were out of power in North Carolina...in the state legislature and increasingly throughout local governments in North Carolina. In addition to the dominance of white Republicans and Populists, there were over 1000 African Americans in elected and appointed offices in North Carolina including Congressmen George H. White (pictured above).



10. H. E. Fries.

11. W. S. Primrose.

12. Frank Wood.

13. N. B. Broughton.

14. J. B. Coffey.

15. J. J. Nelson.

# WHITE DEMOCRATS DECIDE TO TAKE THE STATE BACK...



The Vampire That Hovers Over North Carolina.

# THE TARGET... WILMINGTON

# DEMOCRATIC STRATEGY

Democrats, led by Furnifold Simmons, developed a three part strategy to regain control of the state...starting with Wilmington. Simmons, and the White Supremacy Campaign, organized "men who could write", "men who could speak", and "men who could ride." The writers would create the propaganda, the speakers would rally North Carolinians through racism and hate, and the riders would use terror to control voters and political outcomes. The rider terrorists were known as the "Red Shirts" and were organized on the basis of similar terrorist groups who had already effectively taken over the government of South Carolina. Simmons actually sent a group to train in SC in preparation for the move against Wilmington. These men were officially part of the White Government League, a formal organization within the Democratic Party. They would meet with the Democratic Party "officially" and then change into their Red Shirts to terrorize.



# NOVEMBER IN WILMINGTON

Wilmington, NC. November 1898,

Wilmington was the target of the Democratic Party's strategy to retake the state for several reasons. First, Wilmington was the largest and most economically developed city in North Carolina. The population of Wilmington was evenly divided between whites and African Americans. Most importantly, in Wilmington, African Americans were integrated into the economy and politics of the city. African Americans were leaders in business and politics. African American home ownership and income was higher in Wilmington than anywhere in the state and most places in the South. Wilmington was all that the New South could be.. and that was intolerable to the Democrats.



Introduction for Wilmington on Fire, documentary on the massacre in Wilmington in 1898



ALEXANDER MANLY, SON OF NC GOVERNOR CHARLES MANLY AND A SLAVE. OWNER OF THE DAILY RECORD - ONLY BLACK OWNED NEWSPAPER

Alexander Manly (left) owned and operated a black newspaper in Wilmington. He openly opposed the racism and terror of the Democratic Party. He gained the determined animosity of Furnifold Simmons and the Red Shirts/White Government League in the months leading up to the November elections by publishing a scathing editorial challenging rampant racist stereotyping of African American men as rapists of white women. This editorial was in response to an article published in the Raleigh News & Observer quoting an infamous speech by a Mrs. Felton of Georgia accusing all black men of wanting to rape white women. Manly responded by calling for fair application of justice and by stating that many white women were with black men by choice. This editorial made Manly and his paper a target for the Democrats.

As was so often the case in the South after Reconstruction, the combined racist propaganda and "Red Shirts" patrolling streets on election day in 1898, Democrats were successful in turning Fusionists out of state office. Democrats regained control of the NC General Assembly and immediately set their sites on Wilmington... one of the only Republican controlled hold outs in 1898.

On November 9, one day after the elections, a crowd of 2000 met Democratic leader, Alfred Waddell at the Wilmington armory and issued a "White Declaration of Independence" targeting Manly and the Fusionist government of the city. Alfred Waddell, leading speaker of the Democratic Party of NC, read the declaration to an angry white crowd and gave the African American community til the next day to respond. Shocked and dismayed, African American leaders met and formed a response offering to accept some of the demands, including stepping down from elected positions, but asked for more time to put together a response. Waddell ordered his supporters, many wearing red shirts, to meet at the armory in Wilmington. Despite being informed of a response on the way from the African American community, Waddell ordered the white militia, armed from the armory, to march to Manly's newspaper office. The Red Shirts surrounded Manly's press and burned the building to the ground, all the while preventing black firefighters from reaching the burning newspaper. After the building burned, the whites celebrated in front of the buildings shell and posed for this photograph. The building was a total loss... and was only the beginning of the violence.







'IF WE HAVE  
TO CHOKE THE  
CURRENT OF  
THE CAPE  
FEAR WITH  
CARCASSES.'

-ALFRED WADDELL



"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



# THE ONLY SUCCESSFUL COUP D'ETAT IN US HISTORY



After terrorizing the African American community, the white crowd rounded up the Wilmington city government - the elected leaders of a municipal government in the United States - and under threat of death - forced each one of them to resign. Wilmington's charter allowed a resigning government official to appoint his successor- Waddell stood in front of each man as he resigned and gave them a list of Democrats from whom they could pick their replacement. The "new" city government summarily elected Alfred Waddell as the new mayor of Wilmington... The White militia were careful, under Democratic Party control, to not attack federal workers who were African Americans - this insured that the federal government stood aside and allowed the travesty in Wilmington to occur. Thousands of African Americans fled...the only coup d'etat in American History was complete.

The coup was followed by a banishment campaign which forced African American leaders out of the city. African Americans were fired from jobs. There was an early Great Migration of African Americans from Wilmington to cities in the North.



Banished African American leaders  
being marched to train station on  
November 11t

**IN 1900, THE DEMOCRATIC GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NC PASSED A SUFFRAGE AMENDMENT RESTRICTING AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN FROM VOTING EFFECTIVELY CEMENTING THEIR SUCCESS IN WILMINGTON.**



Thanks to Larae Umphlett for presentation at NCCSS Conference 2015

sources:

<http://www.history.ncdcr.gov/1898-wrrc/1898rptdrftr.pdf>

