

The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898

Overview

Students will learn about the events of the 1898 Wilmington Race Riot via a Power Point presentation, analyzing primary source documents, and class discussion. Students will explore the role of propaganda and spin in instigating the events of 1898 and will discuss the importance of learning about such history, though painful and controversial, today. This lesson will culminate with students creating a memorial design for teaching about the 1898 riot and honoring those impacted.

Grade

8

NC Essential Standards for 8th Grade Social Studies

- 8.H.1: Apply historical thinking to understand the creation and development of North Carolina and the United States.
- 8.H.2.1: Explain the impact of economic, political, social, and military conflicts on the development of North Carolina and the United States
- 8.H.2.2: Summarize how leadership and citizen actions influenced the outcome of key conflicts in North Carolina and the United States.
- 8.H.3.3: Explain how individuals and groups have influenced economic, political and social change in North Carolina and the United States.
- 8.C&G.1.4: Analyze access to democratic rights and freedoms among various groups in North Carolina and the United States
- 8.C&G.2.1: Evaluate the effectiveness of various approaches used to effect change in North Carolina and the United States
- 8.C&G.2.3: Explain the impact of human and civil rights issues throughout North Carolina and United States history.

Essential Questions

- Why was Wilmington, NC considered a symbol of ‘black hope’ in the late 19th century?
- What were the events of the 1898 race riot in Wilmington, NC?
- Compare and contrast the Democratic, Republican, Populist, and Fusionist Parties of 1898.
- What effect did propaganda and spin have on the unfolding of 1898 events?
- How did the events of 1898 impact African American progress?
- What are the most effective ways to remember the events of 1898 and honor those who experienced unjust actions?

Materials

- The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 Power Point, available in the Database of K-12 Resources (in PDF format)
 - To view this PDF as a projectable presentation, save the file, click “View” in the top menu bar of the file, and select “Full Screen Mode”
 - To request an editable PPT version of this presentation, send a request to CarolinaK12@unc.edu
- Power Point Response Sheet and Answer Key, attached
- Excerpt from “The Ghosts of 1898,” by Tim Tyson; special feature of the News and Observer, attached
- Discussion Questions for Excerpt, attached

Duration

- 2 class periods
- Additional homework time will be needed for the culminating memorial assignment

Student Preparation

Students should have a basic knowledge of the Jim Crow Era, as well as an understanding of expectations for respectfully discussing controversial issues.

Teacher Preparation

While the Wilmington Race Riot deals with sensitive topics, it is important for students to explore the events of 1898. In order to study this history effectively and safely however, teachers must have established a safe classroom with clear expectations of respect, open-mindedness, and civil conversation. See the Carolina K-12's "Activities" section of the Database of k-12 Resources <http://database.civics.unc.edu/> for ways to ensure a classroom environment conducive to the effective exploration of controversial issues.

Procedure

Day 1

Introduction to the Wilmington Race Riot of 1898

1. Project the image on [Slide 2](#) of the Wilmington Race Riot Power Point and ask students to examine it, jotting down their observations and inferences. (Do not give students any indication regarding the events of the picture or time period represented yet.) Probe student thinking by asking:
 - What do you see here?
 - What appears to be currently happening? What do you think may have happened before this photo was taken? What would you predict will happen next?
 - When and where do you think this photo was taken? What evidence makes you think this?
2. Allow students to share their thoughts then explain that this photo was taken on November 10, 1898 in Wilmington, NC and give students an introduction to the Wilmington Race Riot, such as:
 - At 8:00 A.M. on November 10, 1898, about 500 white men assembled at the armory of the Wilmington Light Infantry. Led by soon-to-be mayor **Alfred Moore Waddell**, the crowd marched to the **Daily Record** office, the state's only black owned newspaper at the time. As they moved across town, the crowd swelled to approximately 2,000. The mob broke into the building, set it on fire, and watched it burn. The crowd then posed for a photograph in front of the burned-out frame.

Destroying the black-owned newspaper office was only one event in the string of racist actions taken by white supremacists in 1898 in Wilmington, North Carolina. In the name of white supremacy, dozens of Wilmington's black residents (the precise number isn't known) were murdered and many successful black citizens and their white allies were banished from the town. "A new social order was born in the blood and flames, rooted in what the News and Observer's publisher, Josephus Daniels, heralded as 'pernament good government by the party of the White Man.'")

This string of events, which became known as the Wilmington Race Riot of 1898, "was a crucial turning point in the history of North Carolina. It was also an event of national historical significance. Occurring just two years after the Supreme Court had sanctioned 'separate but equal' segregation in **Plessy v. Ferguson**, the riot signaled the embrace of an even more virulent racism, not merely in Wilmington, but across the United States." (Source: *Tim Tyson, "The Ghosts of 1898"*)

Exploring the Events of 1890s Wilmington, NC

3. Next, ask students how many of them have heard about the Wilmington Race Riot before or know something about what occurred in the 1890s in Wilmington. Have students share what they already know and note the number of students with prior knowledge, as this number will be relevant later in the lesson.

4. Explain to students that they are going to be learning about the Wilmington Race Riot, and the causes and effects of this tumultuous time period, via a Power Point presentation and discussion. Let students know that studying this period of history can be difficult due to the overt racism that was at play, as well as the unfair and violent treatment of African Americans by much of the white community. Let students know that you trust them to handle the information with maturity and encourage students to ask questions throughout the presentation and discussion. Provide students with the attached response sheet to fill out throughout the Power Point discussion.

5. It is important teachers use the PPT as a basis for discussion rather than lecture. Example discussion questions:
 - Slide 3:
 - Before we begin, take a few moments to examine this graph. What information does the graph provide?
 - What do you notice about the population of whites to blacks?
 - Based upon this population information, what inferences might we make about Wilmington's society during these years?
 - Slide 5:
 - Why do you think Wilmington was considered a symbol of "black hope?"
 - How do you think the roles of African Americans in Wilmington compared to other Southern towns?
 - Why are such accomplishments by African Americans (such as being shop owners and professionals) even more noteworthy during this particular time period? *(Review with students that Reconstruction after the Civil War had only come to a close a few years earlier, in 1877.)*
 - Slide 6:
 - Are the Republican and Democratic Parties of today the same as they were in the 1890s? (Discuss with students how today's Democrat and Republican parties are different and have different platforms than the 1890 parties.)
 - Based on the descriptions of these three political parties in the 1890s, do any of the parties have anything in common?
 - Let's assume an election was right around the corner - what might two of these three parties gain by fusing/merging into one party?
 - Which of these two parties would you think would be most likely to fuse and why?
 - Slide 7:
 - Given what you know thus far about the Democratic Party during the 1890s, how do you think its members reacted to such changes?
 - Slide 8:
 - Based on Daniel Schenck's comment that the 1898 campaign would be "the meanest, vilest, dirtiest campaign since 1876," what do you envision took place throughout 1898? What kind of tactics do you think the Democratic Party resulted to specifically?
 - Why do you think the Democratic Party was so passionate about winning the 1898 campaign?
 - Slide 9:
 - What is propaganda? Can you think of any recent examples of propaganda that you have encountered?
 - Do political campaigns today still utilize propaganda? In what ways?
 - Is propaganda always a negative thing? Explain.
 - Do you think the type of propaganda utilized by the Democrats during the 1898 election was a bad thing? Why so?
 - Why is it important to be educated regarding propaganda, and to know how to identify it?

- Let students know they are going to be examining various pieces of propaganda from the 1898 election period on Slides 10-12. Project each slide and have students examine it for a few silent moments, allowing

them to walk up to the image projected at the front of the room for a closer look if they choose. After silent reflection, discuss each piece of propaganda.

- Slide 10:
 - What do you see? What do you first notice about this document?
 - Ask a student volunteer to read the text.
 - What is the purpose of this document? Who do you think created it and why?
 - How do you think you would feel seeing this document if you were a white Republican during 1898? If you were an African American Republican? If you were a white Democrat?
 - How do you think this document affected the election and why?
 - Let students know that this is an actual handbill distributed by Democrats throughout Wilmington to intimidate the six leading white Republicans at the time. After Republican Postmaster William Chadbourn gave in to Democratic pressures the “6” was changed to a “5” in local newspapers.
 - Why do you think Chadbourn folded to the pressure?
- Slides 11 & 12:
 - What do you see? What do you notice first?
 - What text is being used in this political cartoon?
 - What symbols are being used?
 - What message is the artist trying to convey? What is his goal?
 - In what ways might the cartoon have influenced voters?
 - What about this cartoon is offensive to our modern day perspectives? How does our perspective compare to that of 1898 society?
- Slide 13:
 - How would you characterize the Red Shirts?
 - Are there other hate groups the Red Shirts remind you of? (i.e. KKK)
Why do you think such hate shows itself in groups of people in this way? (*Begin discussing the concept of mob mentality with students.*)
- Slide 14:
 - Why do you think fear is such a good motivator in situations like this?
 - What do you think certain members of the white community were so afraid of?
- Slide 15:
 - How would you characterize Alex Manly and why? What do you think of his decision to fight back with his pen? Do you think he knew what the consequences would be? What do you think you would have done?
- Slide 16:
 - What was Waddell’s goal in this speech?
 - If you were an African American living in 1898, how would this speech make you feel and why?
 - How might you respond if you were an African American Republican? A white Republican? A white Democrat? What might the consequences be of such responses?
 - Predict what is going to happen on Election Day. What makes you think this?
- Slide 17:
 - Why do you think so many Democrats turned out at the polls?
 - What do you think the consequences were for those who illegally stuffed ballots? (*There weren’t any consequences for them!*)
 - Do you think the peace will last? Why or why not?
- Slide 18:

Based on everything you have learned so far, how would you characterize Waddell?
- Slide 19:
 - Characterize the response of the Committee. Why do you think they responded in this way?
- Slides 20-21:
 - Who was there to stop this mob of 2,000 angry men? How do you imagine it would feel to be in Wilmington on this day if you were an African American or a white Republican?
 - Do you think the mob is going to stop here?

Create a Newscast from the Daily Record

6. At this point, pause on slide 22 and as a way to have students reflect on what they've learned thus far, tell students to imagine that they are a television reporter standing in front of the Wilmington Daily Record's office as the white mob is being photographed. Tell students to prepare a 3-minute newscast live from the scene, recapping what has happened. The newscast must include at least six facts from the discussion and must be realistic to the actual history. Students should write out their script and should also be prepared to deliver their news report to classmates at the start of the next class. (Students can complete this for homework.)
 - **Teacher Note:** Teachers should point out to students that this is simply a creative way for them to summarize what they have learned, and that in actuality there was no TV reporter there that day, since television had not been invented yet. Also, teachers should discuss what language is appropriate to use in their TV cast. While racial slurs would have been utilized in 1898, students should not make use of such language in their assignment.

Day 2

7. Start class by having a few student volunteers present their newscasts to class. Correct any misinformation and use the information students share as conversation starters. Encourage students to consider not just the facts, but also the emotions experienced in 1898 Wilmington. Also, if there are any differences between the stories or angles students take in their newscast, point this out as it will be relevant to the later "Propaganda & Spin" activity.
8. Continue with the PPT and discussion, picking up with Slide 23.
 - Slide 23:
 - What do you imagine the atmosphere was like in Wilmington on this day?
 - What protection would you have? If you were harmed by the white mob, what recourse do you think you would have?
 - Slide 25:
 - How did Waddell manage to overthrow the local government?
 - Did the black citizens who were unfairly fired have any recourse? Why?
 - Slide 26:
 - Of all the unjust treatment we have learned African Americans experienced, which do you think would have been most difficult to deal with and why?
 - Slide 27:
 - What trend do you notice that occurred in Wilmington's demographics?
 - What might this tell us regarding what was occurring in Wilmington at the time?
 - Slide 28:
 - Looking over this four-pronged plan, do you think the title of "Wilmington Race Riot" is appropriate? Meaning, given that the riot was only one part of a calculated campaign of white supremacy, what other title might better describe this period?
 - "For more than a century, most historians have obscured the triumph of white domination in 1898 by calling it a 'race riot,' though it was not the spontaneous outbreak of mob violence that the word 'riot' suggests...historian H. Leon Pranter calls it a 'massacre and coup.' What another scholar terms the 'genocidal massacre' in Wilmington was the climax of a carefully orchestrated campaign to end interracial cooperation and build a one-party state that would assure the power of North Carolina's business elite." (Tim Tyson)
 - Slide 29:
 - How did the events of 1898 affect the African American community in Wilmington? The Wilmington community at large?
 - What lingering effects do you think resulted?

- At the start of the lesson, I asked how many of you knew anything about the riot and most of you did not. Even though this is such a monumental aspect of our state's history, why do you think it is largely hidden/not discussed?

Optional: Propaganda and Spin

9. Optional: Tell students that you want to focus on the media's role in the 1898 events, which would have consisted of newspapers. Divide students into small groups and tell them that they are first going to do some practicing as a news reporter, specifically as groups of reporters representing the school newspaper. Write the following statement up front where all students can see it:

- As of next month, all snack machines are being removed from school premises.

Tell students that you want them to write a short blurb (paragraph) announcing this news in the school newspaper. However, they must write it from the perspective of a group that you assign to them. Hand out one of the following assignments to each group (group assignments can be repeated if you have a larger class):

- Group 1: School administrators who are tired of the snack machines getting knocked over and vandalized
- Group 2: Student health advocacy group called "Making Healthier Choices"
- Group 3: Student athletes, who raid the snack machines daily when starving after practice
- Group 4: 12th graders who can't leave campus for lunch and despise the cafeteria food
- Group 5: Cheerleaders who have been advocating for low calorie and fat-free snacks to be put in the vending machines
- Group 6: The Booster Club, who has relied on the proceeds from the vending machine to fund athletics (i.e. new uniforms, improved football field, etc.)

10. Give students 5-10 minutes to compile their news blurb then have each group share their blurb with class. Discuss:

- In what ways did our blurbs differ?
- Even though we were all responding to the same topic, why did our blurbs differ? (*they were told from people with differing perspectives and agendas*)
- In what ways does this happen in the media today?

11. Explain to students that when newsworthy events occur, those involved (be it politicians, citizens, etc.) often utilize "**spin**," which is a heavily biased portrayal in one's own favor of an event or situation. "Spin Doctors" provide their point of view or interpretation of an event in a way that is compatible with their own agenda in an effort to sway public opinion. While traditional public relations may also rely on creative presentation of the facts, "spin" often, though not always, implies disingenuous, deceptive and/or highly manipulative tactics. Politicians are often accused of spin by commentators and political opponents, when they produce a counter argument or position. Discuss:

- In what ways do you use spin in your own lives?
- How was spin and propaganda used to fuel the conflict of 1898? (*Review how Democrats used racist propaganda and spin to break up the Fusion Coalition; how Daniel Russell used the News and Observer to publish newspaper stories to spread fear and anger regarding black citizens; review Alex Waddell's "White Declaration of Independence"*)
- For any given event, is there a single truth about what happened or does it always depend on who is telling the story and how they tell it? Explain.

12. Project (or handout copies of) [Slide 30](#), which is an image of the Wilmington Morning Star and discuss with students:

- What do you see here?

- According to this article’s headlines, what happened in 1898 Wilmington?
- What is the goal of this article?
- Does this article utilize propaganda or spin? Explain.

Project (or handout copies of) Slide 31, containing an image of a New York Herald article and continue discussing:

- What do you see in this second image?
- How does this article compare and contrast with that of the Wilmington Morning Star’s?
- Why is there such a vast difference in these two articles?
- Which article do you think represents the “truth?” Why? In 1898, which article do you think citizens would have assumed was the “truth?” Why?

Remembering the Events of 1898 Today – Construct a Memorial

13. Hand out the attached excerpt from the News and Observer’s 2006 special feature on the Wilmington Race Riots. In small groups, instruct students to read the article then discuss and answer the questions provided. (If each group member is to write their responses down, they’ll need to do so on notebook paper.) Once students have discussed in small groups, come back together as a class so that students can share their thoughts as a whole.
14. Tell students that the a group called the 1898 Foundation was organized in 1996 with the following mission: to "tell the story" of 1898 and its legacy, "honor the memory" of those who were killed or suffered in 1898 (as well as those who have worked for racial progress since those times), "heal the wounds" by continuing to work for reconciliation and "foster the hope" by envisioning an inclusive society. To reach these goals, it was determined that an art memorial to the 1898 riot would be constructed.
15. Explain to students that as a culminating activity, they are going to create such a memorial. Teachers should determine whether to have students complete this as an individual, partner, or small group assignment, then project/explain the following:

You work for an art firm that is hoping to construct the memorial commissioned by the 1898 Foundation for the 1898 Wilmington Riot. It is your job to come up with an idea for the memorial then design a small version of it to present to the 1898 Foundation, in hopes that they will hire your firm based on your design. The memorial can be anything you choose, as long as it works towards the goals of:

- Telling the story of the 1898 events
- Honoring the memory of those who were killed or suffered
- Healing wounds and working towards reconciliation
- Fostering hope by envisioning an inclusive society

Your memorial can be designed on paper; in 3-D form using clay, wire, cardboard, or in any creative way you see fit. Your memorial can be literal or abstract, but must connect to the 1898 Wilmington Race Riot in the ways listed above.

Good luck with your design, and may the best art firm win!

16. Let students know when their memorial is due in class, as well as how they will be presenting it. It is recommended that teachers reserve an open space, such as the library, where students can set up their various works of art. Teachers can give students time to freely rotate among the memorials then hold a vote where the class assumes the role of the 1898 Foundation and picks which memorial receives the “bid.”

Culminating Activities

- In groups, have students research another urban race riot in U.S. history (i.e. the New York City riots during the Civil War, the "Red Summer of 1919," the hate-strikes of 1943, etc.) and present their findings in the form of a newspaper's front page. For a detailed lesson and rubric, go to:
http://www.inmotionaame.org/education/lesson.cfm?migration=9&id=9_000LP

Resources

- Wilmington Race Riot Commission: <http://www.ah.dcr.state.nc.us/1898-wrrc/>
- Representations of the Wilmington Massacre of 1898:
<http://www.mith.umd.edu/courses/amvirtual/wilmington/wilmington.html> (source link does not work)
- 1898 Memorial Closer to Reality: <http://www.starnewsonline.com/article/20060710/NEWS/607100371/-1/news28>
- "The Ghosts of 1898," by Tim Tyson; New and Observer: <http://www.newsobserver.com>

Name: _____

The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 – Power Point Response Sheet

1. Why was Wilmington, NC considered a symbol of “black hope” at the end of the 19th century?

2. Complete the following chart with information about the political parties at play in 1898 Wilmington:

Democratic Party	Populist Party	Republican Party
Fusion Coalition		

3. What tactics did white Democrats use to break the alliance of the black and white Fusion Coalition in efforts to win the 1898 campaign?

4. What role did the media and propaganda play in the 1898 Wilmington Race Riot?

5. How did Alex Manly’s editorial fuel the Democrats’ campaign of propaganda and white supremacy?

6. Characterize Alfred Waddell:

7. Who were the Red Shirts and what “scare tactics” did they use to affect the 1898 campaign?

8. What affect did Waddell’s “White Declaration of Independence” have?

9. Summarize the four-pronged plan that occurred in Wilmington, NC:

1 _____:

2 _____:

3 _____:

4 _____:

10. Summarize the aftermath of the events in Wilmington. Out of the various types of injustice the African American community experienced, what do you think would have been most difficult to deal with and why?

11. Why is it important to study this period of history today, even though it might be difficult to hear based on the racism, violence, and calculated cruelty that was at play?

The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 – Power Point Response Sheet
ANSWER KEY

1. Why was Wilmington, NC considered a symbol of “black hope” at the end of the 19th century?

Answers can include: It was a strong religious community that supported charitable organizations, and promoted educational improvements for African Americans; African Americans from a wide range of backgrounds were able to manage their own businesses and buy homes throughout the city; African American entrepreneurs owned barbershops, restaurants, tailor shops, and drug stores. The city boasted numerous black professionals such as attorneys, and African Americans held positions as firemen and policemen. In greater numbers than in many other North Carolina towns, Wilmington’s African Americans participated in politics and held municipal and political positions. The black male literacy rate was higher than that of whites.

2. Complete the following chart with information about the political parties at play in 1898 Wilmington:

Democratic Party	Republican Party	Populist Party
<i>Originally the party supporting slave holding; developed into a coalition of wealthy, working class, and rural white members; controlled the NC state and local governments from 1876-1894; coalition began to break up after 1880s/depression</i>	<i>Originally emerged as the anti-slavery party in the mid-1850s, though was not officially organized in NC until 1867; platform consisted of free enterprise, racial toleration, and political equality for African Americans</i>	<i>The “People’s Party”; founded by working class and rural whites (predominately farmers) who left the Democratic Party;</i>
Fusion Coalition		
<i>As the economic depression deepened, white Populists joined with Black Republicans forming the “Fusion Coalition” from 1894-1896; championed local self-government, free public education, and electoral reforms that would give black men the same voting rights as whites; won every NC statewide office in 1894 and 1896 elections; elected Daniel Russell to be governor</i>		

3. What tactics did white Democrats use to break the alliance of the black and white Fusion Coalition in efforts to win the 1898 campaign?

Wilmington Democrats determined that a campaign of racism would appeal to Wilmington citizens; causing doubt and fear in white residents with white supremacist propaganda would ultimately shatter the fragile alliance between whites and blacks in the Fusion Coalition; Intimidation of white Republicans and African Americans throughout the campaign was channeled through groups such as the White Government Union and Red Shirt brigades, both developed and engineered by Simmons

4. What role did the media and propaganda play in the 1898 riot?

Newspaper stories and public speeches of white supremacists were used to create fear in white citizens of blacks; white society was cautioned of “black beasts” who would harm white women and white society if not stopped; with the support of the racist editor of the News and Observer, Josephus Daniels, who continually supported and printed such propaganda, white citizens were convinced that black equality would mean the end of their society as they knew it; Students may also mention the political cartoons discussed as part of the PPT

5. How did Alex Manly’s editorial fuel the Democrats campaign of propaganda and white supremacy?

He was outraged by a speech that supported the cruel act of lynching (black men were often lynched when accused of attempting a relationship with or making any type of comments to white women). Manly pointed out that white women may choose to be with a black man. This gave the Democrats support for their propaganda, and they begin to spread more hate and violence regarding Wilmington blacks.

6. Characterize Alfred Waddell:

He was a former Confederate soldier; passionate speaker; racist, white supremacist; spread hate and propaganda in fiery speeches that were aimed at turning white citizens against blacks, thus giving Democratic Party more power;

7. Who were the Red Shirts and what “scare tactics” did they use to affect the 1898 campaign?
Group of Democratic Party members who disrupted African-American church services and Republican meetings; patrolled streets before the election and intimidated black citizens from voting in the 1898 election
8. What affect did Waddell’s “White Declaration of Independence” have?
Wilmington’s Fusionists remained in office after the 1898 election, since they had not been up for reelection in this year; Waddell and the Democrats wanted them gone however, so he issued the “White Declaration of Independence” calling for the disenfranchisement of black voters; the day after the declaration, he lead the march of 2000 whites to destroy the Record; Red Shirts rode into black communities on horseback spreading violence against blacks; during the chaos, a coup d’état was staged forcing the Fusionist mayor, aldermen, and police chief to resign; they were banished from the city and replaced by Democrats such as Waddell, who became mayor
9. Summarize the four-pronged plan that occurred in Wilmington, NC:
- *Steal the election. Under the banner of white supremacy, the Democratic Party used threats, intimidation, anti-black propaganda and stuffed ballot boxes to win the statewide elections on Nov. 8, 1898.*
 - *Riot. On Nov. 10, armed whites attacked blacks and their property.*
 - *State a coup. As the riot unfolded, white leaders forced the mayor, police chief and other local leaders to resign from their offices, placing themselves in charge.*
 - *Banish the opposition. After seizing power, whites removed opposition by banishing their most able and determined opponents, black and white.*
10. Summarize the aftermath of the events in Wilmington. Out of the various types of injustice the African American community experienced, what do you think would have been most difficult to deal with and why?
Answers will vary.
11. Why is it important to study this period of history today, even though it might be difficult to hear based on the racism, violence, and calculated cruelty that was at play?
Answers will vary.

Excerpt from “The Ghosts of 1898”, by Tim Tyson

Despite their importance, the events in Wilmington have remained largely a hidden chapter in our state’s history. It was only this year [2006] that North Carolina completed its official investigation of the violence. The report of the Wilmington Race Riot Commission concluded that the tragedy “marked a new epoch in the history of violent race relations in the United States.” It recommended payments to descendants of victims and advised media outlets...to tell the truth about 1898.

Even as we finally acknowledge the ghosts of 1898, long shadowed by ignorance and forgetfulness, some ask: Why dredge this up now, when we cannot change the past? But those who favor amnesia ignore how the past holds our future in its grip, especially when it remains unacknowledged. The new world walks forever in the footsteps of the old. The story of the Wilmington race riot abides at the core of North Carolina’s past.

And that story holds many lessons for us today. It reminds us that history does not just happen. It does not unfold naturally like the seasons or rise and fall like the tides. History is made by people, who bend and shape the present to create the future. The history of Wilmington teaches us that the ugly racial conflict that shaped North Carolina and the nation during much of the 20th century was not inevitable. So long as we remember that past, we might overcome its legacy.

...

When the violence ended, a war of memory persisted. Our politically correct public history, carved into marble on our university buildings and the statehouse lawn, exalts the men who overthrew an elected government in the name of white supremacy, including Charles B. Aycock and Josephus Daniels. No monument exists to the handful of visionaries who were able to imagine a better future, beyond the bounds of white supremacy. Nor do we remember those who gave their lives for simple justice. Instead, we mistake power for greatness and celebrate those responsible for our worst errors. The losers of 1898, though flawed themselves, have far more to teach us than the winners.

...

A new Fusion movement, one rooted in hope and generosity, and encompassing not only blacks and whites but new immigrants to the state, could still redeem the best dreams that have made us. We look to Wilmington in 1898, then, not to wring our hands in a fruitless nostalgia of pain, but to redeem a democratic purpose. And so we hold fast to what Charles Chesnutt, an African American from North Carolina and one of our great writers, called “the shining thread of hope,” which permitted him, over a century ago, to close his own story of the Wilmington catastrophe: “There’s time enough, but not to spare.”

*Tim Tyson, “The Ghosts of 1898”
Special Feature, News and Observer, November 17,
2006*

Name: _____

Discussion Questions for "The Ghosts of 1898"

1. Tyson states of the 1898 events in Wilmington that "despite its importance, the riot has remained a hidden chapter in our state's history." Why do you think this is?
2. Tyson recounts the question that some people ask, "Why dredge this up now, when we cannot change the past?" What answer does he provide for why it is important to study the past, even as difficult as it may be?
3. In your opinion, why is it important to be aware of the 1898 Wilmington events? What can we still learn from this history in today's world?
4. What message is Tyson trying to convey when he says that "history does not just happen?"
5. Tyson states "When the violence ended, a war of memory persisted." What is he referring to in his description of a "war of memory?"
6. Many monuments exist across our state (from the names of college dorms to statues in downtown areas) of people who may have made contributions, but also often made bad choices. In your opinion, what should happen to such monuments and why? (i.e. should they be torn down, should they be amended with additional information, should other monuments be added, etc.)
7. Why do you think Tyson notes that the "losers" of history are flawed also? What does he mean when he says they have far more to teach us?
8. Tyson mentions the Wilmington Race Riot Commission, which was formed in 2000 to develop a historical record of the event and to assess the economic impact of the riot on African Americans locally and across the region and state. Why do you think this Commission was finally formed over 100 years later?
9. The Commission's final report recommended that descendants of victims of the riot receive payments for the wrongs done to their ancestors (reparations.) Do you agree with this recommendation? Why or why not? What are other ways that those treated wrongly in 1898 can be honored today?
10. What does Tyson mean when he says that "We look to Wilmington in 1898, then, not to wring our hands in a fruitless nostalgia of pain, but to redeem a democratic purpose?"
11. When Tim Tyson calls for a new Fusion movement, what do you think he is encouraging? In what ways, in your everyday life, can you meet this ca