CORPORATE PARTICIPANTS

**Elaine L. Westbrooks**

*University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill – Vice Provost of University Libraries and University Librarian*

**William Sturkey**

*University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill – Assistant Professor of History*

**David Zucchino**

*Author*

................................................................................................................................................................................................................................

PRESENTATION

**Elaine L. Westbrooks**

Hello, I'm Elaine Westbrooks. I'm the Vice Provost for University Libraries and the tenth University Librarian at Carolina. I'd like to welcome you to “Well Read”, which is the University Libraries’ series that brings authors with Carolina connections to all of our friends, and we do this to have engaging and thought provoking conversations as a community, and some of you may have joined us in July when we welcomed our first guest, Freddie Kiger, who had a great presentation on Charles Kuralt, and today I'm pleased to welcome David Zucchino. David is an alumnus of Carolina and he's currently a contributing foreign correspondent for *The New York Times* reporting from Kabul, Afghanistan. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for reporting on Apartheid South Africa and is a four-time Pulitzer Prize finalist for reporting from Lebanon, Iraq, South Africa, and domestically he reported on Philadelphia. David has covered wars and civil conflicts in three dozen countries. He is the author of three books. He originally published in 1997 *Myth of the Welfare Queen.* In 2005 he published *Thunder Run: The Armored Strike to Capture Baghdad*, and then earlier this year, he published *Wilmington's Lie: The Murderous Coup of 1898 and the Rise of White Supremacy*, and we'll talk about this book a little bit later.

In addition, I'm pleased to welcome my friend and colleague William Sturkey. Professor William Sturkey teaches history at Carolina. He specializes in the history of American South with a focus on the histories of working-class racial minorities. He teaches courses on modern American history, Southern history, the civil rights movement, and the history of America in the 1960s. His first book, published in 2015, was entitled *To Write in the Light of Freedom*, which is a collection of essays, poems and newspapers produced by African American Freedom School students during the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964, and just last year on Harvard Press, William published his second book, *Hattiesburg: An American City in Black and White*, which is a biracial history of Southern Jim Crow. So, welcome William and David, we’re really excited to have you here. We look forward to the conversation we're going to have tonight.

For the audience, I just want to point out that on the right, bottom side of your screen, there's a chat box and you can submit your questions there and we promise there will be time at the end of the dialogue for William and David to address your questions. So, I'll turn it over to you, William.

**William Sturkey**

OK, thank you so much, Elaine, for having me, and thanks to UNC Libraries. Thanks a lot to David Zucchino for joining us here and, basically, we're going to have a short conversation and we will open it up to Q&A from the audience and people can ask questions and then I will direct those to David. But hi, David, how are you doing today?

**David Zucchino**

Doing great, William, thanks for moderating this. It's really good to be here.

**William Sturkey**

Oh, thank you so much, and thanks so much for the book. I really enjoyed it, and I can't wait to learn more about your process and what you think about this in our current moment. We've had some recent events involving characters from your books. We'll get into that, certainly, but before we get into a lot of the more detailed specifics of the book, could you maybe give us a brief but broader overview of what the story is about?

**David Zucchino**

Yes, it's about the coup of 1898. in Wilmington, North Carolina. I don't know how familiar people in the audience are, but essentially, there was a white supremacy movement in the summer and fall of 1898 that was designed to overthrow a multiracial government in Wilmington, North Carolina, which was a very unusual situation where you had African American men in positions of power in a government with whites, with Republican whites, a process known as fusion, and they had been in control of Wilmington for several years, which just enraged the white supremacists who, from the end of reconstruction on, had really dominated Wilmington, and then they had been replaced, and it was unbearable for them. So, in the spring of 1898, they launched what they called the white supremacy campaign, with the goal of eliminating the black man's right to vote and eliminating black men from public office, and a more narrow goal of overthrowing the multiracial government in Wilmington, and it was a midterm election year so the election got wrapped up with the white supremacy campaign and they essentially stole the election, first of all, by beating and intimidating black men throughout the spring, summer, and fall of 1898 and terrorizing them so that a lot of black men did not even go to the polls, and secondly, by stuffing, literally stuffing, ballot boxes with phony ballots, and that all culminated in what has been called a race riot, but what was actually a coup, a white supremacist coup in November of 1898, in which at least 60 black men were shot dead in the streets, and the white supremacists overthrew the multiracial government and installed themselves in position of power as mayor and city councilmen and police chief and so on. So, that's a basic summary of what happens in the book, which obviously goes into much greater detail.

**William Sturkey**

Yes, great, thank you, and I just want to highlight this naming issue that you mentioned briefly there. This event has been called all sorts of different things. It's called, as you said, a race riot or a massacre or racial unrest, and that name itself has been hotly contested. What do you think is the appropriate name for the events in Wilmington in 1898?

**David Zucchino**

I think coup really describes it better than anything. I mean, as I said, historically, the guardians of the white legacy of Willington has called it a race riot, clearly with the implication that black citizens rioted, and unfortunately, the whites then had to come and put down the riot and restore good government, which is completely false. I think coup really gets into the sense that this was premeditated, and this was planned. This coup didn't just happen. It was planned over a period of months. It was announced ahead of time, as a matter of fact, by the leaders of the coup which drew the national press into Wilmington during that summer and fall, and through the election. So, I think coup really describes it and also describes the ramifications. For decades, the coup really ushered in white supremacy as official state policy in North Carolina up until the 1960s, and it essentially prevented black citizens from voting in any significant numbers from 1898 and up until the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, and certainly kept black citizens out of elected office for 60 or 70 years. So, it was a seminal event and just an extremely important event, and the best way to describe it would be a coup, a long-lasting coup as a matter of fact.

**William Sturkey**

Yes. So, take us back. How did you first come across the Wilmington coup? Let's call it, as you said, [audio] in 1898. Tell us that story? **David Zucchino**

Well, I actually have to admit that I had never heard of it. I went to high school in Fayetteville and I went to college at UNC Chapel Hill, and not once did any professor ever mention this, or I never saw it in any of the history books. I did not learn about it until 1998, during the centennial, when I came across some newspaper stories talking about how Wilmington, 100 years later, was trying to deal with the long term effects of the coup and trying to bring black and white citizens together through a whole year long process, and so that was my introduction to what had happened, and the more I learned about it, just the more outraged I became that, first of all, something like this could happen in the United States of America. I mean, no one was ever punished for their involvement in the coup, nothing was ever done about it, and secondly, that somehow I could not know about this, and still to this day, a lot of Americans and even a lot of North Carolinians don't know about it. So, that really motivated me to want to try to tell this story. Now, I'm certainly not the first person to tell this story by any means. There was an excellent book out in 1984 called *We Have Taken A City* by an African American history professor, Leon Prather, which was an excellent book and a really important resource for me, but that's almost 40 years ago, so I thought I could give it another try, and try in my own small way to correct the historical record.

I mentioned I'm not the first to write this. There was also an African American historian in 1950, Helen Edmonds, with a really important piece of work. It was a thesis paper that she wrote at NC Central University, and she was the very first historian to expose this white supremacist myth, and to really lay out the true story of what happened in Wilmington, and that was in 1951, and her work was published as a book by UNC and it was just disparaged by the white leadership of Wilmington. They said that no black person could possibly write a coherent book, that it was based on a false facts – basically fake news – but it had a big impact in that it was actually the first work to really expose the myth. And then in 2006, there was a state, they called it the Riot Commission Report. They had spent, the commission spent, five years looking into every aspect of the coup and issued a report in 2006. So, there's a lot of stuff out there, but again, I just wanted to have my own small part in trying to correct the historical record along with these other works.

**William Sturkey**

OK, I just want to pick up on that. So, as you say, there have been some histories, but so many people, including yourself, didn't know about this. I teach at UNC Chapel Hill, and I teach a class every year that has students look at their hometowns and tell a history story about their hometown, and I've had kids from Wilmington, the last two springs in a row, and they both told me the same thing; that they never learned about this in the public schools in Wilmington. I just want to ask you, how do you think it's possible? I mean, that's clearly part of the story. It’s a cover up, especially, as you say, the national news was covering this thing at the time. So, how is it possible that 100 years later, a state that values its history, so many people don't know about this?

**David Zucchino**

Yes, it's really, really startling, and in fact, during their lifetimes, the leaders of the coup were quite proud of what they did, and they wrote about it. They gave speeches about it. They wrote memoirs and letters bragging about it so it was wide open for a time, and then their ancestors, their white ancestors, in Willington basically buried the story over the years and it barely appears in the state's history textbooks in the public schools, and when it does appear, it's a completely false narrative, and I quote in the back of the book from some of these just remarkable descriptions of what these white supremacists said happened and this ended up in public school books into the 1950s. I mean, there are people alive today who were taught this skewed version of history. I just think that the transfer of not only political power but of social power in Wilmington was so complete and the whites were in such control, they controlled the history and they controlled the narrative for all those years, and I really hate to say it, but even today in our state legislature, I think we have some white male legislators who probably aren't happy about this story coming about and certainly aren't happy about the monuments all being taken down, which is another part of this story that we can talk to a little bit. But again, like you, I just am flabbergasted that something this important could have been covered up so well and so completely.

**William Sturkey**

Let me push you one step further, what is exactly at stake here? What would change if everybody did actually know this history?

**David Zucchino**

I think people could realize what is possible when you have demonization of people of color like you had in 1898, when you have a news propaganda campaign, basically the Fox News of the day back in 1898, the white supremacists’ newspapers pushing this narrative of black men being rapists, they called them the black beast rapists; of black men being incompetent and not intelligent enough to vote or hold public office and that was just driven into the psyche of the population, of the white population, and I see that… and it's not obviously as blatantly racist today as it was then, but I see a repeat of that same sort of demonization of people, of minimalizing the importance of people ever since the election of Donald Trump with the rise of what some people call white nationalism, which I think is white racism. So, I think the more people know about this and other stories from our history, particularly shameful episodes like this, I mean, the more you realize the danger of scapegoating and demonizing people and how it can mushroom and how, if you pound a message of hate and resentment into people for enough time, they'll start to believe it and I see that happening today.

**William Sturkey**

OK, so let me take us back just a little bit. So, you set off, you learn about this in, you said, 1998, on the centennial, and you set off, and here we are 20 years later. Obviously, you're writing a lot of other things, because you're winning Pulitzer Prizes and such reporting from the Middle East, but tell us about the process of researching and writing this book, and why is it that it just came out now, and where did you go to find the sources? What was that all like?

**David Zucchino**

I actually wanted to write this back in 1998, because it was so timely back then, but I was posted overseas, and then from 2001 and 2003 I've been covering Iraq and Afghanistan almost steadily and just had no time, but finally, I wanted to write this book very badly, and I took a leave of absence three or four years ago, and then had the time to actually start researching the book, and this was a completely new process for me because my other two books were nonfiction but they were about events that I witnessed personally, or if there were parts of it that I didn't witness, I was able to go back and talk to and interview people who had witnessed it themselves, and obviously with a book of this nature, you can't interview anybody who was there, and I'm totally reliant on documents, and this is a new experience for me. So, I spent a lot of my time at Wilson Library. I'd say, two thirds of the research in the book came from Wilson Library, and the North Carolina Collection and the Southern Historical Collection are just fabulous. The depth and breadth of their resources is just amazing, and the staff is extremely knowledgeable and they basically took me by the hand and walked me through, and basically showed me how to do the research, because I'm not trained as an historian. They led me to so many great sources, and I also had these works I mentioned previously, which were full of footnotes and citations that I could follow through and then just follow the trail back. I mean, without the library and without these resources, obviously I could not have written this book, and it's a very time consuming process because sometimes you don't know what you're looking for, and you're flipping through all these documents, some which aren't relevant, but you have to check everyone looking for that one little nugget, and it's really rewarding when you do find that little piece of gold.

The other thing about Wilson Library, and I believe it's the Southern Historical Collection, they have some of the original documents where you have to go in and put on the gloves and go into separate room, and that was thrilling to actually touch some of these documents from 1898, which really had an impact on me and made it seem even more real.

**William Sturkey**

Great, and I'll just say relay, as a historian, I'll just make the pitch. I take students in the Wilson Library, if you want to support history, if you want to support good storytelling about Carolina, about the South, and about the United States of America, support UNC Libraries because that is where so much of that comes from. From Taylor Branch, to yourself and to myself, and future generations of historians will continue to use UNC Libraries and the Southern Historical Collection. It's really an incredible resource for all of us who study this region.

So, I want to get us back on the actual story itself. So, 1898, what is it about 1898? Can you set us there in Wilmington? In other places, some of this transfer of power might have happened a little bit earlier, or even right after the end of reconstruction in the 1870s. Why 1898 for this Wilmington coup?

**David Zucchino**

Well, one thing it was an election year and this fusionist party, this multiracial Government, hadn't been in power very long, and I think it took a while for the white rage to build up and the midterm election year, I think, made it a perfect timing for them to really play on the fears and resentments of white voters who were feeling threatened by the fact that African American men were not only voting, they were holding public office, and Wilmington was unique, I think, among Southern cities. First of all, at that time, I was surprised to find out Wilmington was the biggest city in North Carolina, which I didn't know. It was a major port, and in fact, Wilmington was the last port to fall during the Civil War, and once Wilmington fell in the early winter or late winter of 1865, the war was essentially over. For the last year or so of the war, I mean, Wilmington really kept the Confederate war effort alive, but once it fell, the war was over, but after the war, Wilmington really flourished. There was the naval stores trade in the forests around Wilmington, which brought a lot of jobs. There were tons of jobs at the port. It was a railroad terminus, so there were a lot of jobs there and that drew African Americans after the Civil War. There were so many jobs, there were enough jobs for whites and blacks, and there was a lot of tension, economic tension, between working class whites and working class blacks, but the jobs were so plentiful, the black population moved there, and in 1898 Wilmington was 56% black, and that, again, was a huge threat to the white supremacists. They realized if every black man who was eligible to vote voted, then the whites would be bit overwhelmed at the ballot box, which is why it was so important to deny black men the vote. So, I think all these forces coming together in 1898 just made for this perfect storm of this coup that, from the point of view of the white supremacists, could not have worked out more perfectly. I mean, from their point of view, everything went exactly right.

**William Sturkey**

Yes. So, tell us more about this fusion movement. So, working class whites and blacks – or men we should, say women did not have the right to vote. Working class white and black men were voting similarly, they had their own political movement?

**David Zucchino**

Yes, it was really unusual. The poor white farmers made up most of the populist party, and in the early 1890s, there was a terrible recession and crop prices failed, and that left a lot of these poor farmers in dire straits, and they were very, very angry and frustrated by the Democratic Party, which was the party of white supremacy at the time, felt they were too beholden to moneyed interests, like banks and railroads, and weren't addressing the important issues to these farmers, which was education for their kids, with crop prices, other bread and butter issues, and they formed this fusion movement with the Republican Party, which was the party of emancipation for African Americans and the party that favored votes for African Americans, and they came together with both white and black Republicans, and by fusing with the Republican Party, it meant that poor white farmers were having a political alliance with African Americans, which was pretty unusual, and you know more about this than I do, but I believe there were other fusion movements elsewhere in the South, but none probably quite as successful as what happened in Wilmington, and at the state legislature level. The state legislature I believe in 1894 was taken over by the fusionists after the white supremacist Democrats had controlled it since the… under the Redeemer movement since the end of 1877.

**William Sturkey**

OK, so there's this rape scare, this race scare generated up, it's largely coming through the press. Who are some of the major actors? Because a lot of these names are really well own across our state. Who are some of the major actors that you'd highlight in terms of being involved in generating the energy for the violence that had followed?

**David Zucchino**

Probably one of the most important characters was Josephus Daniels, who was the founding publisher of the *News and Observer* in Raleigh, and he was a member of the Democratic committee of the statewide office and he held Democratic Party meetings in his newspaper office. So, he wasn't really a newspaper man. He was a politician who happened to own a newspaper. He's the one who ran the propaganda campaign and ran all these scare stories about the black beast rapist and stories that claimed that black men were corrupt and incompetent in running government in Wilmington. The almost 25% of white voters at the time were illiterate, so for them, he hired a political cartoonist to draw these horrifically racist cartoons, which are included in the book, to drive home the themes of white supremacy to illiterate whites. So, he was a very major character.

Another one was Colonel Waddell, Alfred Moore Waddell, who was a has been at the time, he was in the 60s, had been a congressman and he had been a confederate officer, and he found a new lease on life by giving these racist speeches throughout the Cape Fear countryside, inciting whites to attack black men, and they did. He was a horrible rabble rouser. On the night before the election, he and about 1,000 whites met in a big political meeting, and he told him that if he'd found black… if they found black men out voting the next day, tell them to leave the polls. If they didn't leave the polls, shoot him dead in the streets. I mean, he actually told them to do that. He also said he wanted to have… wanted to fill the Cape Fear with carcasses, with black carcasses, as part of the coup.

Another important person was Charles Aycock, who was one of the leading speakers on the campaign trail in the white supremacy campaign. They actually had a speaker's bureau and their job was to spread this hatred and racism and propaganda through speeches, just speeches with hundreds of white supremacists showing up, backed by what were called red shirts, which was essentially the KKK and the red shirts were basically the terrorist militia of the white supremacy movement. They were wore red shirts, and they carried Winchester rifles, and they rode on horseback and their job during the summer and fall of 1898 was to ride out through the countryside and break into black homes at night and drag men out and beat them, and tell them they'd be killed if they voted. So, this was what was going on at the time.

Another character probably would have been the editor of the black backed newspaper the *Daily Record*. He was an amazing man, Alex Manly, who really stood up to the white supremacists in person and in print, and he wrote an editorial in August of 1898 that enraged the white citizenry and essentially said that black men, most of the black men, supposedly who are accused falsely of raping white women, were in fact their consensual lovers, and he also pointed out that white men for years had been raping black women with impunity, and of course, that just enraged the city and eventually he was forced out of town. There was a lynch. Lynch mobs were formed to try to kill him, and on the day of the coup, his newspaper was burned, but he was already out of town then.

So, those are some of the major characters, and you mentioned earlier the changing of the names. Charles Aycock’s name was just taken off a dormitory, what, two weeks ago? At UNC, Josephus Daniels’ name was taken off the Student Stores building. There was another character in the book, Julian Shakespeare Carr, who was basically one of the major funders of the white supremacy campaign, who was a leading white supremacist himself. His name was taken off a building, and the statue of Josephus Daniels, across from the *News and Observer* in downtown Raleigh, was taken down by his family in June.

**William Sturkey**

What does it mean to you? So, all of these men that you mentioned, these white men, they did a great number of things in the state. They contributed to different universities, the one where I work included. What does it mean to you, 100 plus years later, to take the names off of buildings and to say that we don't agree with what they did, and not only that, we recognize these other things that they did, but the most important thing that they did was they participated in this particular episode that turned the direction of the state in a different way, or we're going to remove the names from the buildings? What does it mean to you in the year 2020 for institutions like UNC Chapel Hill to do that?

**David Zucchino**

Yes, well, first of all, it's really insulting and appalling that those names could have been up for so long, and I think part of it, nobody really knew who these people were or why the buildings were named for that. I certainly didn't know when I was in school at Carolina. I had no idea who these people were. I didn't know why these buildings were named after them, and what it says to me is that the university wanted to honor white supremacy. I don't have any other way to interpret that. What else were they trying to do? And of course, these buildings were named during the height of the Jim Crow era with the second rise of the KKK, and I understand that now, why they were put up then, but I don't understand how they could stay up for so many years afterwards, right up to 2020, and I think part of it was this story just being buried, and people not really wanting to confront this ugly part of our history. But to me, the fact that they finally did it is extremely important because it gives the university a chance to say who these people really were and what they did, and they're responsible for some horrific things and responsible for things that are still affecting the country to this very day.

**William Sturkey**

Just real quick, if you don't mind, what do you say to the men of their times argument? A lot of people say, well, everybody was racist then, these were men of their times, we can't judge them by our contemporary standards.

**David Zucchino**

I think you can, because there were people in 1898, white people, who did try to stand up, who did try to say this was wrong. So, I think that's a really a phony argument, and just the tenets of white supremacy are so horrific, and if I might say unchristian, and almost all of these men profess to be devout Christians, and I don't know how they reconciled that with their Christian beliefs, but in any case, to me, it's just reprehensible.

**William Sturkey**

So, if we look at this from the point of view of African Americans in Wilmington on the ground, if you will, what are the immediate results of the violence in terms of exactly how many people were injured or killed? [Audio] happened with the black community in Wilmington immediately after the violence, this violent episode, in 1898.

**David Zucchino**

Yes, that this violence had an incredible impact on the African American community. In 1898, there was a thriving middle class, I mean, a really successful middle class. There were 60-some black professionals, doctors and lawyers and professors and funeral home operators. It was an extremely successful black city. As I mentioned, it was 56% black and immediately, within days and weeks of the coup, 2,100 African Americans fled the city. They just were terrified and in fear of their life. The black middle class was devastated. It didn't exist after that day. I mean, that day it just died. But for that professional class, there was a movement to banish – it was called the banishment campaign, to banish the leading intellectual and professional African Americans and they were all taken to the train station and put on trains, and told if they ever came back to Wilmington, they'd be shot on sight and not one of them ever came back. They also put in some of the white leaders who had cooperated with the blacks’ infusion, they put them on trains and banished them from the city. So, the overall effect of this on the black community was that black life in Wilmington was destroyed. In 1898, as I said, the population was 56% black. Today it's 18%, black. From people I've talked to in Wilmington today, there is a tiny black middle class, but nothing on the order of what it was in 1898, and as far as voting, in 1896, there were 126,000 black men registered to vote in North Carolina, and six years later, in 1902, that 126,000 was down to 6,000, and really, African Americans did not vote in any numbers, any appreciable numbers until after 1965. So, you can just see the incredible impact that this had on the city and on the state as well.

**William Sturkey**

Let me ask you one more question, and then let's go out to the Q&A from the audience. We've got some great questions here. But the thing that I can't get past is, what in the world was the state and the federal government doing when this was happening, especially because, as you say, reporters were there from Washington DC and New York saying, look, this is about to be an episode of racial violence? They knew it was coming, essentially. Why didn't the federal government step in or the state government to intervene here?

**David Zucchino**

That is a great question, and you're right. Everyone in the country knew about this. *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Chicago Tribune*, all the major papers of the day sent their white reporters down to cover this, months ahead of time. Everyone knew it was coming. In 1898, North Carolina had the only African American member of Congress, George Henry White, who was from a district that abutted Wilmington, and he went to President McKinley in Washington, warned him what was going to happen, told him exactly what… that there was going to be a massacre, there was going to be a coup. A contingent of African American pastors also went to McKinley and warned him. After the coup, both George Henry White and his contingent of pastors went back and said you have to do something, you have to send US Marshals, you have to send federal troops, you've got to prosecute these people and make an example of them. McKinley did absolutely nothing. The federal government did nothing.

As far as the state government, well, as a result of the stolen election of 1898, the state government was in the hands of the white supremacists, so obviously, they weren't going to do anything. So, no one was ever prosecuted, much less held to account, or jailed for their roles in the riot, and it was just appalling. McKinley was really surprising because he was an abolitionist. He had been a union officer. He had campaigned on helping African American men exercise their right to vote. So, it was a little surprising, but there were a lot of political factors that are too detailed to get into now, but essentially, it was the summer of the Spanish American War, where Southerners and Northerners had come together for the first time since the Civil War, and I think he didn't want to disrupt that. Plus, he needed the white supremacist folks throughout the South, and I think he did not want to risk antagonizing them, so he did absolutely nothing.

**William Sturkey**

Wow, a coup in America. So, I'm going to go ahead and come out to some of the questions here that we're seeing, and the first question I wanted to ask you is, or not I want to ask you, but from the audience is, what did you find most surprising or interesting in terms of your research?

**David Zucchino**

It was how open the white supremacists were, and the newspapers were, about what they intended to do and what was going to happen. They talked constantly about the need for violence and the need for white men to go out and arm themselves. There was a huge run on guns in Wilmington. The hardware stores, which were the places that sold guns back then, had to wire Richmond and Baltimore to send in new shipments of shotguns and pistols and ammunition because the whites bought them out, and at the same time, whites would not sell to African American men, so the black community was completely unarmed. But that really surprised me, that this was all out in the open. Plus, the intimidation of black voters was open in the papers. I mean, the headlines screamed do not let black people vote, go to the polls, intercept them, bring out your guns. It was all very wide open, and when the Northern newspapers sent their reporters down, they amazingly… I would have thought they would have interviewed African Americans and at least presented the other side of the issue. They did not. I couldn't find any. I couldn't find one interview in all those newspapers with an African American in Wilmington. They completely bought the white supremacists’ narrative and reported that a black riot was imminent, that blacks were criminals and they were incompetent, and the government had to go. So, that to me was just shocking.

**William Sturkey**

Yes. Here’s another question from the audience, and this is in light of what you said about Christianity, I think, but so, they were curious about the role of churches and clergy in Wilmington during this period of its history, either black or white, but what exactly were those voices, or were those voices absent or what was happening there with local church leaders in both communities?

**David Zucchino**

Well, amazingly, the white churches were really the heartbeat of white supremacy. The ministers gave just these blood curdling sermons about the need to go out and take back the city, to take it back for God-fearing white people. They cited biblical verses, which they said supported white supremacy, and basically told their parishioners to keep black people from voting, and to help in the legitimate transfer of power to basically God-fearing white men, which was the way things were supposed to be in their minds. The title of the book I mentioned by Professor Prather was *We Have Taken A City* and that was a quote from a sermon by a white minister the day after the… two days, the first Sunday after the coup, that was the title of his sermon, was we have taken a city.

Also, on the day of the coup, there were ministers, white ministers, in the streets with Winchesters as part of the mob of 1,500 to 2,000 white men, right in the middle of it were are all these ministers. So, again, you asked earlier what surprised me. That certainly shocked me that you could have ministers deeply involved in the white supremacy movement.

On the other side, in the African American churches, the pastors, if you can imagine, were terrified. I certainly would have been terrified that summer with what was happening with the beatings and the intimidation and they essentially counseled their congregations to try to lay low, try to get through it, everything was going to be OK. I mean, that was their message throughout, and the message, unfortunately after the coup, when they got permission from the white supremacists to deliver sermons the Sunday after the coup, again, they reassured everybody that everything was going to be OK, it was just a little blip, and we're going to get back to normal, but you really do have to be obedient, and that was the word they used in their sermons.

**William Sturkey**

Yes. Somebody asked, what kind of comparison can we make with the Tulsa massacre, which of course has come into the public light more and more in the last year or so? How does this compare in your view to what happened in Tulsa in 1921?

**David Zucchino**

Right. What's unique about Wilmington and all the other so-called, quote, race riots in our history, including Tulsa, was that Wilmington was premeditated. It was planned and it was announced ahead of time over a period of months. Tulsa, my understanding is that it was fairly spontaneous, like a lot of these other so-called race riots, and usually was triggered by either incidental or actual contact between a black man and a white woman. My understanding in Tulsa, it was in an elevator, a black man had supposedly touched or approached a white woman, and then the rumors spread that he had raped her, and I think racial tensions had been simmering, and they were resentments, great resentments in the white community of the success of that neighborhood, in, I think, it was Greenwood in Tulsa, that the African American commercial district was so successful. I think that was building anyway, but the spark was this alleged rape, and in other so-called race riots I've looked at, it was always an alleged rape or assault by a black man on a white woman, which was not the case in Wilmington at all. As I said, it was premeditated.

**William Sturkey**

OK. There's any question here about Alexander Manly, the African American newspaper editor, and your conversations with his descendants. I wanted to actually impose my own question on that as well. So, the first is, so Alex Alexander Manly, as you showed in the book, he was very outspoken. He had no qualms, really, before this incident about sharing his beliefs. Why do you think he didn't talk more about it after the fact? Because that clearly would have helped more of this story get out there from a different point of view, and then the question that came from the audience that I thought was really interesting, too, was, can you talk about your discussions with his descendants?

**David Zucchino**

Yes. I think first of all, I was really baffled by how quiet he was and how he just refused to talk about it, even with his family members, which really shocked me, and I think it just had such a devastating impact on him, and he did say he wanted to bury it, that he wanted to become a new person and not be Alex Manly anymore, because he was being hunted down. After the coup, he was hiding out in different cities on the East Coast. The white supremacists in Wilmington were saying openly in the newspapers they were looking for him because they wanted lynch him, so obviously he's terrified. He's in hiding. He did give some speeches later to black audiences where he talked about it a little bit, but he also said… he gave a couple of newspaper interviews as well, and he said he did not want to put people in Wilmington – his friends and family members who were still back there, he did not want to put them in danger by bringing this issue up, and by criticizing the white supremacists and telling what really happened. He was afraid that there would be a second massacre and his friends and family would be killed. So, that's my best guess as to why, for his whole life, he just kept so quiet about it.

The interview with Lewin Manly, Jr., his grandson, was by far the most meaningful interview I did for this book. He was just remarkable and he told the story about how growing up he didn't know anything about what had happened to his grandfather in Wilmington Alex Manly's wife, Lewin's grandmother, was still alive and he knew her as a child, and he asked her and he asked his great aunts, which was his Alex Manly’s wife's sisters, nobody would talk to him about it. His own father wouldn't talk to him about it, the son of Alex Manly. He didn't find out about it, again, until, like I did, 1898, and he didn't get the complete story until 2006 when the State Commission Report came out, and he was devastated and he was also extremely angry about what had happened, and how nobody knew about it, and it really had a big impact on his life. And when you read the book, you'll see I end the book with his interview and what he hopes happens as a result of this coming to light.

**William Sturkey**

And so, what is that?

**David Zucchino**

He said he's not a religious man, and he doesn't believe in forgiveness, but if there's a hell, he hopes they're burning in it, all of them. That was his quote.

**William Sturkey**

So, I want to pull together a couple of the questions here, and I think these are really interesting about going forward and teaching what happened here, especially in K-12 schools, not just in North Carolina, but even across the region and country. Do you have any sense of how you think this should fit into the K-12 public school curriculum, and then also in terms of Wilmington itself, what does reconciliation mean to you in the City of Wilmington? What does that look like in terms of their commemorative landscape in Wilmington of this event, and what do you think should happen going forward?

**David Zucchino**

Yes, I'll start with a second question first. My impression of what happened. In 1998, I think they made a lot of progress. They had descendants on both sides get up and talk with each other. A lot of the white descendants were directly involved in the commemorations openly and without resentment. There were descendants of Alex Manly who were directly involved, and I think they reached some sort of reconciliation. They put up a monument. It took some time, but there is a monument down there in the city. They took down the historical marker that had called it a race riot, and the new information that's at the memorial describes what really happened, and calls it a coup, and talks about the effect on African American voting and on civil rights, and on and on and on. I think it’s very good. But my recent… in giving book talks in Wilmington, I still think there's just a lot of strong feelings on both sides, and I don't think there has been complete reconciliation. I don't think there has been completely, with a lot of exceptions, on the white side of people acknowledging the privilege that was afforded them because of the actions of their ancestors, that they are in a privileged position, and not really acknowledging the devastation on the black community. From the African American community, I get, obviously, a lot of resentment that there has been no reconciliation and a lot of demand for reparations, which, on the white side, has caused a real backlash. So, I think that's where they are now despite the steps they made in 1998, and since I do think there are still some strong feelings that really need to be reconciled.

The first question, I'm sorry, the first part of that?

**William Sturkey**

Oh, I just asked you, what's your sense of how this should be taught in K-12 public schools, or even just your hope?

**David Zucchino**

Yes, I think it’s just such an example of the power of appealing to resentment and hatred and stereotypes, and scapegoating and demonizing people of color, which is what's happening today, and I think it's very relevant, and I think that's how it should be taught just as an example of how dangerous demagoguery is and the results, and how very quickly it can turn into violence and completely change the lives, not only of the people of the time, but of their descendants, and I think there is a way to teach that and to tie it to the climate of hate and resentment that we're dealing with today.

**William Sturkey**

We, obviously, in this state have made the news in recent years because of voting. We've made the news for many things in this state, sometimes good, sometimes bad, whatever, but one of these issues that keeps coming up is voting and African American voting. What's the connection here between this issue that’s sparked by black political power, and more recent events in North Carolina and how should we think about that going forward?

**David Zucchino**

Yes, you're exactly right. I mean, there is a straight line from 1898 to today. Here we have a legislature full of conservative white men, and I believe the Republican contingent in the General Assembly is 100% white, and the leaders obviously are white men and here 120 some years later, we are still having white politicians, white male politicians, in North Carolina working as hard as they can to deny black citizens the vote and there's no other example, no better example, than the so-called Voter ID Bill in which these white conservative politicians looked, did a study, helped by the Board of Elections, looking at patterns in voting and picked restrictions that would directly affect African Americans. For example, they got rid of early voting on Sundays, which is the so-called souls to the polls, which a lot of African Americans use to get a lot of people to the polls, they cut back on early voting, and most importantly, they required an ID to vote knowing that many African Americans… or they might not have cars, they might not have the kind of documentation that you would need, birth certificates and social security numbers and that kind of thing needed to vote. The federal appeals court threw that law out and said that the legislators targeted African Americans with surgical precision and pointed out that race, they were entirely motivated by race, and the Supreme Court has upheld that. Unfortunately, as you know, it went to a state referendum. The Voter ID Law passed again and struck down again. I mean, it just keeps going on and on, but the point is, you have white conservatives working as hard as they can to restrict access to the ballot, to the polling place, by African Americans.

Secondly, in 1898, the whites, they were in the minority in Wilmington. They took the two black wards and gerrymandered them and put all the blacks into two wards to dilute their voting power. Today, you have two congressional districts and 28 legislative districts in North Carolina drawn by white conservatives to dilute the black vote, and again, the federal courts have from those out and the Supreme Court has upheld that, but they're still trying, again, in new ways to try to restrict the black vote, and it just keeps going on and on.

**William Sturkey**

Somebody else, or a couple of people have asked this interesting question about memory and how this is taught, and somebody has suggested that we don't teach in this country that white people, essentially, could commit acts of terrorism, in that when we think of terrorism in this country, we don't think of Tulsa or Wilmington. How would you respond to that? Do you think there's any validity to that? How might that change the story of America that we're all taught coming up?

**David Zucchino**

Right. I think that's absolutely true. I mean, when we think of terrorism, we think of… or I think most people do think of international terrorism and car bombs and airplane hijackings, where, in fact, far more incidents in the last, what, 15 or 20 years of terrorism have been at the hands of white supremacists or white power groups, and still in this country today, though, we don't recognize that. You can just look at the issue of these cases we're seeing like George Floyd and many other cases where white police officers will target particularly young black males and make an assumption that they are dangerous, that they don't belong wherever they're finding, that they're in the wrong place, and that they are going to be violent and that very violent measures are needed to hold them down, but you never see that same attitude towards white men, in particular, or white women. You don't see… the case, where was it, in Colorado, where two African American women and their three kids were riding in the car and the police mistook their license plate for the license plate of a stolen motorcycle, grabbed them out of the car, threw them down on the ground, handcuffed them, put little kids down on the ground. I don't think that would happen with a white family. I'm getting off the point now, but I do think it is hard for a lot of Americans to comprehend white terrorism as opposed to Middle Eastern terrorism or violent acts by African Americans.

**William Sturkey**

OK, and somebody else wanted to know from the audience, how did you sustain yourself through so much research and continuing to work on this book that you said you were thinking about for so long, and honestly, it's an incredibly challenging topic emotionally to deal with, can you talk more about that?

**David Zucchino**

Yes, I was angry a lot. I mean, I felt a lot of rage, just the more I looked at how nakedly racist these people were, and how well-crafted their racism was, and how dedicated they were to suppressing an entire people. I did get angry and particularly in 2017 with Charlottesville, when you had the… I forget the name of the rally, but when we had these white people with torches at night shouting Jews will not replace this, I mean, that was 1898 all over again, and that same anger swelled up. So, yes, I was angry a lot when I was researching this book and the more I dug, the angrier I became, and it really made me want to tell the story, even though the story obviously has been told before, but maybe bring it to a new audience. I think people really, really need to know that Americans, some Americans, are capable of some pretty horrific things, and just because it happened in 1898 does not mean it can't happen today.

**William Sturkey**

OK, well, David, we're just about out of time, and I want to leave you with the last word, and I also want to point out, I think, we have a fair number of students in the audience today. So, if you'll please speak to all of us, but certainly consider them. What do you want to leave us with in terms of what happened in Wilmington in your experience researching and writing about this episode of American history?

**David Zucchino**

Well, I think I would just remind them of just how far reaching the impact of this was, and it affects our lives to this very day, and we've talked about voting and people holding public office, attempts to suppress black voting, but this event was really an inspiration to white supremacists across the South. Once the white supremacists took over the state legislature in North Carolina, they passed a law that stripped the vote from blacks, legally stripped the vote from blacks, it was called the Grandfather Clause, immediately four other states in the South did the same thing. Another example is in 1906, during a race-baiting election in Georgia, a statewide election, the white supremacists who end up stealing that election and intimidating black men, consulted with the leaders of the Wilmington riot on how to go about stealing an election and keeping black citizens from voting.

So, I would just leave you with the fact that this was many, many years ago, but the ramifications are still being felt today, which I think is why we really have to look at events like this, and many other events that don't get enough attention, to show you just how deep in our country racism runs and still runs today.

And I think now we'll take it back to Elaine.

**Elaine L. Westbrooks**

Great, thank you. Wow, I've just learned so much and I really appreciate both of you for joining us and being a part of the University Libraries “Well Read” series.

So, speaking of our series, we still have one more guest coming up and her name is Jill McCorkle, a very famous novelist and short story writer, and so on Wednesday, September 16, she'll be joining us, and just to give you a little bit of information. Five of her books have been on The New York Times Best Seller list. Her novel *Life After Life* was a New York Times Best Seller, and so on September 16, she will be joining us to talk about her new novel *Hieroglyphics*, which is a mesmerizing novel about the burden of secrets, and how they carry across generations.

So, on behalf of the University Libraries, I'd like to thank you for tuning in and I hope to see many of you back here on September 16. Thank you and have a great evening. Bye-Bye.