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Primary Source: Letter from an African American Citizen of Wilmington to the President [1]

This letter was written to President McKinley by a Black woman living in Wilmington. She described the fear and desperation of the Black community in Wilmington who had been terrorized by the white mob during the Wilmington Coup.

President McKinley was briefed about the situation in Wilmington, and he also met with Brooker T. Washington, a prominent Black leader, to discuss the violence. McKinley refused to take action, as he feared white southerners would have incited further conflict against Black southerners and he depended on white voter support. The North Carolina state government did not ask for federal troops or declare a state of emergency, despite the fact that the governor was a Republican who had been voted in to office with the support of Black North Carolinians.

McKinley nor Congress even publicly acknowledged the violence in Wilmington. Black Americans across the United States were disheartened by the lack of support from the federal government. McKinley's decision to ignore the violence reflected a shift in national politics towards white supremacy. While Republicans depended on black voter support, McKinley needed support from white southerners for his foreign policy and colonial projects in Cuba and the Philippines.

Please send releif *[sic]* as soon as possible.
or we perish.

Wilmington N.C. Nov 13, 1898
Wm McKinley: -- President of the United States of America,

Hon- Sir,

I a Negro woman of this City appeal to you from the depths of my heart, to do something in the Negro's behalf. The outside world only knows one side of the trouble here, there is no paper to tell the truth about the Negro here, or in this or any other Southern state. The Negro in this town had no arms, (except pistols perhaps in some instances) with which to defend themselves from the attack of lawless whites. On the 10th Thursday morning between eight and nine o clock, when our Negro men had gone to their places of work, the white men led by Col. A. M. Waddell, Jno. D. Bellamy, & S. H. Fishblate marched from the Light Infantry armory [2] on Market st. to Seventh down seventh to Love & Charity Hall (which was owned by a society of Negroes and where the Negro daily press was.) and set it afire & burnt it up And firing Guns Winchesters. They also had a Hotchkiss gun & two Colt rapid fire guns. We the negro expected nothing of the kind as they (the whites) had frightened them from the polls by saying they would be there with their shot guns. So the few that did vote did so quietly. And we thought after giving up to them and they carried the state it was settled. But they or Jno. D. Bellamy told them *[illegible words]* in addition to the guns they already had they could keep back federal interference. And he could have the Soldiers at Ft. Caswell to take up arms against the United States. After destroying the building they went over in Brooklyn another Negro settlement mostly, and began searching every one and if you did not submit, [you] would be shot down on the spot. They searched all the Negro Churches. And to day (Sunday) we dare not go to our places of worship. They found no guns or amunition in any of the places, for there was none. And to satisfy their Blood thirsty appetites would kill unoffending Negro men to or on their way from dinner. Some of our most worthy *[illegible]* Negro Men have been made to leave the City. Also some Whites, G. Z. French, Deputy Sheriff, Cheif of police, Jno. R. Melton, Dr. S. P. Wright, Mayor, and R. H. Bunting, united states commissioner. We don't know where Mr. Chadbourn the Post Master is, and two or three others white. I call on you the head of the American Nation to help these humble subjects. We are loyal we go when duty calls us. And are we to die like rats in a trap? With no place to seek redress [3] or to go with our Greiveances?

Can we call on any other Nation for help? Why do youforsake [4] the Negro? Who is not to blame for being here. This Grand and Noble Nation who flies to the help of suffering humanity of another Nation? And leave the Secessionists and born Rioters to slay us. Oh, that we had never seen the light of the world. When our parents belonged to them, why, the Negro was all right. Now, when they work and accumalate [sic] property they are all wrong. The Negroes that have been banished [5] are all property owners to considerable extent, had they been worthless negroes, we would not care.

Will you for God sake in your next message to Congress give us some releif [sic] If you send us all to Africa on we will be willing or a number of us will gladly go. Is this the land of the free and the home of the brave? How can the Negro Sing My Country tis of Thee? For Humanity's sake help us. For Christ sake do. We the Negro can do nothing but pray. There seems to be no help for us. No paper will tell the truth about the Negro. The Men of the 1st North Carolina were home on a furlough [6] and they took a high hand in thenefarious [7] work also. The Companies from every little town came in to kill the negro. There was not any Rioting Simply the strong slaying the weak. They speak of special police every white Man and boy from 12 years up had a gun or pistol, and the Negro had nothing, but his soul he could not say was his own. Oh, to see how we are Slaughtered, when our husbands go to work we do not look for their return. The Man who promises the Negro protection now as Mayor is the one who in his speech at the Opera house said the Cape Fear should be strewn with carcasses. Some papers I see, say it was right to eject the Negro editor That is all right but why should a whole city full of negroes suffer for Manly when he was hundred of miles away? And the paper had ceased publication. We were

glad it was so for our own safety. But they tried to slay us all. To day we are mourners in a strange land with no protection near. God help us. Do something to alleviate [8] our sorrows if you please. I cannot sign my name and live. But every word of this is true. The laws of our state is no good for the negro anyhow. Yours in much distress

Wilmington NC

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