

CHAPEL HILL, N.C.— UNC-Chapel Hill students were warned about the dangers of one-sided historical narratives and were encouraged to compare the Wilmington Massacre and current events in a speech given by an award-winning journalist and UNC-CH alumni on Monday.

“This really isn’t ancient history, the legacy lives on with us today,” said David Zucchini.

Zucchini urged students to continue the dialogue about North Carolina’s forgotten history.

In Zucchini’s new book, "Wilmington's Lie: The Murderous Coup of 1898 and the Rise of White Supremacy," he used contemporary newspaper accounts, diaries, letters and official communications to reveal the duality of the mischaracterized history.

On November 10, 1898, white supremacists overthrew the multiracial government in Wilmington, North Carolina. White supremacists burned down the black newspaper, as many as 60 people were murdered and many more injured.

The white supremacist-backed mob leaders replaced the local government that had been elected two days prior. They also banished all members of the prior government and threatened to kill them if they came back to Wilmington.

In the weeks after the coup, approximately 2100 black citizens left Wilmington. The 56% majority black population in 1898 decreased to only 18% today.

The Wilmington Massacre was the only coup d’état ever to take place on American soil and “it was the most successful and permanent violent overthrow of an elected government in American history,” said Zucchini.

However, the coup has been misrepresented, and only the white narrative has been told.

The white narrative was documented because the white supremacists announced the coup ahead of time, which drew the white media to cover the events. When the white media arrived in Wilmington, they were embedded with white gunmen and framed the issue to be a race war.

The white narrative not only dominated the 1898 media, but it also persists in the education system today.

“The current textbooks in North Carolina mention it, but do so briefly and in passing and they call it a race riot,” said Zucchini. He said textbooks fail to address the white supremacist campaign and its long-term impact.

Zucchini referenced one North Carolina textbook from 1949 that summarized the events of the coup. The textbook claimed that “a number of blacks were jailed for starting a riot and a new white administration took over Wilmington’s government,” said Zucchini.

Some teachers have approached Zucchini and said that the Wilmington Massacre is not in their curriculum, but they still teach it, in an attempt to tell this untold or mischaracterized history.

“I wrote this book to try to correct the historical narrative,” said Zucchini.

The true story of the Wilmington Massacre should be taught to North Carolina students.

“I have to admit that I went to high school and college in North Carolina and had never heard about this event,” said Zucchini, a 1973 journalism graduate from UNC-CH.

Zucchini went on to explain how he was unaware of this issue that had implications in his daily life.

“I found out when I was researching this book that it had basically been following me around my whole life,” said Zucchini.

UNC-CH has up to 30 buildings with [names tied to white supremacy](#).

Zucchini specifically referenced how he was “condemned” to Morrison dorm and went to football games in Kenan Stadium. Cameron Morrison, the dorm’s namesake, was one of the leading speakers during the white supremacy campaign in 1898 and William Rand Kenan Sr., the stadium’s namesake, was in charge of one of the gun crews that rode through the streets of Wilmington during the coup gunning down black citizens.

“This university that I love, all these buildings that I took classes in were named for white supremacists and the fact that I had no inkling of this is really pretty shameful,” said Zucchini.

The Wilmington Massacre’s story and the events surrounding this time that contributed to the political climate should be analyzed critically and parallels current events in the United States and on UNC-CH’s campus.

Zucchini compared the passing of the 1898 Grandfather Clause to North Carolina’s current voter ID laws and cited gerrymandering cases from both 1898 and today.

“I think it is fantastic that we can have a conversation as a university about areas that are uncomfortable at times if we are going to make North Carolina an even better state than it is today,” said Susan King, dean of the Hussman School of Journalism and Media.