

## Aycock Residence Hall

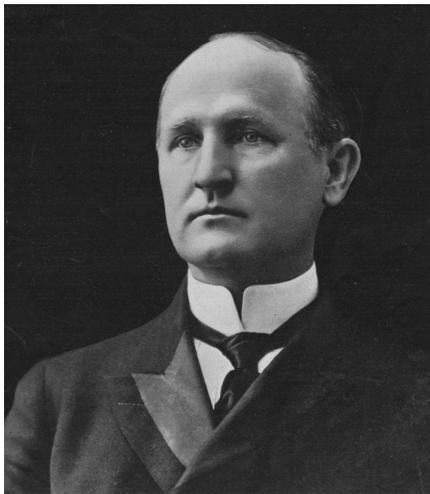
The Board of Trustees named this building in 1928 to honor Governor Charles Brantley Aycock, Class of 1880.<sup>1</sup>

### Aycock:

- Spearheaded the Democratic Party's white supremacy campaign of 1898
- Condoned the use of violence to terrorize Black voters and their white allies
- Campaigned for governor in 1900 on a platform of white supremacy and Black disenfranchisement
- Embraced "White supremacy and Its Perpetuation" as the guiding principle of his political career

*[The Negro] may eat rarely of the cooking of equality, but he will always find, when he does, that there is death in the pot. Let the negro learn once for all that there is unending separation of the races.*

– Charles B. Aycock, Address to the North Carolina Society of Baltimore, December 18, 1903.<sup>2</sup>



Charles B. Aycock  
North Carolina Collection, Wilson  
Library, University of North  
Carolina at Chapel Hill

Charles Brantley Aycock was born in 1859, the youngest of Benjamin and Serena Aycock's ten children. His parents owned a farm that sprawled across more than one thousand acres of fields and woodland in Wayne County. They were made prosperous by the labor of thirteen enslaved men, women, and children who cultivated that land. Benjamin was a fervid Confederate who served in the state senate through the end of the Civil War and into the early years of Reconstruction. In 1866, he supported passage of a Black Code that severely restricted the freedom of North Carolinians who were newly emancipated from slavery.<sup>3</sup>

Charles graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1880 and soon after established a legal practice in Goldsboro. He became an influential figure in state politics, and between 1893 and 1897 served by presidential

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<sup>1</sup> Minutes, June 11, 1928, oversize volume 13, Board of Trustees of the University of North Carolina Records, 1789-1932, #40001, University Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>2</sup> "Negro Problem Solved," *New York Times*, December 19, 1903.

<sup>3</sup> Oliver H. Orr Jr., *Charles Brantley Aycock* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 5, 11, 14-16.

appointment as U.S. attorney for the eastern district of North Carolina. In 1898, Aycock and UNC classmate Locke Craig – described in newspaper reports as "young apostles" of "white supremacy" – appeared together at a rally in Laurinburg, where they launched the Democratic Party's campaign to unseat a Fusion alliance of Black Republicans and white third-party Populists that had won control of the state legislature and the governor's office in the elections of 1894 and 1896.<sup>4</sup>

On the campaign trail, Aycock denounced "negro domination," complained of the "curse of negro jurymen" who sat in judgment of whites in the state's courts, and whipped up fear of Black men's alleged lust for white women. He and other party leaders encouraged loyal Democrats to organize "White Government" clubs in communities across the state and to muster squads of vigilantes known as Red Shirts for the purpose of terrorizing Black voters and their white allies. The worst violence occurred in Wilmington, where a white mob took up arms in the only municipal coup d'état in American history. They marauded through Black neighborhoods, killing wantonly along the way; burned the offices of Wilmington's Black newspaper; and forced the resignation of the city's Black and white Fusion board of aldermen.<sup>5</sup>



Red Shirts were the paramilitary arm of the state Democratic Party. Laurinburg, N.C., 1898.  
North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

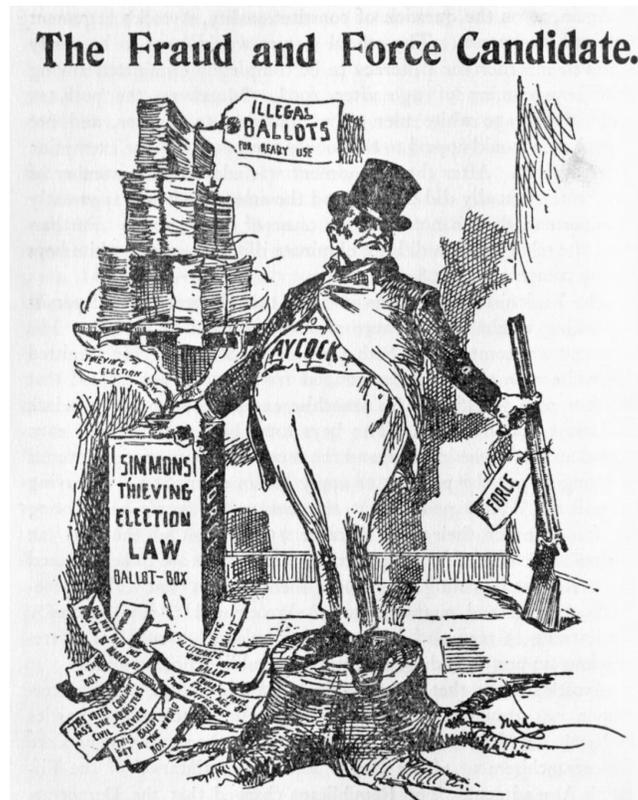
On Election Day, Democrats regained control of state government. They then moved to consolidate their hold on power and to lock Black North Carolinians into permanent subjugation. In the 1899 legislative session, they passed the state's first Jim Crow law, which

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<sup>4</sup> Orr, *Charles Brantley Aycock*, 33, 36-85, 111-14; R.D.W. Connor and Clarence H. Poe, eds., *Life and Speeches of Charles Brantley Aycock* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1912), xii, 70; "White Men to the Front," *Wilmington Messenger*, May 13, 1898.

<sup>5</sup> Orr, *Charles Brantley Aycock*, 114, 123-24, 131-32; H. Leon Prather, Sr., "The Red Shirt Movement in North Carolina, 1898-1900," *Journal of Negro History* 62 (April 1977): 174-84; LeRae Umfleet, *The 1898 Wilmington Race Riot Report*, 1898 Race Riot Commission, Research Branch, Office of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, May 31, 2006, <https://bit.ly/3dLwkRg>; David Zucchino, *Wilmington's Lie: The Murderous Coup of 1898 and the Rise of White Supremacy* (New York: Grove Atlantic, 2020). The red shirt was a symbol of the bloody sacrifice of Confederate soldiers who gave their lives to defend white rule and racial slavery.

required that train passengers be segregated by race, and drafted an amendment to the state constitution that, once approved by popular referendum in the next election, would impose literacy test designed to strip Black men of the right to vote. As the Democrats' gubernatorial nominee in 1900, Aycock made ratification of the amendment the centerpiece of his campaign.<sup>6</sup>



Aycock's opponents used his own words to label him the "Fraud and Force Candidate" in the 1900 gubernatorial election.  
*The Caucasian* (Clinton, N.C.), June 21, 1900.

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<sup>6</sup> Paul D. Escott, *Many Excellent People: Power and Privilege in North Carolina, 1850-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 259-60; Orr, *Charles Brantley Aycock*, 146-53, 157-160, 167-71. The amendment and the revised election law that subsequently put it into practice required that would-be voters wishing to register first demonstrate – "to the satisfaction" of local election officials – their ability to "read and write any section of the Constitution in the English language." That gave Democratic registrars wide latitude to exclude black men from the polls. The amendment also included a grandfather clause that exempted white men who sought to register before December 1, 1908 and were lineal descendants of male citizens who were entitled to vote before January 1, 1867. The latter date was significant because the Military Reconstruction Act of 1867 had given Black men a limited right to vote in the election of delegates to constitutional conventions in North Carolina and the other former Confederate states (except for Tennessee). Before that date, no Black men had been entitled to vote in North Carolina. The state legislature had stripped them of that right by constitutional amendment in 1835. The literacy test was thus designed to achieve the very thing the Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution expressly outlawed – voter exclusion based on race. See *Laws and Resolutions of the State of North Carolina, Adjourned Session 1900* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, and E.M. Uzzell, 1900), chap. 2; *Public Laws and Resolutions of the State of North Carolina, Passed by the General Assembly at Its Session of 1901* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, and E.M. Uzzell, 1901), chap. 89, sec. 12. The literacy test, though no longer enforced, remains in the state constitution; see Article VI, sec. 4, <http://bit.ly/3kxYO52>.

As in 1898, Red Shirts turned up at many of Aycock's rallies. More than one thousand white men, armed and on horseback, welcomed him to Hillsborough; in Clinton, a band of twelve hundred formed an honor guard that escorted him into town. The vigilantes reinforced Aycock's message: He and his party had given fair warning of their willingness – in Aycock's words – to "rule by force"; only a vote for white supremacy and Black disenfranchisement would restore peace and good order. For a majority of whites, Aycock's appeals to race hatred and threats of violence were persuasive. When ballots were counted, he and the constitutional amendment won by a margin of 59 to 41 percent. That victory marked the beginning of a new era of white rule that for more than half a century denied Black North Carolinians their fundamental rights as American citizens.<sup>7</sup>



Aycock in the U.S. Capitol's  
Statuary Hall  
Architect of the Capitol

After his death in 1912, state leaders memorialized Aycock as North Carolina's "Education Governor." They noted that he significantly increased school spending during his time in office, opposed lawmakers who tried to prohibit the use of white tax receipts for Black education, and launched a program to build hundreds of rural schoolhouses. For admirers, these accomplishments were reason enough to disregard the deadly price of white supremacy and to crown Aycock with what one devotee described as "a halo of justice and idealism." The Aycock Memorial Association erected a statue of the governor on the state capitol grounds in Raleigh in 1924. Eight years later, the state placed another likeness of Aycock in the U.S. Capitol's Statuary Hall, where it stands alongside the marble form of North Carolina's Confederate governor, Zebulon B. Vance.<sup>8</sup>

But there was more to the historical record, even on the narrow question of education. The Fusion lawmakers Aycock opposed in 1898 also valued North Carolina's public schools, and during their brief time in power, they funded instruction for Black and white children on an equal per capita basis. That contrasted with sharp disparities under Aycock's administration. By the end of his term in 1904, construction of new schoolhouses

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<sup>7</sup> Orr, *Charles Brantley Aycock*, 174-77; Prather, "Red Shirt Movement," 181-83; "Aycock at Snow Hill," *Morning Post* (Raleigh, N.C.), March 1, 1900; Connor and Poe, eds., *Life and Speeches*, 81, 218-19, 262-63; J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974), 193.

<sup>8</sup> Rupert B. Vance, "Aycock of North Carolina," *Southwest Review* 18 (April 1933), 288-306, quotation at 306; "Aycock Statue Unveiled Before Admiring Throng in State's Capital City," *Goldsboro News*, March 14, 1924; "Aycock Memorial Presented to State in Simple Ceremony," *News and Observer* (Raleigh, N.C.), March 14, 1924; "Keck to Design Aycock's Statue," *News and Observer* (Raleigh, N.C.), November 18, 1930; *Acceptance and Unveiling of the Statue of Charles Brantley Aycock* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1932).

for whites was outpacing that for Blacks eight-to-one and per capita spending on the education of Black children was half that for whites.<sup>9</sup>

These figures are a reminder that Charles Aycock was a principal architect of the regime of Jim Crow, which denied Black North Carolinians equal justice and the basic rights of citizenship for more than half a century. As Aycock assured delegates to the Democratic state convention in 1900, "White Supremacy and Its Perpetuation" was the guiding principle of his political life.<sup>10</sup>

Since 2014, Aycock's name has been removed from campus buildings at Duke University, East Carolina University, and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.<sup>11</sup>

UNC Commission on History, Race, and a Way Forward

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<sup>9</sup> *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction for the Scholastic Years 1894-95 and 1895-96* (Winston: M.I. and J.C. Stewart, 1897), 45-46; *A Decade of Educational Progress in North Carolina, 1901-1910* (Raleigh: Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1912), 12; *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina, Scholastic Years 1904-1905 and 1905-1906* (Raleigh: E.M. Uzzell and Co., 1907), part II: 97, 104, 131.

<sup>10</sup> "Address Accepting the Democratic Nomination for Governor," April 11, 1900, in Connor and Poe, eds., *Life and Speeches*, 224.

<sup>11</sup> "This Duke Dorm Is No Longer Named After a White Supremacist Former Governor," *Washington Post*, June 17, 2014; "ECU to Remove Gov. Charles B. Aycock's Name from Dorm," *News and Observer* (Raleigh, N.C.), February 20, 2015; "UNCG Drops Aycock's Name from Auditorium," *News and Record* (Greensboro, N.C.), February 18, 2016.