



Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report

Reporting the story:

Media portrayals and public opinion

Chapter 11

Given the level of confusion and lingering questions surrounding Nov. 3, 1979, as well as if and how justice was served afterward, the GTRC asked how and in what ways did the media address the issues, concerns, and conversations circulating in the community at the time of the shootings and during the court trials? For instance, was the event itself represented as a “shootout” as murder defendants claimed, or a “massacre” or “ambush” as the survivors claim? Were portrayals of the players in this drama – including CWP, Klan and Nazi members as well as involved police and government agencies – fair and impartial? What background reporting was done by media to help the city understand this event?

To answer these questions and to examine how local newspapers’ reporting affected the community’s understanding of what happened and why, the GTRC assessed the relationship between the media and the more broad-based concerns of political and social power. This research examined the news reporting in 617 articles from Greensboro’s daily and weekly newspapers from 1979 to 1985 surrounding Nov. 3, 1979. Central to this study were a number of guiding questions:

1. What can we learn about the media if we treat news stories as vital to the community understanding of Nov. 3, 1979, rather than peripheral to it?
2. How did the media explain Nov. 3, 1979, and its aftermath?
3. In what ways and to what ends did news coverage frame Nov. 3, 1979, to help the community understand the event, its context, causes, and consequences?

By clarifying the role of the media in 1979 and afterward, we hope to equip citizens and journalists in 2006 and beyond to work together more effectively to discuss critical community issues that contribute to reconciliation.

Role of media in community conflicts

It would be easy to blame to the media for the misunderstandings that circulated then and now among citizens. Indeed, the media do shape individual and community views and actions by putting forth the relevant facts as reporters and editors see them. Still, the media is just one factor among many that influence people. Several other factors operated alongside media representation to affect the community’s understanding of Nov. 3, 1979.

First, people’s prior knowledge, biases, and interpretive frameworks combine to make sense of the news in ways consistent with or extending previous understandings. As a result, news consumers do not always trust media reports that are inconsistent with previously held beliefs, even in the face of compelling evidence.

Second, media reports in Greensboro’s daily newspapers in 1979, The Greensboro Daily News and The Greensboro Record, contrasted sharply with what was communicated in the weekly Carolina Peacemaker that circulated in the African American community. The daily morning and evening newspapers focused on the unfortunate actions of the Klan/Nazis and the CWP, suggesting each side was culpable

for what happened. In contrast, the weekly newspaper focused on the actions of the Greensboro Police Department and most often organized articles around the suspicion of official wrongdoing.

Consider these daily newspaper headlines and the use of select words – leftists, hate, shootout – to describe the Nov. 3, 1979, participants and event:

- Leftists Plan War on Klan (Greensboro Record, 11/6/79)
- ‘They All Hate Each Other,’ Professor Says of Leftists (Greensboro Daily News, 11/6/79)
- Radical Left, Right Gain Supporters (Greensboro Daily News, 11/7/79)
- Melvin Sees a More United City After Shootout (Greensboro Record, 11/23/79)

With a different tone and approach, the Carolina Peacemaker, the African American newsweekly, featured headlines that used quite different words to describe what happened – massacre and murders:

- The Morningside Massacre (Carolina Peacemaker, 11/10/79)
- Cops Surround CWP Marchers (Carolina Peacemaker, 11/17/79)
- CORE Points to Officials for Murders (Carolina Peacemaker, 11/17/79)

These headlines are indicative of the predominant type of coverage in the newspapers in the immediate aftermath of the event.

Third, mistrust within the community surrounding the event in 1979 was rampant. From the very beginning, individuals and groups called for independent reviews of the event because they were not satisfied with internal police department records or media accounts. Various citizens’ groups in Greensboro and outside its geographic borders organized in support of the CWP members. Alternatively, in support of police action, one citizen organized a petition to demonstrate that citizens were satisfied with government policies and procedures that day. The Klan/Nazis and the CWP all claimed misrepresentation in the local newspaper reporting.¹ Many journalists expressed frustration with the city’s lack of cooperation.² Community members were confused by the sequence of events. Their bewilderment was compounded by the conflicting stories advanced by all involved.

Fourth, distinguishing among similar names in a complex matter spanning six years may have also caused confusion, especially in coverage of the three trials. Someone who was reading a news story might have easily confused the discussion of a bullet fired by Smith as being fired by victim (Sandi) Smith instead of the actual shooter (Jerry Paul) Smith. Many people may have mixed up District Attorney (Mike) Schlosser when the newspaper was reporting on defense counsel (Steve) Schlosser. Likewise, it could have been difficult to remember it was (Rick) Greeson who was on the prosecution team while (Hal) Greeson was on the defense team. WVO member (Nelson) Johnson could have been confused with federal prosecutor (Michael) Johnson or Patrol Officer (T.R.) Johnson. Similarly, federal criminal judge Flannery and Flannagan, a federal prosecutor, might have been hard to distinguish. There were two Klansmen named Matthews (Horace Greeley Matthews and defendant David Wayne Matthews) as well as a police photographer riding with Det. Cooper named J.T. Matthews.

Fifth, reader exhaustion no doubt became a factor. As new evidence was presented, readers may have tuned out the new or more nuanced information. According to Nov. 3, 1979, eyewitness and reporter Winston Cavin, “The sheer power of videos was overwhelming – to the general public and probably the journalists as well.”³ Multiple versions of sound analyses of the gun shots were presented with conflicting defense and prosecution witness testimony. The experimental and highly technical procedure left jurors and news consumers unsure of how to interpret evidence about which even experts could not agree. Even the FBI’s analyst changes his interpretation of the data multiple times (see Justice chapter).

Sixth, the larger social environment or community culture also impacts how we come to understand a news event. In the case of Nov. 3, 1979, many view the city overall as reliant on civility as a means to avoid overt conflict and to downplay racial and class undertones of the event.⁴

Despite these other factors, we speculate that the media played a significant role in community understanding of the event. That is because in the absence of direct experience or previous knowledge, citizens get information about major events from the mass media. This phenomenon, explained in media dependency theory, is not uncommon to most Americans who turn on the television or look for the newspaper in the wake of a crisis to learn from the media experts what is happening.⁵

Functionally, the media's role is to provide information. Reporters and editors make decisions daily about the number of articles to write on a given topic, the length of the story, and the depth of the coverage. These decisions yield information, but extend beyond the scope of just providing information. Reflecting on the role of the media nearly a century ago, Walter Lippman said, if reporting were just a recitation of obvious facts, then the job of a reporter would be reduced to that of a clerk.⁶ Indeed, the facts are often voluminous, complex and hardly obvious. Someone must choose which facts to present and how to make sense of those specific facts – that is, to weave a “story” out of them. To do so, media often rely upon interested parties to provide the substance for any given article.

The analysis of the news reports in Greensboro following Nov. 3, 1979, shows that citizens were left to make sense of the event through the eyes of lawyers, government officials, police representatives and to a lesser extent, the members of the CWP, Klan and Nazis. While these groups were clearly the interested parties involved in the action that day and after, there were others involved who were only rarely present in the daily media accounts, namely the residents of Morningside Homes where the rally was planned and the violence ensued. Community supporters were cited more often and discussed in articles in the weekly *Carolina Peacemaker* than either the daily *Greensboro Record* or *Greensboro Daily News*.

Greensboro's experience was not unique in this regard. Research demonstrates that when community conflicts erupt, the media most often reflects the views of local political and economic leaders. For example, a study of the 1967 riots in Winston-Salem concluded that the media depended so much on government and police reports to the exclusion of other community stakeholders that the news coverage reflected only a specific and narrow point of view of the local authorities.⁷ In other studies of regional planning efforts and the installation of electricity lines that presupposed opposing sides, the research revealed that the media attributed statements and perpetuated an understanding of the community conflict through the lens only of the political elite.⁸

Methodology: Greensboro media in 1979⁹

In Greensboro, two daily newspapers operated in 1979. The *Greensboro Daily News*, which was introduced to the city in 1909, was the morning paper with a circulation of 80,562 in 1979. The *Greensboro Daily Record*, a Greensboro staple since 1890, was published for delivery in the afternoons and claimed a circulation of 31,072 in 1979. By 1982, the papers merged into what is now known as the *Greensboro News & Record*. The community in 1979 was also home to the *Carolina Peacemaker* newsweekly serving the African American population. Four network-affiliated television stations covered the events of November 3, 1979: WFMY-TV (CBS); WXII-TV (NBC); WGHP-TV (ABC); and, WTVD-TV (ABC). Commercial and public broadcasting radio stations also covered the event and its aftermath.

The GTRC's media research chose to focus on newspaper coverage due to relatively easy access in electronic archives, the ease of duplication and review of the data in this analysis, and to provide what will be the most comprehensive printed record to date of newspaper coverage for the GTRC archives. In addition, we chose to examine newspapers instead of broadcast news because print media is typically able to report with more depth than what is generally possible on television or radio.

Reporters themselves were eyewitnesses to the shooting. Four television stations had reporters and cameras present, as well as a reporter and photographer for the Greensboro Daily News. Winston Cavin, a reporter for the Daily News, offered a compelling and thorough account of what took place. He relayed then, and recounted at the GTRC's second public hearing, that his position transformed from a detached journalist to an involved participant. His eyewitness accounts were relied upon not only for newspaper articles, but also for important trial testimony.

Other reporters played important roles in covering the story after the fact. Among them, Martha Woodall, a reporter for The Daily Record, made a significant contribution to understanding the story surrounding the events by uncovering the role of undercover BATF agent Bernard Butkovich and his infiltration of the Nazi Party. Woodall provided valuable in-depth reporting on the role and knowledge of federal law enforcement agents in the lead up to the shooting.

These reporters and others played pivotal roles in the coverage of Nov. 3, 1979, beyond their typical reporting duties. Journalists provided eyewitness accounts, revealed personal stakes in the aftermath, engaged in investigative reporting that uncovered other witnesses, and offered testimony that in the end benefited both the prosecution and defense teams in the three trials.

We chose a stratified sampling design for the daily newspapers to capture coverage in time periods of key events from Nov. 4, 1979, to the end of what would be the final and third, civil trial in 1985 (see Annex for details). We used this design to ensure that we would read and analyze articles about the most distinctive events surrounding Nov. 3, 1979, and its aftermath.

From these time periods, we selected articles based on compelling headlines and/or length of stories. The rationale for this method came from recognizing that the community's collective understanding of Nov. 3, 1979, would have been based primarily on media coverage and that people generally scan pages for the headlines that stand out and stories that occupy the greatest and/or most prominent space. The goal was to examine how the newspapers told the Nov. 3, 1979, story, so best efforts were made to read every article that appeared to be substantive in nature. The articles included in the analysis represent roughly 46 percent of the daily newspaper coverage devoted to Nov. 3, 1979, by the two daily Greensboro newspapers and 100 percent of the weekly newspaper coverage (with the exception of articles from 1981, which were unavailable for the Carolina Peacemaker).¹⁵

Daily newspaper analysis

Based on a close reading of the newspaper accounts in the Greensboro Daily News and The Daily Record, we find that the daily newspapers fulfilled their obligation to report on the most important facts of the event and the years-long legal struggle surrounding three trials over a period of nearly six years. In doing so, however, what stands out in the coverage is that a rhetoric of blame emerged. In other words, the paper began to focus its reporting on the responsibility of individual actors. Further, the protestors with the CWP were essentially caricatured in descriptive news accounts, particularly in the first six months following the event. Not a single article was ever published about Sandi Smith, the African American graduate and former student body president of Bennett College for Women. At the same time, the police were regularly praised (in editorials and in news accounts) for their diligent action

despite charges and some evidence that the police absence on Nov. 3, 1979, may have contributed to or even caused the ensuing violence. The focus of the media on the Klan/Nazi actions and CWP images early on deflected attention away from other actors in the drama such as the police informants.

Police informant and undercover processes, labor and worker rights, racial tensions, and social unrest were barely cited in the daily newspaper coverage and nearly eliminated from mention altogether as the reporting narrowed in on event details, subsequent protests (to which media coverage was limited to how to maintain law and order), and trial-specific details. While this information would be considered necessary for any good reporting, it was a minimum standard that had the affect of leaving out much of the discussion surrounding labor practices, race relations, First Amendment rights, national and international political contexts, and other large issues in which the event was embedded.

As the trials unfolded, the media coverage in the daily newspapers did include statements made by the protestors about police and government complicity leading up to Nov. 3, 1979. In fact, by 1984-1985, the largest number of stories focused on just this issue. However, with the prior caricature portrayals of the CWP members firmly established, it is perhaps not surprising that the subsequent coverage included the protestor's quotes but little else. Comments by the CWP members were most often presented without analysis or investigation, serving primarily to reinforce that portrayal of them as dogged conspiracy theorists. That portrayal of events bypassed opportunities to engage legitimate questions of police and government action in relation to racist violence.

For the readers who followed the coverage in the daily Greensboro newspapers regularly or sporadically from 1979 to 1985, it is likely that the story they understood best was one that revolved around who shot who first, and therefore was more guilty than the others. That was the story that was repeated over and over again, sometimes with more detail, but generally returning to that central theme. To the extent that deep, structural factors were involved in the commission of violence on Nov. 3, 1979, the daily newspaper readers were not given an array of views held by various stakeholders nor how those issues were connected to activities happening not only in Greensboro, but around the country.

Weekly African American newspaper analysis

The tragedy of Nov. 3, 1979, was first reported in the weekly paper a week after the event, on Nov. 10. From a reading of this newspaper's articles, readers learned about the activities surrounding Nov. 3, 1979, but also the parallel developments in racist violence around the country. As the Carolina Peacemaker continued its coverage, there was greater attention and a larger percentage of column inches devoted to the black community's reaction and response than what was provided in the daily newspapers. The community response featured in the newspaper was generally suspect of the police role in the events leading up to and following Nov. 3, 1979.

The assumption that underscored the articles was that the Klan/Nazis were responsible for the killings that day. This was not a point that needed any greater evidence than the eyewitness accounts and film footage that showed the shots being fired. Rather, it was stated simply and without particular malice, hate, or even retribution toward the Klan/Nazis. The reporting that flowed from the basic assumption of Klan/Nazi guilt was geared toward discussing or questioning what was not resolved. Namely, was the police and government action reasonable and adequate? It would be difficult for a reader of this newspaper to reach any other conclusion than that the CWP members, for all their faults – which were discussed in the newspaper – were not protected as they should have been by the police on Nov. 3, 1979. The newspaper continued to raise the question of FBI and other federal agency relationships with the Greensboro Police Department, even before the existence of informants and undercover agents was known.

Use of emotive labels

The newspapers used labels to describe the violence that occurred on Nov. 3, 1979, that in effect planted the seeds for blame or not with the CWP demonstrators, the Ku Klux Klan, and the Nazi Party. To illustrate how the newspapers told their respective stories, the emotive labels used by reporters (not quoted individuals) were counted and then grouped into three broad categories.¹⁶

- Equal Culpability by Two Groups (Klan/Nazi & CWP)—Shootout, confrontation, conflict, crossfire, clash, gun battle, fight;
- Blame Attributable Primarily to One Group, the KKK/Nazis—Massacre, ambush, attack, carnage, slaughter, slayings, murder, killings; and,
- No one group implicated/blame not the issue—Shootings, violence, incident, shooting deaths, nightmare, bloodshed.

It is important to point out that for all categories listed above, the police and/or local government were not considered possible targets for blame.

The daily newspapers routinely invoked language that found both “extremist” groups at fault for what happened on Nov. 3, 1979. To do so, they used labels in 45 percent of the stories that found both groups culpable for what happened. Labels such as shootout, confrontation, conflict, crossfire, clash, gun battle, and fight suggest that the CWP and the Klan/Nazis were ready, willing, and able to assault one another. This high percentage (45 percent) stands in sharp contrast to the use of these same labels by the Carolina Peacemaker, which amounted to only 8 percent (See Annex for data tables).

The Carolina Peacemaker’s negative perspective toward the KKK built upon a history of violence against blacks, which might lead us to believe that terms like massacre and murder used in early headlines would dominate their continued coverage. We found that not to be the case. Instead, the weekly newspaper adopted an approach that questioned police and government action in contributing yet another chapter to the history of tension between the African American and law enforcement communities. In doing so, the newsweekly used primarily neutral labels to describe Nov. 3, 1979. In the 146 stories examined, 55 percent of the time the words selected to describe the event were shootings, incident, violence, shooting deaths, tragedy, or rally/demonstration. To a lesser degree, amounting to 36 percent of the time, the newspaper did indeed use words such as murder, killings, slayings, and massacre.¹⁷

Comparison of Labels Used by Daily Newspapers and Weekly African American Newspaper

11/79-5/80	6-12/80	1981	1/82-4/83	5/83-4/84	4/84-12/85	TOTAL
Nov. 3rd Aftermath	1st Trial	1st Trial Aftermath	Grand Jury	2nd Trial	3rd Trial	

Equal Culpability:

Dailies	Shootout	26%	20%	15%	3%	9%	2%	16%
Weekly	<i>Shootout</i>	3%	0%	--%	0%	14%	0%	4%
Dailies	Confrontation	9%	24%	26%	7%	22%	58%	20%
Weekly	<i>Confrontation</i>	9%	5%	--%	0%	0%	0%	3%

KKK/Nazis Blamed:

Dailies	Massacre	2%	0%	7%	0%	0%	0%	0.9%
Weekly	<i>Massacre</i>	17%	11%	--%	11%	0%	17%	13%
Dailies	Murder	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.05%
Weekly	<i>Murder</i>	6%	6%	--%	4%	0%	35%	10%

No One Group Implicated:

Dailies	Shootings	31%	17%	33%	76%	44%	31%	36%
Weekly	<i>Shootings</i>	23%	39%	--%	37%	57%	30%	34%
Dailies	Incident	4%	8%	7%	0%	2%	0%	4%
Weekly	<i>Incident</i>	20%	22%	--%	4%	7%	0%	11%

In both the daily and the weekly newspapers, the word most often used was “shooting,” which cast blame on no one in particular in describing Nov. 3, 1979. Not only in total, but also across every time period in the Carolina Peacemaker, shooting was the word of choice. That wasn’t so for the daily newspaper, where shootout and confrontation together were used 36 percent of the time, nearly as much as shootings and incident at 40 percent or massacre and murder which were together used less than 2 percent of the time. In sharp contrast, the African American newsweekly only used shootout and confrontation in total 7 percent of the time whereas shooting and incident were used 45 percent of the time and massacre and murder were used 23 percent of the time.

Readers take cues from media reports about how to define a news story, how to name an event, and how to talk about it. For readers of the daily newspapers, Nov. 3, 1979, was as much of a shootout (between two extremist groups) as it was a shooting (an incident where people were killed by others). Blame was rarely attributed to the Klan/Nazis alone as murders or massacre. For readers of the weekly newspaper, Nov. 3, 1979, was read first and foremost as an event that was a shooting or incident. It was rarely considered a collision between two extremist groups. As a result of these two very different presentations, community members, divided to a large degree along racial lines, learned to understand and remember Nov. 3, 1979, differently.

Framing the story : “making sense” of the news

Framing refers to the ways in which the media selectively punctuates the information in a news story.¹⁸ A frame is an interpretive tool used to simplify the complexity of the news by focusing on a particular aspect of it. Like a picture frame that highlights what is inside its borders and draws attention away from what’s outside, a news frame emphasizes what reporters or editors conclude to be the most important features of a news event. Critical readers ask why a particular news frame is deemed most relevant and what stakeholder(s) influenced the media to choose that frame as the relevant one to interpret the story.

We deconstruct news frames to understand what is being made prominent in a story by way of what information is included, while also considering what is being positioned as secondary or irrelevant to the story by virtue of its absence. News framing involves decisions of what’s in and what’s out of a story, how often, and more. “Framing the news is a question of slant, structure, emphasis, selection, word choice, and context,” explain media analysts Joseph Cappella and Kathleen Hall Jamieson.¹⁹

Frames define terms and content of the story of the event, in short, what the story means. These interpretations are often reflected in ensuing community conversations. When news frames have an agenda-setting function that reflects the dominant expressions of community leaders or the elite understandings of the conflict, community members are led down a designated path of understanding.²⁰ News frames affect not only short-term communication of information, but also long term cultural understandings of society.

Despite the critical role of news framing in the community’s understanding of the news, news reporters and their editors, particularly for the daily papers, are by the nature of their jobs forced to make quick decisions daily. To make the required fast judgments, the media rely on their own common sense to ferret out the unimportant from the necessary facts. Naturally, news professionals rely on their best judgment to guide their decisions. This in-the-moment decision making tacitly encourages the media to return to the familiar and traditional understandings of culture and conflict, rather than moving toward creative, unconventional and critical thinking of events.²¹

There is wide scholarly agreement that information stripped from its context is a mystery at best and a misrepresentation at worst.²² A news event such as Nov. 3, 1979, or any other tragedy for that matter, remains unexplained and misunderstood as long as the range of observation, reporting and discussion fails to include the context in which the news occurred. For many in Greensboro, the news framing in 1979 and after was adequate. For others, the news coverage of the event in the daily newspapers, while replete with facts (some of which they contested), was absent the context and causes of the events leading up to that day.²³

In matters of labor, around which November 3, 1979, centered, the framing of union activity and protection of workers’ rights have historically been usurped by coverage of management practices and corporate values. Though there are relatively few studies examining the content of news coverage of labor-management concerns, one of the earliest was conducted in 1945. In that analysis, unions were typically portrayed as the “wrong” party in organizational conflicts.²⁴ Since then, other news analyses have shown that media typically report in ways that describe union workers according to negative stereotypes that point to laziness, chaotic behavior, disheveled appearance, and the unwillingness to bargain in good faith in what are regarded as senseless conflicts.²⁵

The fact is that labor’s views have not been widely covered either in terms of frequency or depth. When

coverage of strikes, protests, or other labor practices is included in the news, it is most often done in ways to isolate the event, thereby divorcing grievances from the larger social and economic issues to which many union leaders and activists speak.²⁶

For media critics, the debate centers on the pathways news reporters provide to readers to see and understand the news. “Episodic” frames often focus on specific events, acts, and players. Responsibility in these frames is often attributed to an individual. By contrast, “thematic” frames explore the social and historical conditions that give rise to the events with detailed discussions of root causes of dissatisfaction. Responsibility in thematically framed stories is more often attributable to systems, norms, and cultural practices.²⁷

THE EIGHT FRAMES OF NOV. 3, 1979

In media depictions of Nov. 3, 1979, we found eight different explanations, slants, or news frames were most commonly used for what happened and why. **These are the explanations commonly used by the news reporters. They are not our own interpretations.**

1. *Nov. 3, 1979, was an unfortunate event and a disruption to Greensboro’s civility*

This frame portrays Nov. 3 violence as a surprise. No one anticipated it; violence erupted spontaneously; violence was unpredicted. The focus is on the event, not the issues surrounding the event (CWP goals, GPD absence). Larger issues are ignored or trivialized. As media coverage turns to trials, specifics of trial process are emphasized – how many jurors selected, costs, subpoenas issued.

2. *Police acted responsibly and were the pride of the town*

This frame portrays the bold actions of police as not only perfectly acceptable, but helpful in curtailing the violence. Greensboro, as a city, was the victim of two extremist groups. Police were misinformed about the location of the march. This frame suggests two extremist groups were the culprits of the violence, and the police were the innocent bystanders. This frame also portrays the police as following prudent action in marches and educational events involving the CWP after the shootings.

3. *Police and government knew of and ignored violence and CWP protection*

In this frame, city and federal officials are portrayed as knowing violence would occur through informants and other intelligence efforts. Police saw the Klan/Nazi guns and tailed caravan all the way to the march. Claim is the event was a government assisted massacre. Government representation of CWP survivors failed to put forth the best case, leaving out key information that could implicate the government.

4. *The march and its aftermath were part of Greensboro’s civil rights history*

This frame describes the march, led by people described as educated and opposed to racism and the oppression of minorities. The march is seen as part of a wave of labor strikes and events sweeping the South in 1978-1979, in part as a response to the resurgence of Klan activity. Cone Mills in Greensboro

was attempting to bust union organizing efforts. “Death to the Klan” was a slogan used around the country. Organized labor in 1979 may have been at a tipping point where a shift in favor of worker’s and minorities was imminent. The police and the justice system failed to serve the unpopular CWP.

5. *Protestors’ legitimacy is denied*

In this frame, CWP protestors are portrayed as militant, deviant, disorganized, and dishonest. They are presented as misleading the police about the march starting point. They misled the community about their ulterior motives – to promote communism over and above workers’ rights. Protestors were crazy in that they wanted violence and martyrs to occur to bring attention to the cause. They baited the Klan. They put innocent children and community members in harm’s way. These were outsiders, leftists, extremists who advocated revolutionary overthrow of the government. They refused to cooperate with the justice system and were responsible for the unjust outcomes.

6. *Patriotism of the Ku Klux Klan/Nazis explains their reasonable actions*

This frame focused on the Klan and Nazis as patriotic people who wanted to defend the good name of their groups and the admirable mission of protecting the United States against communist take-over. Their character as church-going people is highlighted and their plans at most were to hurl eggs at the crowd of Communists. They represented the plight of the poor, white workers in America being increasingly displaced. Although they brought and shot guns, they did so only when provoked and in self-defense.

7. *Klan/Nazi legitimacy is denied*

This frame portrays the Klan and Nazis as hate-filled individuals involved in criminal activity to eradicate the world of blacks, Jews, and non-Christians. They were uneducated, stuck in a Civil War mentality where white supremacy was reinforced in the South. These were deviant individuals.

8. *Community pulse and response*

In this final frame, community members respond with collective concern and/or support for the response to Nov. 3, 1979. Other communities or groups outside Greensboro issue statements and initiate action in response to the aftermath of Nov. 3, 1979. National and local groups issued statements or were the subject of newspaper coverage.

Frame analysis

In some articles, one frame dominated the coverage to the near exclusion of any others and therefore the dominant frame only was noted in the analysis. In other articles, more than one frame was used within the news report, and thus multiple frames were coded for those articles. The following chart shows a comparison of the frames used by the daily and weekly newspapers.

Frames cast an agenda to be sure, but once again it is important to point out that individual news readers interpret stories according to their own predispositions, understandings, biases and prior knowledge. Social conditions, too, influence how people make sense of news at a given time.

What happened after November 3, 1979?

Comparison of Labels Used by Daily Newspapers and Weekly African American Newspaper

	1st Six Months		1981-1983		1983-1984	
	Nov. 3rd 1st Trial		Grand Jury		2nd Trial 3rd Trial	
Event & Aftermath Focus (no issue)	20%	13%	18%	18%	27%	14%
Police Acted Responsibly	11%	4%	4%	0%	8%	0%
Police/Gov't Knew of Potential Violence	6%	37%	37%	46%	28%	40%
Another Civil Rights Action for CWP	8%	6%	13%	14%	4%	21%
Protestors' Legitimacy Denied	29%	5%	11%	0%	14%	0%
Patriotic Klan/Nazi Act Reasonably	7%	0%	4%	0%	10%	0%
Klan/Nazi Legitimacy Denied	13%	17%	13%	4%	9%	3%
Community Pulse and Response	6%	26%	0%	18%	0%	15%

* Articles from the 1981 editions of the *Carolina Peacemaker* are missing from archives and unavailable for research.

Conclusion

The value of looking back at an event and analyzing its media parts is to pass judgment for the sake of changing or sustaining reporting practices. From our analysis, while many in the media deny its influence on public opinion, we suggest that the media played a crucial role in the community's understanding of Nov. 3, 1979, even as other factors influenced the community's response. The daily newspapers reported the facts. But they did not report all the facts. They could have attended to the aforementioned concerns of police, labor, and race by illuminating the central arguments offered in various reports, evidence provided by the protestors' legal representatives, and charges made by numerous civil rights organizations that linked Greensboro actions to larger, national matters. To do this, the media would have contextualized Nov. 3, 1979, within the labor movement that was taking place not only in North Carolina but throughout the South. As African Americans were moving from outside the mills to working inside them, the impulse for union organizing was growing to reflect a commitment to a multiracial workforce that arose out of the Southern civil rights movement.²⁸ This was the reporting strategy essentially adopted by the Carolina Peacemaker but that newsweekly arguably did not reach as many readers, and certainly not the white, Anglo-Saxon community that held the reins of power in Greensboro in 1979.

To discuss Nov. 3, 1979, within the movement of resistance to racist action and violence to which it was connected would have necessitated a discussion of the relationship between law enforcement policies and practices with Ku Klux Klan activity and membership. While the Klan's membership figures in 1979 were nowhere near its peak, its influence in North Carolina began a resurgence in 1975.²⁹ Residents in the South at the time were all too familiar with the nearly collaborative work carried out in the recent past by local law enforcement and rogue Klan members.³⁰

To contextualize Nov. 3, 1979, fully would have meant addressing more significantly the role of government agencies in the racist violence that day. A question never fully engaged by the print media was what knowledge local law enforcement had of the violence, and if and how law enforcement officials looked the other way or worse, incited the violence through their informants who provoked and encouraged illegal activity by the Klan and Nazis.³¹

Finally, the news media did not engage the communist rhetoric espoused by the protestors and its implication on our democratic systems and way of life. The daily and weekly media failed to enter any meaningful conversation about the possibilities or threats of communism being espoused prior to and following Nov. 3, 1979.

As we have shown elsewhere in this report, what happened in Greensboro in many ways was not unique. Racial and labor strife were rampant throughout the South. Many law enforcement officers and political leaders often shared the belief that community stability would be maintained by adhering to traditional norms.³² However, Greensboro had a unique opportunity to engage with critical social and economic concerns as a result of Nov. 3, 1979. The media had the floor to question the assumptions of race and class privilege that informed the prevailing cultural and ideological practices. To the degree that the media failed to delve into these issues, there was a missed opportunity to discuss, inform the community, and engage the questions that lead people to talk and learn from a momentous event.

As civil rights historian Timothy Tyson told the GTRC, refusing to acknowledge painful chapters in our histories "is like hiding the empty pie plate and wondering why you got fat." Greensboro proceeded without pause, without self reflection, laying blame for the tragedy outside itself. The media did not make this so, but to the extent that it did not press the issues by using its resources to highlight the underlying currents and struggles, it too, missed the opportunity to prompt the kind of substantive changes that could bring about a stronger, healthier city.

In 2006, Greensboro has additional print media voices. Greensboro's News & Record and Carolina Peacemaker are currently joined by two other weekly newspapers, Yes! Weekly and the Rhinoceros Times. Blogs, web-based commentaries, have been initiated by journalists at the various newspapers as well as by city officials and citizen activists. Taken together, a lively discussion has ensued since the naming of the GTRC. This is a healthy development that brings more voices from the community into conversation about community issues to provide a balance to the reliance of journalists on official sources for their reporting.

As newspapers change to meet the demands of a more discriminating society, they are challenged with adapting to reader preferences in ways perhaps not so evident in 1979. In commenting on the future of newspapers, Carl Sessions Stepp noted that newspapers “must unhesitatingly help the audience with connection and context” in coping with the data that readers encounter.³³ Newspapers today face the same challenge they had in 1979 – to serve as a clearinghouse of information about information.

Beyond “reporting the facts,” newspapers will serve the broader interests of the community by positioning the content within necessary contexts, by providing relevant background information, and by pointing readers to other sources for additional information. Investigative duties remain critical, maybe more so in the 21st century where citizens are bombarded by information that must be analyzed for accuracy and relevance.

Winston Cavin, speaking at the second public hearing, responded to what he has seen in the evolution of news reporting on Nov. 3, 1979.

I think the coverage has changed over the years. In the beginning, there were some voices in the media and elsewhere blaming the CWP. I think that has changed ... Over time, people look at events in a different light. Reporters who initially looked for someone to blame have taken a longer view.³⁴

If Cavin is right, the results of this report can be understood not as an indictment against the daily news media in 1979, or as perpetuating the rhetoric of blame, this time targeting journalists. Instead, this report will serve the community interests when it is read as recognizing that the media can do better in its reporting practices than what was demonstrated in 1979. The media does influence the community, but the community pulse affects the media as well.

As a community, we are still working on understanding what happened on Nov. 3, 1979, and reconciling our many views of why it happened and what it means. The media today can play a vital role. In doing so the media can fulfill its civic promise to connect readers, arouse their interest, and detail the rich spectrum of evidence worthy of extended discussion and consideration.

Findings:

We did not find that the daily papers predominantly used “loaded” words like “shootout,” “ambush” or “massacre” to describe Nov 3. Rather, neutral terms like “shootings” were the most common descriptors.³⁵

Newspapers fulfilled their duty to report on the basic salient facts of the event but overall the dailies failed to provide context of police involvement or why the conflict happened in Greensboro. Rather, the daily coverage tended to focus blame on the two “extremist” sides of the CWP and Klan/Nazis.

The weekly Carolina Peacemaker provided more in depth contextual coverage.

■ Notes

- ¹ Greensboro Daily News, November 17, 1979. See also defense motions to change venue of state murder trial due to “biased” news coverage.
- ² Greensboro Daily News, January 25, 1980.
- ³ W. Cavin (2005, August 26). Testimony to the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission Public Hearing.
- ⁴ Chafe, W. H. (1980). *Civilities and civil rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the black struggle for freedom*. New York: Oxford.
- ⁵ Media dependency theory as explained by Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur (1976) suggests that the media is an important factor in creating and reinforcing images that community members receive.
- ⁶ Lippman, W. (1965). *Public opinion*. New York: Free Press. (Originally published 1922).
- ⁷ Paletz, D.L. & Dunn, R. (1969). Press coverage of civil disorders: A case study of Winston-Salem, 1967. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 33, 328-345.
- ⁸ Tichenor, P.J., Donahue, G.A. & Olien, C.N. (1999). Community conflict and citizen knowledge. In M.S. Mander (Ed.), *Framing friction: Media and social conflict*, pp. 29-57. Urbana, IL: University of Chicago.
- ⁹ See Media Annex for more details on methodology.
- ¹⁰ Reporter Laura Blumenthal and cameraman David Dalton
- ¹¹ Reporter Charles Travis and cameraman George Vaughn
- ¹² Reporter Pamela Hill and cameraman Jim Waters
- ¹³ Reporter Matthew Sinclair and cameraman Ed Boyd.
- ¹⁴ Reporter Winston Cavin and photographer Don Davis
- ¹⁵ A total of 617 newspaper artifacts were identified and coded: 471 from the *Greensboro Daily News* and *The Daily Record* and 146 from the *Carolina Peacemaker*. Most were news articles, but approximately a dozen editorials and/or letters to the editor were included in the analysis.
- ¹⁶ This report recognizes that quotes that marked Nov. 3, 1979 according to the spokesperson’s views also impacted the community’s understanding of that event. However, with our focus on media representation, the choice was made to make relevant here only the media’s voice.
- ¹⁷ See Table 1 in annex.
- ¹⁸ Noakes, J.A. & Johnston, H. (2005). Frames of protest: A road map to a perspective. In J. A. Noakes & H. Johnston (Eds.) *Frames of protest: Social movements and the framing perspective*, pp. 1-29. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- ¹⁹ See p. 57 in Cappella, J.N. & Jamieson, K.H. (1997). *Spiral of cynicism: The press and the public good*. New York: Oxford.
- ²⁰ Noakes, J.A. (2005). Official frames in social movement theory: The FBI, HUAC, and the communist threat in Hollywood. In J. A. Noakes & H. Johnston (Eds.) *Frames of protest: Social movements and the framing perspective*, pp. 89-111. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- ²¹ Martin, C.R. (2005). *Framed! Labor and the corporate media*. Ithaca, NY: ILR.
- ²² Watzlawick, P., Bavelas, J.B. & Jackson, D.D. (1969). *Pragmatics of human communication: A study of interactional patterns, pathologies, and paradoxes*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- ²³ Waller, S. (2005, February). *A city of two tales: The Greensboro massacre of November 3, 1979, in fact, context and meaning*. A report presented to the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
- ²⁴ Sussman, L. (1945). Labor in the radio news: An analysis of content. *Journalism Quarterly*, 201-214.
- ²⁵ See Parenti, M. (1993). *Inventing reality: The politics of mass media, 2nd ed.* New York: St. Martins and Puette, W.J. (1992). *Through jaundiced eyes: How the media view organized labor*. Ithaca, NY: ILR.
- ²⁶ Carreiro, J.L. (2005). Newspaper coverage of the U.S. labor movement: The case of anti-union firings. *Labor Studies Journal*, 30 (1), 1-20.
- ²⁷ Noakes, J.A. & Johnston, H. (2005). Frames of protest: A road map to a perspective. In J. A. Noakes & H. Johnston (Eds.) *Frames of protest: Social movements and the framing perspective*, pp. 1-29. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- ²⁸ Si Kahn, Statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission* public hearing. (15 July 2005)
- ²⁹ Jeff Woods, Statement to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission* public hearing. (15 July 2005)
- ³⁰ See “North Carolina Resurgence of the Klan” chapter.
- ³¹ Lewis Pitts. “Investigate police’s role.” *Greensboro News & Record*. (2005, May 29).
- ³² Woods, J. (2005, July 16). Presentation to the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission at the 1st

public hearing. Greensboro, NC.

³³ Stepp, C.S. (1993). How to save America's newspapers. *American Journalism Review*, 15, 3, 18-23.

³⁴ Winston Cavin public hearing statement.

³⁵ There was a significant difference, however, between the daily and weekly newspapers. In the daily newspapers, shootout and confrontation together were used 36 percent of the time, nearly as much as shootings and incident at 40 percent or massacre and murder which were together used less than 2 percent of the time. In sharp contrast, the African American newsweekly only used shootout and confrontation in total 7 percent of the time whereas shooting and incident were used 45 percent of the time and massacre and murder were used 23 percent of the time.