

# The Greensboro Massacre: A Challenge to Accepted Historical Interpretations

Jason Kops

*East Carolina University*

*Faculty Mentor: Wade Dudley*

*East Carolina University*

## ABSTRACT

*The Greensboro Massacre, a tragic event in the historical narrative of North Carolina, remains controversial in regards to the root causes and apportionment of culpability. By removing the multiple levels of rhetoric and bias pertaining to the highly charged social groups involved and by analyzing a broader depth of historical documents, the Greensboro Massacre can be examined more objectively. The evidence will demonstrate that the day of the rally did not go as planned according to any participant, and that the communist victims possibly contributed to their own demise.*

The killings in Greensboro, North Carolina on November 3, 1979 are mired in controversy arising from the political and emotional atmosphere of the time. Even the common moniker, the Greensboro Massacre, projects bias through its implications of the innocence of those departed and the inhumanity of the aggressors. The level of polarization relating to those groups involved thickens the shroud of bias, attenuating objectivity.

Despite a plethora of documentation on the Communist Workers Party's now infamous "Death to the Klan" march, common misconceptions of this event continue to proliferate. Social bias in North Carolina has tinted the lens of perception, allowing for the easy reception of whichever opinions tend to be loudest. Unfortunately, the most extreme participants voice their arguments at the highest volume. There exist numerous allegations that are not only unsubstantiated but also contradicted by the evidence. Allegedly, Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and affiliated Nazi sympathizers

executed a calculated assault on civil rights protestors. Allegedly, both local and federal law enforcement agencies participated in the assault and cover-up. Allegedly, defenseless protesters died fighting for the rights of minorities.

Members of the Communist Workers Party (CWP), the primary proponents and organizers of the "Death to the Klan" march, largely bear responsibility for the tragedy. Negligent of their own safety and without regard to the safety of others, they incited violence by aggressively provoking the white supremacists. Moreover, members of the CWP demonstrated a pattern of hijacking social causes for the advancement of their own communist agenda. The communists promoted revolution through the exploitation of the victims of social pathologies that they claimed to champion.

Surviving members of the Communist Workers Party have vociferously described the killings as a concerted political assassination by trained paramilitarists. This hyperbolic assertion is undermined by the broader historical evidence that will

be examined. The documentation will support the conclusion that the Klansmen did not conspire to commit murder, and, that while the white supremacy movement increasingly adopted a militant identity throughout the 1970s, the Klansmen did not execute a paramilitary operation on November 3.

### **The Undisputed Facts**

During the late hours of the morning, on November 3, 1979, members of the Communist Workers Party, including prominent members such as Nelson Johnson, Paul and Sally Bermanzohn, and Signe Waller, held a “Death to the Klan” rally in the Morningside Homes housing project in Greensboro, North Carolina. A caravan of cars carrying Klansmen and affiliated Nazi sympathizers drove into the starting point of the march, at the corner of Carver Drive and Everitt Street. Upon arrival and before the rally officially started, violence erupted. A meaningful police presence was completely absent. Lasting only eighty-eight seconds, the riot imparted devastating consequences on the participants and the city of Greensboro. As a direct result, five members of the CWP, James Waller, Sandy Smith, Bill Sampson, Michael Nathan, and Cesar Cauce, were killed. Numerous others were injured and arrested.

### **A Pattern of Exploitation**

Leading to, during, and after the anti-Klan rally, members of the CWP can be characterized as acting recklessly, exacerbating tensions and promoting violence. They pursued their revolutionary political agenda at all costs, negligent to the potential for harm. They attempted to exploit the disenfranchised black community in Greensboro by manipulating racial tensions. However, the Greensboro Massacre was not an isolated example of this behavior. The leading

members of the CWP engaged in a pattern of commandeering social causes in order to disseminate their political ideology and recruit soldiers for their revolution.

For many years prior to November 3, 1979, the Greensboro community considered Nelson Johnson, prominent member of the CWP and key organizer of the anti-Klan rally, to be a source of social unrest. A lengthy history of promoting violence and being arrested induced many to view Johnson as “alienated.”<sup>1</sup> Johnson first achieved notoriety for his involvement in student protests in Greensboro in 1969. The student council at Dudley High School controversially excluded a student from the election for class president due to his ties to black militancy. Administrators believed this student was under the heavy influence of Nelson Johnson, a campus leader of black militancy at North Carolina A&T.<sup>2</sup> Johnson seemed to take advantage of the backlash to the election at Dudley and organized protests and boycotts at the high school and university. As a result of Johnson’s aggressive tactics, casualties mounted: one student was killed and numerous others were injured or arrested. After more than two weeks of unrest, the mayor declared a state of emergency. The National Guard arrived and restored some semblance of peace, but the damage to Greensboro was evident.<sup>3</sup>

Several years later, many future members of the Communist Workers Party first became acquainted at Duke University.

---

1 Jim Schlosser, “Leaders Are No Strangers Here,” *Greensboro Record*, November 5, 1979.

2 William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 185.

3 North Carolina State Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights, *Trouble in Greensboro: A Report of an Open Meeting Concerning Disturbances at Dudley High School and North Carolina A&T State University* (Greensboro, NC: NC Advisory Committee on Civil Rights, 1970), 1-11.

Jim Waller, Cesar Cauce, Mike and Marty Nathan, and Paul and Sally Bermanzohn connected through their experiences at Duke's medical center in Durham. In 1976, communist activists, including the Bermanzohns, pushed for unionization for service workers at Duke. However, infighting amongst rival communist factions derailed the effort. The activists failed to agree on a plan of action for the union drive and prioritized their political agenda over the needs of the employees. The public dispute between the communists involved increasingly radical rhetoric that further discouraged employees from supporting unionization.<sup>4</sup>

Members of the CWP also focused heavily on unionization efforts at several Cone Mills locations in North Carolina. They believed the textile plant floors would serve well as recruiting grounds. The endgame of the communists included revolution and inversion of the status quo, achieved by leading a unionized army.<sup>5</sup> During the late 1970s, they successfully infiltrated several mills and union organizations. Protests were devised, and strikes were coordinated. Friction emerged between the local unions and their parent organizations, and negotiations with plant management regressed.<sup>6</sup> Predictably, the vociferous and radical nature of the communists repelled potential allies and emboldened adversaries. Again, the workers suffered, as their legitimate concerns were eclipsed by the politics of the CWP members.

Moreover, the unionization efforts were more perfidious to the average mill worker than to members of the CWP. The communist organizers, the majority

of whom obtained impressive degrees in higher education, made a conscious decision to work at the textile mills. If they lost their job, they had the ability to acquire work elsewhere. On the contrary, the average worker possessed minimal skills and education, with severely limited options for employment. Being terminated from work would bear more devastating consequences for them than for the communists. The members of the CWP failed to take this fact into consideration.

In addition to unionization efforts, the communists with a medical background assisted in the organization of the Brown Lung Association (BLA). Once again, their radical politics created more division than unity. The primary organizers of the BLA were aware of the communist tendencies of the CWP doctors and attempted to mitigate their espousal of political propaganda. They failed. The communist doctors, intent on building the communist party, focused on educating their patients on the connection between capitalism and their health condition. The retired textile workers rejected their political rhetoric and became reluctant to participate in the organization.<sup>7</sup>

Publicity arose surrounding the political ideology of the doctors that tainted the entire BLA campaign. Companies, on the verge of conceding to the BLA's demands, took to the offensive. Because of the communist stigma, the BLA lost all bargaining power. Many of the BLA organizers blamed the communist activists for undermining their legitimate health concerns with Marxist ideas of revolution. Members of the CWP readily parted ways with the BLA in order to focus on the active workforce, a more fruitful source of recruitment than the pool of sick, retired laborers.<sup>8</sup> While the BLA achieved future success in establishing new

---

4 Bermanzohn, 132-133.

5 Waller, 103-105.

6 William March, "WVO 'Targeted' Cone, Other Mills for Infiltration," Greensboro Daily News, November 5, 1979.

---

7 Wheaton, 54-55

8 *Ibid.*, 57-58.

safety standards for employees, members of the organization never forgave the CWP. When reports aired that some of the slain victims of November 3 were organizers in the Brown Lung Association, the BLA quickly distanced themselves from the communists.<sup>9</sup>

China Grove, the Greensboro Massacre, and the Aftermath Prior to the November 3 rally, the Communist Workers Party deployed a barrage of media attacks against the Klan in a successful attempt to emasculate them publicly. Earlier in 1979, Klansmen scheduled a showing of the controversial film, *Birth of a Nation*, at a public library in China Grove, North Carolina. The use of public facilities for the proliferation of racist ideas incensed members of the Communist Workers Party, then known as the Workers Viewpoint Organization.<sup>10</sup> They distributed a flier describing the Klan in the most pejorative and crude of terms. The leaflet overtly encouraged blacks and union workers to violently confront the Klan during their planned event. It also prominently displayed the slogans “Smash the Klan” and “Death to the Klan.” Of course, the authors intertwined communist propaganda with their anti-Klan rhetoric.<sup>11</sup>

The confrontation at China Grove on July 8, 1979, while almost devoid of violence, was a major catalyst in the development of tragedy in Greensboro. Believing the First Amendment should be selectively applied, members of the CWP planned to disrupt the Klan activity held at the public facility. In addition to the scheduled Klan event, China Grove housed the largest

textile mill in the nation. The communists considered the environment “ripe” for unionization. Defeating the Klan and creating a union stronghold would serve a dual-edged purpose. They supported an organized march to confront the Klan, but disapproved of using explosives, as some locals suggested. Concerns of serving time in jail, not producing casualties, ultimately dissuaded proponents from using explosives.<sup>12</sup>

When protest marchers arrived at the library, the Klansmen realized they were heavily outnumbered, but not out-gunned. Both sides initially refused to back down, but, at the behest of local police, the Klan retreated inside the building. They later left quietly. Joe Grady, a Klan spokesman present at the China Grove event, claimed that the Klansmen were well prepared to establish firing lines, but opted for the more peaceful solution. Even the Klansmen believed that the communists were exploiting the local protesters as “cannon fodder.”<sup>13</sup> While members of the CWP actively participated in the protest at China Grove, a local resident, Paul Lucky, primarily directed the response to the Klan.<sup>14</sup> Afterwards, the CWP hijacked the incident as by publicly purporting to be responsible for the success over the Klan.

The communist agitators exploited the widely perceived public defeat of the Klan at China Grove and the Klanmen’s subsequent embarrassment. A leaflet distributed by the CWP, once again, encouraged readers to “Smash the Klan,” adding that “armed self-defense” and “correct understanding” would be necessary. The CWP publishers claimed responsibility for chasing the Klan from

---

9 “Claim Disputed,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, November 24, 1980.

10 Sally Bermanzohn, *Through Survivors’ Eyes: From the Sixties to the Greensboro Massacre* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2003), 184.

11 Greensboro Police Department, Appendix A.

---

12 Waller, 184-186.

13 “Klan Rally and Film Protested,” *Lexington Dispatch*, July 9, 1979.

14 Waller, 185-186.

China Grove and insinuated there would be future acts of aggression. The leaflet culminated in an attack on the press for being a tool of the bourgeoisie.<sup>15</sup> “Correct understanding,” a subtle and misleading moniker, refers to embracing Marxist ideology and the party line.

The CWP published similar leaflets advertising a rally on November 3, persisting in their assertions that armed conflict was the only method to successfully quell the growing public threat of the KKK. They also continued to utilize the incident at China Grove as an example of their commitment to protecting the people from the overpowering forces of the capitalist aggressors. Issuing an open letter to members of the Klan, the CWP again accused them of being a tool for capitalism and encouraged them to settle their differences through physical confrontation at the rally in Greensboro.<sup>16</sup> They goaded the Klan through television exposure as well.

While the Communist Workers Party distributed leaflets declaring “Death to the Klan,” the Klansmen were reluctant to use *death* in their propaganda.<sup>17</sup> Critics may argue for a metaphorical interpretation of the employment of the word *death*. However, an open letter from the CWP to the Klan on October 22, 1979 supports the more literal definition. The intent of the “Death to the Klan” rally is described, in part, as “to organize to physically smash the racist KKK.” Again in the letter, the inevitability of the Klan being “smashed physically” is reiterated.<sup>18</sup> The conscious decision by the Klan to exclude the word “death” from their fliers seems to demonstrated at least some level of restraint, which seems

completely absent from the rhetoric and actions of the communists.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to a campaign to goad the Klansmen into a violent confrontation, members of the Communist Workers Party engaged in other activities that directly endangered the public. Assuming a confrontation would take place, the CWP placed members of the community at risk by planning a march that traversed several public housing projects. Believing the security would be inadequate at the march, the CWP relied on the community as an auxiliary defense. They produced fliers that solicited residents to defend the march through an armed presence on their porches.<sup>20</sup> Although the CWP failed in its attempt to make soldiers out of unwilling participants, the membership succeeded in converting a peaceful neighborhood into a battlefield.

Many of the decisions made on November 3 by members of the CWP seemed to contribute to the increased potential for disaster. The Klansmen’s arrival alone was an act of aggression, but the anti-Klan demonstrators initiated violence by assaulting the caravan of cars. The Klansmen drove to Greensboro with malicious intentions, but they were woefully unprepared for the mass of protesters that violently swarmed them. Contrary to the stipulations of the parade permit, many CWP protesters transported firearms to the rally. Klansmen fired the first shots, but the CWP’s use of firearms induced a more forceful response from their counterparts. Many Klansmen intent on fisticuffs scrambled for their firearms after perceiving the communists to be heavily armed.<sup>21</sup>

Curious residents, not affiliated with

---

15 Greensboro Police Department, Appendix A.

16 Ibid., Appendix B.

17 Workers Viewpoint Organization, “Death to the Klan Flier” in J.A. Armfield Papers.

18 Waller, 203-204.

---

19 Wheaton, 120-121.

20 Waller, 211.

21 Jack Scism, “Four Die in Klan-Leftist Shootout,” Greensboro Daily News, November 4, 1979.

either faction, lined the streets when the confrontation erupted. With plenty of outlets for retreat, members of the Communist Workers Party exchanged gunfire and punches with the Klansmen, increasing the prospect of collateral damage.<sup>22</sup> Jim Waller, prominent member of the CWP and casualty of the rally, supplied at least one protester, untrained in firearms, with a loaded pistol.<sup>23</sup> A mortally wounded Bill Sampson, another member of the CWP, selflessly relinquished his pistol to another injured demonstrator. However, the pistol contained incorrect ammunition, leading to the near-death of its bearer.<sup>24</sup>

After the tragic rally, the Greensboro community did not converge in defense of the protesters. The communists perpetually, and grossly, miscalculated their connection with and support from the local citizenry. Residents were angered by the violence. They insisted, justifiably, that the communist and supremacist outsiders were responsible for the carnage in their streets. Some community leaders regarded the incident as white-on-white violence, unrelated to the civil plight of blacks.<sup>25</sup> Others defended the conduct of police. Despite the heavily charged atmosphere, almost everyone urged for calm and reason to prevail.<sup>26</sup>

The surviving members of the CWP pushed for upheaval, not peace. They engaged in an “Avenge the Murder of the CWP 5” campaign, similar to guerilla advertisement, encouraging violent resistance. Survivors created constant

disruptions during court proceedings and held numerous public demonstrations. Due to the belief that the system was rigged, they refused to testify in any trial.<sup>27</sup> Members of the CWP were oblivious to the damage they inflicted. Their radical public displays further marginalized their cause amongst the community. In the absence of survivor testimony, the deceased members of the CWP lacked a personal and emotional presence in court.

### **The Klan**

The embarrassment of the Klansmen at China Grove, North Carolina, where they retreated from a large and hostile crowd, motivated them to attend the “Death to the Klan” march in Greensboro. They assumed that the rally would largely be attended by blacks, not whites, including many of those present at China Grove. This presumption fueled much of the internal Klan rhetoric and agitation.<sup>28</sup> Race played a major role in encouraging the Klansmen to act on their impetus for violence.

In addition to confronting the Klan at China Grove, members of the Communist Workers Party nearly monopolized media exposure, preventing the Klansmen from achieving the press coverage they desperately desired.<sup>29</sup> Certainly, the Klansmen intended on skirmishing with the communists, whom they viewed as the source of their public embarrassment. Despite claims to the contrary, the Klansmen envisioned a “knock-down, drag-out fight,” not an exchange of bullets. They expected to brawl against several hundred protesters, mostly large blacks, and believed that the police would be irrelevant in a fistfight. The Klansmen originally decided against

---

22 Winston Cavin, “Without Warning, the Shooting Started,” Greensboro Daily News, November 4, 1979.

23 Wheaton, 129.

24 *Ibid.*, 147.

25 Martha Woodall and Greta Tilley, “Melee Angers Residents,” Greensboro Daily News, November 5, 1979.

26 Dwight F. Cunningham, “Residents Pleading Keep Radicals Out,” Greensboro Daily News, November 7, 1979.

---

27 Waller, 268-278

28 Elizabeth Wheaton, *Codename GREENKIL: The 1979 Greensboro Killings* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 110-111.

29 *Ibid.*, 120.

transporting firearms to the rally.<sup>30</sup>

The decision of whether to carry guns became a heated topic of discussion for the Klansmen preparing for the march. All agreed that an effort would be made to produce more noise than the protesters, which would inevitably lead to a physical confrontation. However, conflicting opinions arose regarding firearms. Some Klansmen believed that carrying a firearm would demonstrate their fear of the protesters, unnecessarily emboldening them. The pro-gun camp decidedly won the argument, mainly for concerns about defense. Arguably, uncertainty and fear ultimately compelled the Klansmen to proceed heavily armed.<sup>31</sup>

Additionally, the Klansmen's claims of self-defense bear some credibility, lending doubt to the assertion that they planned a shooting spree. They transported a majority of their firearms in one car's trunk, demonstrating a lack of intent to use them.<sup>32</sup> Upon arrival, the protesters violently swarmed the Klan caravan. The lead car stopped, trapping the subsequent cars in the caravan. Panicked, the Klansmen reacted with an innate and animal instinct.<sup>33</sup>

On November 3, the Klansmen behaved as a disorganized and non-cohesive group, united primarily by their bigotry and propensity for violence. As a collective unit, they acted haphazardly and without foresight. While they are not guilty of all charges made against them, they are culpable on numerous levels for the tragedy that unfolded. The white supremacists deserve more than contempt

for their hostile actions and utter disregard for human life. The physical blood, long removed from their hands, continues to metaphorically stain them.

### Law Enforcement

Members of law enforcement passively contributed to the Greensboro Massacre, but the claim that they colluded in the killings and participated in a massive cover-up is contradicted by the documentation. The Greensboro Police Department undertook several precautions leading to the anti-Klan rally, well aware of the impetuous nature of the social factions to be in attendance. However, confusion about details and failures of communication plagued the officers assigned to the march.

The Greensboro Police Department (GPD) held a debriefing on the morning of November 3. The officers in charge disseminated several key pieces of information during this meeting that they believed to be true. An unknown number of Klansmen assembled at a location relatively close to the planned route of the march, and at least some of them possessed firearms. The Klansmen planned to heckle the protesters as they marched by hurling eggs and insults. They intended to confront the protesters at the end of the march.

Supervising officers briefed their subordinates on state and local laws that would possibly need to be enforced during the rally. They directly assigned twenty-six personnel to the event. The commanders advised all units to be in their assigned locations no later than eleven-thirty that morning and granted permission to eat lunch beforehand. This decision later haunted them. The parade permit issued designated the starting location as the intersection of Everitt Street and Carver Drive in the Morningside Homes housing project. The permit listed the starting time as noon. When Nelson Johnson, who filed the parade permit, picked up the official

---

30 Ibid., 111-112.

31 Ibid., 114-115.

32 Ibid., 144.

33 Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report (Greensboro, NC: Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2006), 6.

approval, a police commander requested they meet at Morningside Homes thirty minutes prior to the start of the rally in order to coordinate their actions. Johnson never agreed to the meeting.

Not every police officer assigned to the march took a lunch break before the protest. Some searched for Nelson Johnson prior to the march. They failed to observe any activity at Everitt and Carter, just after ten in the morning, and proceeded to the Windsor Community Center, arriving around ten-thirty. The officers encountered a hostile group of protesters preparing for the march. Having failed to locate Johnson and having further agitated the crowd, the officers decided to pursue a lower profile. They assumed that the protesters would congregate at Windsor and march to the start of the rally. This assumption led to the distraction of many police units from the Morningside Homes area.

At 11:13 AM, Detective Jerry Cooper, the police officer surveilling the caravan of Klansmen, radioed the communications center and informed them that the caravan was mobile and headed towards the rally site. Two minutes later, the radio operator relayed this information to all channels. At this time, many police units were enjoying their lunch, thus tragically out of position. Even worse, key officers involved were intermittently out of radio contact, fettering the coordinating efforts of the police. Cooper first radioed reports of heckling at eleven-twenty-two. During the next minute, he followed with reports of fighting and shots fired. Not yet in position, many officers were helpless to intervene.

With the information available, the Greensboro police should have enacted stronger measures of prevention prior to the Klansmen's arrival at the rally. The act of throwing eggs would constitute assault. Furthermore, any physical act of aggression directed at the protesters would constitute infringement upon their civil

right to peacefully assemble. Arguably, the Klansmen could have been arrested on charges of conspiracy as they gathered. Regardless of the potential success for conviction, arrests had the potential to be justified and to avert disaster.

In addition, the police should have taken action to prevent an illegal double standard. In accordance with the agreement in the parade permit, transporting firearms to the rally would have been a violation of the law. The police, aware of the Klansmen's intent on being both armed and in attendance, possessed a foundation to detain the Klansmen and search their vehicles for weapons. At the very least, the police could have searched the Klansmen for eggs.

The police commander who approached Nelson Johnson on November 1 about meeting to coordinate the protest march activities could have been more thorough in establishing a concrete time and place. The officers searching for Nelson Johnson on November 3 claimed to be ignorant of Johnson's appearance, which hindered their efforts. However, as police are often responsible for locating people who do not wish to be located, additional resources could have been utilized in their quest for Johnson.

Distractions foiled the police department in their performance of duties. At no point should officers have been allowed to take a lunch break without relief officers in place. Given the history of animosity between the Klansmen and the protesters, most notably the China Grove incident earlier that year, officers should have maintained a heightened state of attentiveness and performed more diligently. In organizing an operation consisting of twenty-six men, superior officers being outside of radio contact provided for an ineffective response..

Planning and executing a successful demonstration required cooperation between the local police and the protesters.



Arguably, a mutual distrust, deeply rooted in the political ideology of those two groups, sabotaged efforts to coordinate. The communist organizers maintained a distant relationship with the police in regards to the march, and many key officers assigned performed ineffectively in their professional duties.

In their allegations, surviving members of the CWP also implicated the federal government, specifically the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (BATF), in conspiring against them. At the time, the FBI had a well-established reputation of disrupting social movements through extra-legal means. In addition, the FBI and the KKK shared a common enemy, thus an allegiance of sorts, in fighting communism in the years following WWII.

However, the attention of the FBI became heavily focused on the rising influence of white supremacy groups. Starting in the mid-1960s, the FBI pursued an official agenda of aggressively disrupting Klan and Nazi activities, attaining high levels of success towards the end of the decade. Their actions created blowback within the white supremacy community and fostered an increasing hatred and mistrust of the government, perceived to be under the manipulation of communist and Zionist forces. Regarding the killings in Greensboro, the FBI intervened in the aftermath in order to provide security and pacify the volatile atmosphere, not participate in a cover-up.

Unlike the the FBI, the BATF had an undercover agent planted amongst the Klansmen well before the confrontation in Greensboro. Bernard Butkovich infiltrated the white supremacy groups associated with the United Racist Front (URF) in an attempt to intercept illegal firearms. He attended numerous rallies and meetings where Klansmen made preparations for November 3. Agent Butkovich and his

superiors failed to adequately communicate with local law enforcement and relay information pertinent to successfully mitigating potential violence.

The performance and effectiveness of the BATF was perhaps hindered by their tunnel-vision. Their desire to procure charges stemming from firearms violations obscured the evident warning signs of impending violence. Despite their failure to serve the greater public good, agents of the BATF actively engaged in tactics designed to disrupt the illegal trafficking amongst white supremacists, not the activities of the communist revolutionaries

As conspiracy theories proliferated after the tragedy, many people failed to notice the irony in accusations of collusion. While the communists maintained that agents of the capitalist government employed the KKK in an effort to crush their Marxist revolution, Klansmen believed that the government was being manipulated by Zionist forces in an attempt to spread communism. The FBI did engage in hostile activities directed towards social movements deemed subversive, including the aforementioned, but they never allied themselves with any radical organization pertaining to the Greensboro Massacre.

Arguably, members of local and federal law enforcement were complicit in tragedy, not conspiracy. While their negligent actions fostered an atmosphere conducive to precludable tragedy, the warring communist and supremacist factions would not be deterred in their pursuit of violent confrontation. Thus far, the members of the Communist Workers Party have attempted to avoid a significant apportionment of blame in the public arena. Nevertheless, as they arguably orchestrated the “Death to the Klan” rally, they arguably orchestrated the violence that ensued.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout the decade prior to the Greensboro Massacre, members of the Communist Workers Party engaged in a

myriad of smaller social movements in order to leverage their political capital. The communists' lack of subtlety and desire for control debilitated the efforts of many organizations in their attempts to redress genuine grievances. The negative consequences of CWP involvement seem to consistently outweighed the benefits of their call to action. Ultimately, the revolutionary agenda of the communists failed; perhaps they were blinded by their own exceptionalism.

As with their other activities, the surviving members of the Communist Workers Party viewed the riot on November 3, 1979 through a distorted lens. They rejected any guilt or responsibility for

the tragedy while hurling allegations of conspiracy and assassination. This analysis of historical documents also revealed no evidence of conspiracy among law enforcement, but rather that the members of law enforcement involved performed their duties ineffectively. They acted in a manner bereft of collusion and malice. The Klansmen did arrive in Greensboro with violent intentions. However, they responded to direct incitement from the CWP and, in some unjustifiable capacity, acted as they had in similar situations. The members of the Communist Workers Party did not deserve their fatal consequences, but they certainly set the stage for a high probability for violence and death.

## Bibliography

### *Primary Sources*

Bermanzohn, Sally. *Through Survivors' Eyes: From the Sixties to the Greensboro Massacre*. Nashville: Vanderbilt Press, 2003.

Greensboro (N.C.) Daily News, 1979.

Greensboro Police Department. *An Administrative Report of the Anti-Klan Rally, Greensboro, North Carolina, by William E. Swing*. Greensboro, NC: Greensboro Police Department, 1979.

Greensboro (N.C.) Record, 1979.

Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission. *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report*. Greensboro, NC: Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2006.

J.A. Armfield Papers. Greensboro Historical Museum. Greensboro, NC: University of North Carolina Greensboro, 2012. <http://library.uncg.edu/dp/crg/collection.aspx?c=69> (accessed on April 22, 2012).

Lexington (N.C.) Dispatch, 1979.

North Carolina State Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights. *Trouble in Greensboro: A Report of an Open Meeting Concerning Disturbances at Dudley High School and North Carolina A&T State University*. Greensboro, NC: NC Advisory Committee on Civil Rights, 1970.

Waller, Signe. *Love and Revolution: a Political Memoir: People's History of the Greensboro Massacre, its Setting and Aftermath*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2002.

Wilmington (N.C.) Morning Star, 1980.

### *Secondary Sources*

Chafe, William H. *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Freedom*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.

Drabble, John. "From White Supremacy to White Power: The FBI COINTELPRO WHITE HATE, and the Nazification of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1970s." *American Studies* 48, no. 3 (Fall, 2007): 49-74.

Wheaton, Elizabeth. *Codename GREENKIL: The 1979 Greensboro Killings*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008.