

A Letter from the Four Survivors of the 1979 Greensboro Massacre Currently Residing in Greensboro to the City Council of Greensboro

PO Box 875, Greensboro NC 27401

October 17, 2017

Dear Mayor and Councilpersons:

As Greensboro residents who survived the deadly assault of November 3, 1979 and remained active in the struggle for racial, social, and economic justice in Greensboro, we applaud the Greensboro City Council for the significant step it took on August 15, 2017, in apologizing for the Greensboro Massacre. Thank you.

We appreciate you for taking an action that no City Council before you saw fit to take. Your near-unanimous vote to apologize for the Greensboro Massacre opens a door to healing our city, putting us on a path to become a model city that acknowledges and takes responsibility for the wrongs in its past so as to move forward to a better future for all its residents; Greensboro needs that, and we think you will agree that our nation needs that.

We are writing this letter on behalf of ourselves, non-Greensboro based survivors of that tragic day, the former residents of Morningside Homes, and the justice loving residents of Greensboro.

We write not merely to take note of your apology and thank you for it, but also to help you in putting that apology in a clearer context. In that spirit, we ask you to read the seven specific apology recommendations listed below. Then please read carefully and slowly the complete document that backs up the apology recommendations.

- Police and City Foreknowledge of Violence along with Failure to Warn Potential Victims
Having foreknowledge about a planned confrontation by violence-prone groups from many sources, including from a Klansman who was a paid police informant, but never sharing the known threat in the weeks leading up to the parade with those who stood to be harmed.
- Egregious Actions in Police Handling of WVO Parade Permit by Violating the Law in Support of Klan and Nazi Plans and against the Demonstrators and the Community
Issuing a parade permit with the stipulation of a ban on all firearms, concealed or unconcealed--a violation of North Carolina and United States constitutional law--and in disregard of a municipal ordinance that required notifying the permit applicant about the permit within three days; and only granting the permit to the WVO nearly two weeks after application was made; and giving the permit, with its weapons' ban, to the Klan at virtually the same time that it was delivered to the WVO.

- Adopting a “Low Profile” Plan that Deployed Officers Away from March Formation
Adopting a *low profile* tactical plan that kept uniformed police away from the site of the parade during the time when marchers would be gathering and their armed assailants would be *en route* to carry out a known, planned confrontation with them.
- Lack of an Effective Plan to Protect Parade Participants and the Community
Having no effective plan and taking no effective action to intervene in the known planned attack and the unfolding of violence, injury, and death, for which GPD Officers, Klan and Nazi members were eventually found liable in court for wrongful death.
- Lack of Pursuit of Fleeing Suspected Perpetrators
Not pursuing suspected perpetrators of criminal action as they fled the scene.
- City and Police Promotion of a False Narrative Scapegoating and Demonizing Victims
For the City and the Police being partners in forging a false narrative that demonized CWP/WVO members, especially those that remained in Greensboro, who have endured enormous suffering and hardship growing from such demonization.
- City Council’s Racially Biased Vote Opposing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission
The City Council’s racially biased vote (all whites voting against the TRC and all Blacks voting for it) served to continue the demonization and to continue to block sincere efforts to seek truth, reconciliation, justice, and healing related to the events of November 3, 1979.

Again, we cannot over emphasize the need to read this complete document in order to understand and appreciate the background and the context for the apology recommendations.

We have done our best to recount the details of the November 1979 Massacre accurately but also from the perspective of those who were killed, physically and emotionally wounded, and yet have continued to press our way forward with deep compassion, especially for the “least among us.” We hope that our compassion and our continued commitment to work for the “good of the whole” are reflected in the pages that follow. (As declared in the North Carolina State Constitution, “all government of right originates from the people, is founded upon their will only, and is instituted **solely for the good of the whole.**”)

Mayor and Council Members, many people in Greensboro have told us that the apology, as stated at the August 15th City Council meeting, was good but lacked content. They wondered why council members did not name specifically that for which the council was apologizing. We assumed that the council was intending to put forth a more complete statement of apology later.

We understand that none of you were on the Council in 1979 and some were too young or maybe not even in the city during that period, so the level of knowledge that the Council members have about the roles played by the Greensboro Police Department (GPD) and the City of Greensboro in the 1979 attack on an authorized public rally might make it hard to connect it with its actual history that is seen in these contemporary times. You are now our elected representatives and it is you, the sitting City Council, that can most authoritatively offer a sincere apology with specifics on behalf of our City and the Greensboro Police Department; such an apology can open new doors and bear good fruit in years to come.

We all lead busy lives and are rarely able to take the time necessary to seek out the truth with open and inquiring minds in order to study important issues deeply rather than superficially. Plus, we are all influenced by the cultural milieu in which we live by media reports that are often hastily prepared and biased. If you did not find the words to make the apology more real and concrete a few weeks ago, we believe we might be able to assist by sharing some well-documented, key facts in their context. Tremendous effort by some was put into altering the context and promoting confusion in the aftermath of that tragic day in 1979. Please accept some “midwife coaching” to coax out the truth so we may together birth a brighter, more equitable future for our City.

For some of the most important factual evidence, we go to the Greensboro Police Department’s own report of Nov. 19, 1979, “An Administrative Report of the Anti-Klan Rally, Greensboro, North Carolina November 3, 1979.” On October 19, 1979, Nelson Johnson, a well-known civil rights leader, an A&T student in the late 1960s, and the main organizer of the 1979 anti-Klan rally, applied for a parade permit on behalf of the Workers Viewpoint Organization (WVO). Appendix E of the police report contains the Application for Parade Permit, the Permit to Conduct Parade, and a description of the parade route with the starting point at Everitt St. and Carver Dr. and the termination point at Florida St. and Freeman Mill Rd. The purpose of the parade, Johnson wrote on the application, was “political and educational: To educate and organize political opposition to the KKK and their secret supporters.”

The parade permit had an unusual stipulation *without which it would not be granted*: “NO WEAPONS TO BE CARRIED IN PLAIN VIEW OR CONCEALED. SIGN POSTS NO LARGER THAN 2” x 2”. Captain L. S. Gibson signed the agreement for the City of Greensboro and Nelson Johnson signed for Workers Viewpoint. However, Johnson was concerned and inquired about the weapons’ ban, asking the police if they were expecting any trouble on November 3rd. “Captain Gibson looked me straight in the eye,” the rally organizer said, “and assured me that the police would take care of security and protect the march.”

Although a *City ordinance mandated a three-day period in which permit applicants were to be notified one way or the other*, and the application had been filed nearly two weeks earlier, Johnson did not receive the permit until November 1st, when he and another WVO leader, Paul Bermanzohn, held a press conference on the Washington Street side of the Municipal Office Building. The purpose of the press conference was to publicly insist that the parade permit be granted, or at the very least, that a clear reason be given as to why the permit was not being granted.

The parade permit was of critical importance as workers and community residents would be coming from Danville VA, Martinsville VA, Rocky Mount NC, Durham NC, Haw River NC, Kannapolis NC, as well as from the textile mills and community of Greensboro. It was at the press conference that Johnson was given the parade permit, with its unusual stipulation of a weapons’ ban, authorizing the WVO parade two days hence.

In the two-week interval after the parade permit was applied for and before the November 1st press conference, some WVO supporters encountered police harassment when trying to post signs for the rally. Shortly after this incident, a black preacher received information from one of his congregation members employed by the city that frightened the pastor into suddenly withdrawing his church as the location for the labor conference that was planned at the end of the parade. With the delayed permit on his mind, and a history of the police and the city so often being on the wrong

side of the black struggle for freedom and civil rights, Johnson took the opportunity at the November 1st press conference to warn against what he saw as possible police tactics of interference with the upcoming anti-Klan rally, saying “to the Police Department and to [Mayor] Jim Melvin, stay out of our way. The march will go on.” (Johnson’s statement, taken out of context, was one of the “excuses” later offered for the lack of a police presence on November 3rd; namely, that Nelson Johnson told the police to stay away!)

“During that same day, Thursday, November 1, 1979,” the police administrative report on page 5, states that: “a man came to the Police Department and requested a copy of the parade permit which had been issued to the Workers Viewpoint Organization... The man said he was a member of the Klan and his name was Dawson.” The police report mentions, very reasonably, that the permit was a public document and had to be given to Dawson on his request. Dawson hung out on the fringes of the WVO press conference and even chatted with Bermanzohn, who took him to be, perhaps, an ordinary Greensboro business man.

Of course, the permit was a public document available to anyone. Now here is the back story--facts *not* included in the police report but documented elsewhere. What did the police know prior to November 3, 1979, that they did *not* share with the public? **Did that knowledge inform, or should it have informed, all their decisions and plans for protecting the November 3, 1979 parade?**

Edward Dawson, longtime Klansman and previously an FBI informant, who had served jail time on charges stemming from a 1967 shooting spree in a black community in Alamance County, was the GPD’s Confidential Informant 1068, recruited in early to mid-October 1979. ***His handler was Police Detective Jerry Cooper. During the period when the parade permit application was filed and then finally granted, the Police Department had knowledge of who Dawson was because he was working for them.*** He was not just a guy off the street asking for a copy of the permit. (For the pivotal role that GPD informant Dawson played in the what happened on Nov. 3, 1979, see Lindsey Gruson, “Klan Rally Planners Included Police Informant,” Greensboro Daily News, 8/3/1980, A1)

In fact, according to Dawson’s sworn testimony (in deposition taken by lawyers in the Civil Rights Suit), Dawson thought the march was going to start at the Windsor Community Center on Lee Street, (one of several gathering points for marchers on the parade route and shown on a poster). *Cooper informed Dawson that Everitt and Carver was the starting point and told the Klan member to get a copy of the parade permit, which Dawson said he would do.* The permit included the parade route WVO would follow.

By obtaining a copy of the permit, as per Detective Cooper’s instruction, Dawson, along with other Klan members, was able to reconnoiter the route, in the early morning hours of November 3rd, in order to choose the place for their planned confrontation. The Administrative Report of November 19th conceals Dawson’s relationship to the GPD, which in the particular context we are concerned with is not just some abstract procedural issue about not revealing informants, but part of a scenario that led to a deadly confrontation that might have been avoided. And there is much more.

Throughout late October, until minutes before bullets rained down on people gathering to participate in the march, Dawson was supplying the Greensboro police with information, ***for which he was paid***, about the developing plans of the KKK and other violent, right-wing organizations for a confrontation at the anti-Klan rally. Dawson himself spoke at several Klan rallies around the state, making speeches urging a confrontation with the communists.

On October 31, 1979, Detective Cooper wrote a confidential report, quoted in part below, on his contact with Dawson. (The original of this piece of evidence, as well as other evidence obtained in the 1985 Civil Rights Suit brought by surviving spouses and wounded demonstrators of November 3rd, may be viewed at UNC's Wilson Library in the Southern Historical Collection.) Cooper writes that he was contacted by Dawson who:

had been in contact with the Grand Dragon of the K.K.K., Virgil Griffin, from Mount Holly, North Carolina, who stated Leroy Gibson, who is head of the Rights of the White People in Wilmington, had informed him that members of his organization would be in Greensboro on 11/3/1979 and also that Harold Covington, head of the Nazi Party in Raleigh, North Carolina, had informed him that members of his organization would be in Greensboro on 11/3/1979 reference the Anti-Klan rally being held by the Workers Viewpoint Organization... The informant stated that Virgil Griffin, the Grand Dragon, was to arrive in the Greensboro area at approximately 2 a.m., 11/3/1979, to survey the parade route in an effort to determine where a confrontation might take place between the W.V.O. and the other organizations... He stated as soon as he can find out the numbers of people involved and the location for a confrontation, he will contact this writer and advise him of those locations and numbers...

Dawson, however, was apparently having some misgivings or fears because on November 1st, he told Detective Cooper and Lieutenant Robert Talbott, Cooper's supervisor, that he had gone to the City Attorney attempting to get an injunction to stop the November 3rd parade and was told it couldn't, or wouldn't, be done. **Note: The City Attorney did nothing with all the information Dawson gave to him!**

Dawson left the attorney's office angry, saying "the next damn time I'll bring you a bucket of blood." (See Emily Mann's play, *Greensboro: A Requiem*, in *Testimonies: Four Plays* (Theatre Communications Group, 1997, pp. 269-270). Mann interviewed Dawson and was faithful to his character and his words in her play.) The police never used the information available to them from Dawson about his reasons for wanting to stop the WVO parade. Missing this opportunity, among many others, to halt their criminal and immoral trajectory, police and city officials plowed on ahead with their plans: Dawson, pawn-like, continued to cooperate with them.

So far we have established that the GPD deliberately disarmed the Workers Viewpoint as a condition for granting a parade permit. Two points need to be mentioned: *In 1979, it was constitutional and legal to be visibly armed in public, so that the weapons ban laid on the WVO was a most unusual departure from the law. Also, the police put no parallel weapons restrictions on Klansmen and Nazis nor did the Greensboro Police bother to stop Klan cars seen loading weapons into the trunk of one of the Nazi/Klan caravan cars that would be going to the parade starting point.*

We have established that the police had a Klan informant whose intelligence revealed that the Klan and other violent groups were organizing a counter-demonstration and were planning to confront the November 3rd marchers. That means that the police not only disarmed the WVO but did so knowing about a planned assault on the anti-Klan demonstration by groups that typically are armed. If not a set-up to trap and harm the WVO, it certainly had that potential.

Furthermore, if we extend some common-sense reasoning, we might realize that the police could not be sure that the WVO would adhere to the ban on weapons (which we did for the most part). In that case they might have been setting up a serious gun battle instead of the one-sided assault and the few futile attempts at self-defense that actually happened. In a real gun battle, there would be the potential for many more people--demonstrators, Klan, Nazis, community residents, media persons, and others--to be wounded or killed. In short, the police could not know how things might actually turn out, and their behavior is aptly described as reckless endangerment of the people.

This is only the tip of the iceberg. The police absence from the parade origin on November 3, 1979, was *by design*. There are numerous converging pieces of evidence to uphold the conclusion that the police had foreknowledge not only that there *might* be violence on November 3rd but that there *would most likely* be violence. Several pieces of evidence will be discussed here very briefly.

We are focused here specifically on the *police responsibility for the Greensboro Massacre and why Greensboro residents are owed an apology (with specifics) from the City and the police*. As we discuss police foreknowledge about the *likelihood of violence on November 3rd*, keep in mind one very important fact that burns in the soul of everyone who suffered loss of a loved one, bodily injury, or mental trauma due to the decisions the police made about what to do, what not to do, where to be and where not to be on November 3, 1979.

Not once did the police warn the demonstrators of the impending danger they faced. The police knew, and they did not tell us so that we might do something different, like cancel our rally, rather than walk into a deadly ambush.

As it happened, a great many people knew or heard rumblings about a violent encounter that would ensue at the anti-Klan rally, including police officers, city officials and others. None shared their information with us. Police Captain Gibson, who signed the parade permit on behalf of the city, lied deliberately and despicably to the rally organizer, assuring him of police protection.

Prior to our rally, we had discussed possible police harassment of our parade and agreed we would not be baited into a violent response to police provocation. ***It occurred to no one, however, that the police would actively collude with the Klan and Nazis and would not be present to protect parade participants and city residents at the poor, majority black Morningside Homes community*** where the rally took place. Knowing what they knew, the police should have warned demonstrators, indeed, all city residents, that they faced imminent danger. However, the City and the police, in sync with the media, made every attempt to pit the community against WVO/CWP, despite the fact that Rev. Johnson and the Greensboro Association of Poor People (GAPP) had been actively organizing in the community for over a decade.

Klansman and police informant Edward Dawson was far from the *only* source of information about the potential for violence at the anti-Klan rally. A prior clash on July 8, 1979, in China Grove, NC, between WVO members and the KKK, in which the WVO burned a confederate flag, is mentioned on the first page of the police administrative report as “background information.”

At China Grove, Klan and Nazi members armed with rifles were confronted by anti-Klan demonstrators with sticks and clubs. A standoff of verbal insults and threatening gestures ensued, as the Klan and Nazis retreated to the porch of the building in which they planned to show the pro-Klan film, “Birth of a Nation.” *No violence occurred that day--perhaps only because one or two police officers were stationed at the site.*

The Greensboro police knew full well the details of the China Grove confrontation and how potentially explosive it was. They knew that the Klan felt humiliated and was seeking revenge against the WVO. The GPD began an investigation of the WVO (later called the Communist Workers Party (CWP)) in October 1979 out of concern that the near-violence of China Grove could be repeated in Greensboro, and GPD Police Chief William Swing had a memorandum distributed to the Department on the China Grove incident prior to November 3. Therefore, even without Klan informant Dawson telling them about the active preparations being made to confront anti-Klan demonstrators on November 3rd, did the police not have enough foreknowledge from the China Grove clash to know that a huge potential for violence existed if these two adversarial groups came together again?

But there is more. *Other* law enforcement agencies and other individuals shared information with the GPD that pointed most definitively to the potential for violence that day. As we cannot take the space here to list all the particular facts we are sending with our letter a paper that former civil rights lawyer and lead attorney in the 1985 civil suit, Lewis Pitts, prepared around the time the Greensboro Historical Marker was being discussed.

Pitts cites specific factual evidence about three law enforcement agencies with foreknowledge about plans to violently attack the anti-Klan rally of November 3, 1979--the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (BATF), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Greensboro Police Department (GPD). Much of this information was shared inter-agency and the GPD had a particularly good relationship with the FBI and received new information from them as well as confirmation of what they already knew. All three agencies knew the potential for violence on November 3rd and knew that specific Klansmen and Nazis planned to go armed with guns and other weapons to the anti-Klan rally in Greensboro for the purpose of assaulting anti-Klan demonstrators. *"Yet, all three agencies failed to be present that day,"* writes Pitts, *"or provide any warning or protection for the demonstrators. In fact, the Greensboro Police Department took action to ensure the demonstrators would be unarmed and thus unprotected."*

At 10:00 a.m. on the morning of November 3rd the GPD held a briefing for the Tactical Units assigned to cover the anti-Klan parade. Present were most of the 26 members assigned to the activity (see Police Administrative Report of Nov. 19, 1979, pp. 10-11 for names) along with Detective Cooper, Police Attorney Maurice Cawn, Lieutenant Spoon and Lieutenant Daughtry. Detective Cooper relayed his "reliable and up-to-date" intelligence (Police Administrative Report of Nov. 19, 1979, p. 8) that he received earlier that morning, around 7:30, by phone from informant Dawson. The Tactical Units were advised that Klan members were already gathered at a residence on Randleman Road known to the police, that they planned to ride the parade route and heckle the marchers, throw eggs, and perhaps fist-fight with demonstrators, and that some Klan members had handguns. It was clear at this point that the Klan/Nazi group came to Greensboro planning to break the law.

Cooper also advised the assembled officers that based on his information, if a confrontation occurred it would probably be at the ending point of the parade, at Florida Street and Freeman Mill Road. What could such a flawed conclusion possibly be based upon?

No further discussion is referenced in the police report about the Klan weapons, the possibility that the Klan might not restrict itself to heckling the marchers, or the chance that the "confrontation" so

much talked about and planned for by the Klan could happen at any point, not necessarily at the end of the march. This is very significant. If your plan is to protect a parade, wouldn't you want the utmost clarity and knowledge about various scenarios that posed a threat to its safety?

Before the 10:00 a.m. police briefing, in the early hours of November 3rd, Dawson and three other Klansmen, including Grand Dragon Virgil Griffin (about whom Detective Cooper had remarked that he "was a 'hot head' and should be considered dangerous") had ridden the parade route looking for a place for the confrontation. By 9:00 a.m. several Klan and Nazi members had gathered at the Randleman Road house. "Dawson was in charge. Some of those present would later testify that Dawson kept looking at his watch and hurrying people along." (Cited in *A City of Two Tales: The Greensboro Massacre of November 3, 1979, in Fact, Context and Meaning*, p. 14, AKA Survivors' Narrative presented to the Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Commission, February 2005)

Captain Thomas, responsible for the intelligence function that day, having received the report from Cooper that the Klan had guns, did not stay in touch with Cooper or any other officers. "Instead he took his son for a haircut without taking a police radio." (Cited in *A City of Two Tales*, p. 14) Is this in any way defensible behavior by an "intelligence" officer who had any intent of providing for the safety of the parade and conference participants including the neighborhood?

Also before the 10:00 a.m. police briefing, Detective Cooper, with Sergeant Burke, did surveillance on the house on Randleman Road where Klan and Nazis were gathering. Although Cooper failed to acknowledge it in depositions and interviews, his superior Lt. R.L. Talbott, testified to the FBI that he learned from Cooper or Thomas, that *Cooper had indeed observed weapons being placed in cars.*

Dawson, in his deposition, claimed he made a second call to Cooper that morning: apparently this second call occurred shortly before the 10:00 a.m. police briefing began. Dawson said he updated Cooper about the number of Klan and Nazis gathered and the weapons they had. He reported there were over a dozen Klansmen and Nazis with an array of handguns, shotguns, and rifles. District Attorney Mike Schlosser later described the motorcade as a "mobile arsenal." (Martha Woodall, "Deaths detour Wood in his cause pursuit," *The Greensboro Record*, March 25, 1980)

Virtually everything known at the November 3rd police briefing was known at a prior police meeting on November 1st. *The November 3rd briefing verified the fact that Klan and Nazi members had actually assembled and were carrying out their planned confrontation.*

The tactical unit briefing on the morning of November 3rd ended shortly after 10:30 a.m. and the Tactical Unit officers were sent to an early lunch and told to be at their assignments at 11:30 a.m. The parade, as per the permit, was scheduled to begin at noon. After the briefing, Cooper drove back to the Randleman Road house with GPD photographer John Matthews arriving at about 11:00 a.m. Most of the cars Cooper had seen earlier were gone, but the two police officers left and caught up with an 8-car caravan pulled over on the onramp of I-85. It was soon joined by a 9th car.

Clearly "**probable cause**" existed for stopping and searching the Klan caravan in view of the totality of circumstances. After all, Cooper had *seen* Klan guns being loaded into the cars (concealed weapons) and *knew* that the vehicles were on their way to disrupt a parade, so it was reasonable to think that a crime was about to be committed. No stop and search occurred. *Cooper*

and Matthews, in an unmarked car, proceeded to trail the 9-car motorcade to Morningside homes, parking just a few vehicles behind the last Klan vehicle.

The option of a police presence to accompany and monitor the weapons-laden caravan on its route also did not happen due to the police decision to have a “low profile.” A “low profile” (which could include a range of policing options) actually translated in this case into *a plan to station the tactical units several or many blocks from the parade’s actual starting point, meaning they would not be at Carver and Everitt Street.* The Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report of May 2006 (on p. 200) concluded that even if the officers had been at their assigned positions after lunch, and had been there as early as 11:13 a.m. when Cooper made his radio transmission stating “Caravan of nine cars moving toward the parade starting point from Interstate 85 and Randleman Road” (about 4 miles away from Everitt and Carver) --*they would have arrived too late to protect the marchers and locals.*

The problem with the police’s “low profile” tactical plan was that it kept the units *away from Everitt and Carver*, the starting point of the parade. *Knowing what they knew, the police designed and followed a plan--“early lunch” and “low profile” --that cleared the field for entry of the armed caravan into the rally space. It gave those who avowedly were looking for a confrontation plenty of time, at least until 11:30 a.m., to work their damage unhindered by a police presence.*

On November 3, 1979 there was not only a low profile but in spite of all the information known to the police at the time, **THERE WAS NO PRESENCE, NOT ONE SINGLE UNIFORMED POLICE OFFICER WAS ON THE SCENE THAT DAY.** To this very day there has been no explanation as to why Lt. Trevor Hampton, the Police Officer who shook Nelson Johnson’s hand and vowed to meet him at Carver and Everett Street, was not present. Further, Hampton has himself said nothing and there is no substantial mention of him in any report. Incidentally, Lt. Hampton has been the police chief in at least three cities in three different states after leaving Greensboro, shortly after 1979.

After five people were killed and ten wounded in the Greensboro Massacre, police faced many questions about their absence from the parade origin. They had to scramble to account for their actions and omissions in their administrative report and to the news media. Their claims are flimsy and fall apart under the scrutiny of the facts: nothing is offered that is much better than the earlier-discussed point (taken out of context) suggesting that the reason they weren’t there was that rally organizer Nelson Johnson told them to stay away. Given that the police knew from multiple sources of the impending danger, **staying away was outrageous.** Being told to “stay away” is contextually untrue. But even it was true, it is like being told that a bank was to be robbed and someone told the police to stay away and the police stayed away! Yes, such a position is outrageous. But, given the weight of demonization, fear, confusion, and anti-communism promoted largely by the City of Greensboro and the Police with the help of the press, people were simply blinded to the truth.

The Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission (GTRC) in Chapter 7 of its 2006 report, thoroughly researched the sequence of events leading up to the November 3rd assault. They traced the movements and communications of the officers responsible for covering the WVO/CWP parade. We recommend that you read the entire GTRC Report, which is a broad-scoped, accurate and inspired contribution (though limited) to the literature about the Greensboro Massacre. The

paragraph quoted below addresses one particular police “excuse” for their absence from the parade origin.

One of the police department’s most often repeated reasons for why no police were present on Nov. 3 was over confusion because the WVO/CWP changed the starting point of the parade. The GTRC finds this to be simply untrue. The WVO/CWP designated on their parade permit that Everitt and Carver was the starting point, and Nelson Johnson explained the discrepancy with the posters to Captain Gibson when he applied for the permit. The discrepancy was repeatedly discussed in planning meetings on Nov. 1 and Nov. 3. It was repeatedly emphasized that the starting point was to be at Everitt and Carver. In their depositions, Spoon, Daughtry, Burke, Hightower and Cooper all say they understood Carver and Everitt to be the starting location.

The claim that police were confused about the starting point of the parade is, or should be, completely debunked. It was a police lie told for popular consumption and frequently enough spread in the mass media so that in time it oozed into people’s false consciousness about November 3rd.

While we do not have the space here to go into all the details, similar “excuses” were attempted in the police administrative report and they serve as distractions or irrelevant side shows to avoid the main issue, which is *the failure of the police to protect the parade participants and the community*. For example, the police report, pp.11-13, has much to say (that is of little relevance) about the verbally hostile reception received by Sergeant Comer and another police officer from the crowd gathered at the Windsor Community Center when they went there about 10:30 a.m. (They were allegedly looking for Nelson Johnson and supposedly didn’t know what he looked like.) However, when Johnson applied for the parade permit, Commanding Office Captain Trevor Hampton told him that two officers would meet him at Carver and Everitt at 11:30 a.m. on November 3rd. At the last minute, Hampton, an early Black officer to attain to a high command in the GPD, and an acquaintance of Nelson Johnson’s as their daughters were good friends, was off the assignment and Lt. Paul W. Spoon was the Field Commander of the November 3rd operation. Spoon told Comer to keep looking for Nelson Johnson at Windsor Center even though he knew that an 11:30 meeting was set with Johnson for Everitt and Carver.

Shortly before going to Windsor Center, at around a quarter past ten, the police report says, Sgt. Comer had checked Everitt and Carver and had not seen any people gathered there. Had Comer checked Everitt and Carver a bit later he would have seen the WVO sound truck and plenty of people gathered in good spirits, singing freedom songs, as shown in TV station videos of that morning.

Another irrelevant side-show delayed Lt. Spoon and took him out of radio contact at a critical time as he tried to make contact with the Pastor at the church that initially was to host the afternoon conference but that had cancelled several days earlier. The GPD knew about the cancellation so it should have been a non-issue on November 3rd. The police radio transcript relating to Spoon, says the GTRC Report, “shows a somewhat confusing and contradictory story” (p. 220)

All in all, the police communications often seem designed to obfuscate. Officers seem to be in disarray and not communicating clearly with one another, or they are altogether incommunicado.

Taken as a whole, the “plan” for protecting the parade seems as if it is choreographed for maximum confusion and plausible deniability-- a choreography of avoidance.

However, if you read it as a plan to move police officers around in such a way that they *seem* to be doing something but are not--they are doing *anything but* coming together to protect a rally being imminently and directly threatened--then it makes sense. The radio transmissions of the morning of November 3, 1979 (that may be accessed as part of the Police Administrative Report in Appendices H & I) make sense if they are read as part of a police plan that is more about collusion with criminals than upholding the law and protecting people’s lives and civil rights.

Field Commander Spoon’s response to Cooper’s transmissions as people are being shot and are dying is shocking. Cooper radioed on Frequency 3 at 11:22.25 “OK, we got about 9 or 10 cars on the opposite side has now arrived at the formation point for the parade, and it appears as though they’re heckling at this time, driving on by, uh, they’re definitely creating attention and some of the parade members are...” and then at 11:23.10, “...we’ve got a 10-10 down here, you better get some units in here,” and at 11:23.27, “shots fired...” Spoon’s response to a Frequency 3 operator, who asked at 11:23.41, “Can you advise for F-1 where you want the (District II) cars?” was “Move ‘em into the area,...,should be there at Windsor Community Center.” Almost simultaneously Cooper is reporting on F-3, “heavy gunfire.” Spoon continues at 11:23.51, “Pull all available cars in the city to the area of, the Windsor Community Center. Don’t all come to the area, I’ll advise further when I arrive on the scene.” **So, in the face of people being shot and killed at Carver and Everitt, Cooper stays in his car with police photographer Matthews, who takes pictures of the assault, and Spoon sends his units away from Everitt and Carver to Windsor Community Center!**

Nor did Spoon or anyone else in the GPD order that the assailants in the caravan cars be pursued as they fled the scene of the crime. The arrest of several Klansmen and Nazis that day was fortuitous. The yellow van, the last vehicle in the caravan and the one with the shooters and most of the weapons, was tardy in leaving the area and the two police officers who stopped the van were never ordered to be at Carver and Everitt.

One of the most revealing pieces of evidence about the police role in the Greensboro Massacre came from Officer April Wise, who testified under oath that shortly before 11:00 a.m.--just about the time the Klan/Nazi caravan was heading into the area--she and fellow Officer Cardiff responded to a routine call about a domestic disturbance on Dunbar St., half a block from Carver and Everitt. Several minutes before 11:00 a.m. Wise received a call from the police dispatcher ordering her to “clear the area.” Wise then returned the call to say she and the other officer were wrapping up their business. (The radio frequency Wise used to confirm she was clearing the area started at 11:00 a.m., thus concealing her 10:57 call to the police.) Wise’s story was verified in sworn testimony by a woman who made a hobby of listening to police frequencies and who heard and clearly remembered the order to clear the area. Her memory was sealed soon afterward when she heard radio calls for police backup and by the violence of that morning.

An important lesson must be drawn from the above evidence, a lesson that many people would prefer not to learn. The failures and errors of the GPD in 1979 were not the result of a few “bad apples” in the department. They were not merely a matter of misconduct by a few rogue cops. The decisions made and the actions taken were approved and authorized at the highest level of the GPD, Chief William Swing. The order to April Wise to clear the area shortly before the arrival of the Klan

caravan came from the police's Command Post, designed to allow commanding officers to reach everyone in the field in an emergency, and Swing went there on the morning of November 3rd.

Chief Swing, who made contradictory statements after November 3rd, knew by mid-October that the WVO was having an anti-Klan rally and the Klan was coming. From the time Dawson was hired as a GPD informant, all the important information that Cooper received from Dawson about the Klan/Nazi plans to violently attack the November 3rd rally was passed to Chief Swing through Assistant Chief of Police, Col. Walter Burch (also the main author of the "low profile" approach). (This information from an Internal Affairs Division (IAD) report of Nov. 29, 1979)

Nor did this police plot happen without the support of city officials. The police are subordinate to city government and Chief Swing was subordinate to Hewitt Lovelace, Director of Public Safety for the City of Greensboro at the time. Swing, Lovelace, and City Manager Tom Osborne met in a restaurant on November 2nd to discuss Nelson Johnson and the anti-Klan rally. Swing reported what he knew about the impending confrontation to these city officials. They, along with Mayor Jim Melvin, authorized the police's plan for responding to what all knew to be a dire threat. Mayor Melvin, a few days after the killings, called the actions of the police on November 3 "very commendable." (Told to reporter William Welch, "Causes of Violence Not Easy to Pinpoint," *Durham Sun*, Nov. 6, 1979)

This letter contains only a small selection from the facts that indicate the responsibility of the Greensboro Police Department and the City of Greensboro for the Greensboro Massacre. We hope we have made clear the appropriateness of an apology from those two responsible parties. What we have told you here should resonate with the conclusion drawn by the GTRC in the Executive Summary of its 2006 Report that "the majority of commissioners find the single most important element that contributed to the violent outcome of the confrontation was the absence of police."

We again call attention to one of the most depressing facts in this saga—that not one of the many people with foreknowledge of the violent disruption to come that would take lives and change lives forever, warned the potential victims. Signe Waller, in her political memoir, wrote "The inaction and conspiracy of silence by the police condemns them all, for *no police officer lacked the authority to intervene to prevent the planned violent attack on the demonstrators.*" (p. 450)

In the aftermath of November 3, 1979, lies and cover-ups springing from the misdeeds of local to national law enforcement agencies did nothing to redeem the situation. Truthful, investigative reporting was scarce. The police used the rally participants' funeral march of November 11, 1979, as an opportunity to arrest as many attendees as they possibly could--(in this case they did not shy away from searching cars for weapons).

Three months after the murders, the City of Greensboro attempted to deceive the public when they moved to make the Coliseum unavailable as a venue for a major civil rights gathering. Thus, they were undermining freedom of speech and assembly. Two acquittals by all-white juries of Klan and Nazi members seen on videos shooting people down in broad daylight left many in the Greensboro community incredulous. In the final piece of litigation, however, a civil suit brought by surviving spouses and wounded protesters, we saw a glimmer of justice.

The June 1985 verdict of the civil suit found two police officers, (Spoon and Cooper), four Klansmen, (Dawson, Sherer, Matthews and Smith), and two Nazis, (Wood and Fowler) jointly

liable for the wrongful death of one demonstrator, Dr. Mike Nathan. The civil suit was the first judicial proceeding in which plaintiffs were not represented by lawyers from law enforcement agencies with a motive to cover up their own nefarious involvement in the massacre, but were represented by their own team of lawyers—and it was the first time the jury had a black juror.

For the plaintiffs, the civil suit was an incredible uphill struggle against many obstacles. Although the finding of the jury was unprecedented in holding some perpetrators of the November 3rd tragedy liable and in declaring joint liability of Klansmen, Nazis and police, it was only a partial victory and very far from complete justice. But it was something. *The City of Greensboro paid the \$350,000 judgment for the Klan, Nazis and Greensboro Police Officers found liable for wrongful death of one person.* At the same time the City and the Police denied any specific wrongdoings even up until the present time.

In putting forth our views we do not mean to avoid mistakes and errors in our own work. In his testimony to the *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission* on the first day of the second Public Hearing on August 26, 2005, the Reverend Nelson Johnson, one of the most blamed and demonized persons in the ranks of the CWP/WVO, expressed some of his regrets, self-criticisms and apologies, as excerpted from page 20 below: (To access the full testimony, go to www.greensborotrc.org , then Public Hearings and Statement Archives.)

...I deeply regret the use of the slogan “Death to the Klan.” In retrospect I am clear that it was an unfortunate, ill-advised slogan. The slogan was meant to convey the weight of our conviction about the damage done by racism, a challenge this nation...needs to face. It would have been more accurate to say “death to racism.”

...I very much regret that a flyer was developed in the form of a letter that called the Klan members cowards and challenged them to come from under their rocks and face the wrath of the people. That was wrong. The names demeaned and devalued the potential of people who were members of the Klan or Nazis. Although in a letter form, it was really a flyer and I need to emphasize here that it was never mailed to anyone by us.

...I regret the use of the word communism. Let me say that many people who were part of the Communist Workers Party no longer consider themselves communists. The party was officially disbanded in 1985. I have many friends, however, whom I respect deeply, who still consider themselves communists. I mean no disrespect to them.

...While I cherish much of what I have learned from my study of Marxism, the word communism, however, no longer describes my core beliefs. In addition, because of the fear and confusion associated with the word, it became almost impossible to use that term to convey broadly anything of positive value. I would note in passing that there is a passage in a very broadly read book which says, “Now ***all who believed were together, and had all things in common and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.***” This saying comes for the second chapter of Acts, verses 45 and 46, in a book called the *Holy Bible*. I think our culture would do well to ponder its implications as it relates to our economic structure and way of life.

None of the regrets and criticisms cited above in Johnson's testimony or any place else, can or should be used to justify the conduct of the City of Greensboro or the Police.

The truth is concrete and we strongly urge the City Council to be specific in any apology it makes. Specifics will be most helpful in overcoming the veil of shame and falsehood which continues to impede better race relationship and social justice and equity in our city. A genuine statement of apology with specifics will also be an enormous help in opening new avenues of communication, cooperation, reconciliation, and community building. This we believe will set Greensboro apart as one of the emerging great cities of the nation.

For those who would like to pursue this topic, we would like to recommend what we believe to be some of the best sources: they are from those closest to the events and from people who have done the most research. We list them here in chronological order: "Love and Revolution: A Political Memoir," Signe Waller, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002; "Through Survivors' Eyes: From the Sixties to the Greensboro Massacre," Sally Avery Bermanzohn, Vanderbilt University Press, 2003; "A City of Two Tales," Survivors' Understanding about the November 3, 1979 Greensboro Massacre as Presented to the Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Commission, 2005; "Final Report" by the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Presented to the residents of Greensboro, the City, the Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Project and other public bodies on May 25, 2006; and "Democracy, Dialogue, and Community Action: Truth and Reconciliation in Greensboro," Spoma Jovanovic, University of Arkansas Press, 2012.

We want to conclude this document with a quotation from a speech made at Grosse Pointe High School outside of Detroit by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on March 14, 1968--three weeks before his death:

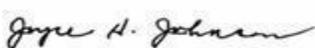
I want to discuss the race problem tonight, and I want to discuss it very honestly. I still believe that freedom is the bonus you receive for telling the truth. Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. And I do not see how we will ever solve the turbulent problem of race confronting our nation until there is an honest confrontation with it and a willing search for the truth and a willingness to admit the truth when we discover it.

We earnestly implore you to join us in "a willing search for the truth." A sincere apology from the City Council, along the lines we have sketched out here, would admirably show a willingness to admit truth once discovered. Thank you for reading through this letter. Please believe that we are sincere about working with the City and the Police to make our city better, and although we face a bitter past in many respects, the possibilities to use our God-given gifts to come together in truth, friendship and cooperation are always alive and never more needed than now.

Respectfully and sincerely yours,



Willena R. Cannon



Joyce H. Johnson



Nelson N. Johnson



Signe Waller