

Some Historical Perspective Related to the August 29, 2009 Neo Nazi Conference in Greensboro, NC

By Nelson N. Johnson

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I learned about the Neo-Nazi's plan for a conference in Greensboro on August 29th through a call from WFMY TV asking for a comment. I have decided not to make comments to the media on this matter. I have not been contacted by anyone associated with the publicized counter-demonstration activity. While I respect the feelings and the decision of those organizing the counter activities, under the current circumstances I believe it would deflect from the more substantial issues of police injustice, immigration abuse, racism, and systemic injustices that remain deeply rooted within the culture and institutions of Greensboro and Guilford County. For these reasons I will not be a part of the counter activities. We had planned to organize a local rally in support of comprehensive health care for all in Downtown Greensboro on August 29th. However, because we do not think it will be helpful for us to become part of any initiatives that might lend energy to the Nazis or that might facilitate establishment leaders' use of the "Nazi threat" to reinforce the promotion of their false context about 1979. We have decided instead to join our local health care support efforts with a statewide rally in Raleigh on August 29th. Hopefully, the Neo-Nazis will be gone on August 30th. However, the deeper issues discussed in this paper will certainly still be with us in Greensboro. If we can make a breakthrough on local issues, it will not only improve the quality of life in Greensboro, it will also contribute to the broader national movement for justice and righteousness.

The Second Tragedy

Most Greensboro residents have heard of the tragic killings of November 3, 1979 in our city. Perhaps the second greatest tragedy spawn by those daylight Klan and Nazi killings of five labor and community organizers was and remains the tragedy of false information, demonizing of individuals, and promoting a most distorted context. This second tragedy has left the city unable to express or receive forgiveness or to learn from or be healed from this profound violation of human rights. The volume of untruths, distortions, and demonizations has penetrated deep into the "groundwater" of our city and remains a toxin from which most residents drink daily – unaware of the cultural sickness being spread. With great effort and against great odds, dedicated citizens of our city worked to provide a truthful context so as to allow the tragedy of 1979 to become a learning laboratory from which we could emerge as a better and more just city. With one of the most open and democratic processes this city has ever experienced and that was joined and supported by many nationally and internationally, the Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation undertaking was one of our city's best efforts. It remains so, and someday will likely be recognized as such. However, *the powers that be rejected the truth and reconciliation efforts*, and the mainstream media dutifully played its role as the voice of the establishment. The pattern of promoting a flawed context, distorting information, and assigning motives was played out again. In spite of genuine efforts the controlling governmental, economic, and law enforcement authorities rejected both the quest for truth and the gesture of reconciliation. This is the unavoidable subtext of the Neo-Nazi Greensboro August 29th Conference.

Parallels: A Distortion of Historical Context

This brings us to the August 20th *News and Record Newspaper* article, "*Neo-Nazi Event Creates Parallels to the Clash in 1979.*" Author Jason Hardin's intent notwithstanding, the article is fundamentally flawed because it lacks historical context and objectively plays to a bevy of cultural assumptions. The article is rife with untruths, distortions and demonizations that have become part of the culture of our city. It is instructive, however, to examine the article to grasp its meaning and implications. We can start by asking the question, what actually are the parallels?

- *In 1979 those who applied for and ultimately received a parade permit to conduct a legal march had years of grassroots social justice work in Greensboro. This work involved forming grassroots organizations in seven poor neighborhoods, including Morningside Homes, and leading the citywide Greensboro Association of Poor People (GAPP). GAPP led successful community/labor struggles involving Blind Workers, Public School Cafeteria Workers, A&T Cafeteria Workers, AAA tenant rent strikers, and worked*

on hundreds of individual cases of injustice. GAPP helped establish Uhuru Bookstore and helped establish an independent school, Malcolm X Liberation University. In addition, members of the group that applied for the parade permit included an elected president of a local textile union plus others who were leading organizers at four other local textile plants. At the time of his death, one of the persons killed was a Greensboro City employee. The 1979 event did not grow from two outside groups that chose Greensboro for a “clash.” **Where is the parallel?**

- In 1979 the only group that knew for sure that Klan and Nazi members planned to come to Greensboro with the intention of breaking the law was the Greensboro Police Department and a few federal officials. The Police had an informant in the Klan who alerted them to the Klan’s plans. Consequently the police photographed Klan and Nazi members placing guns in their car and driving to the rally site. Yet, the police refused to tell demonstrators, refused to stop the Klan and Nazi caravan, refused to post police on site as agreed upon, and, instead, sent their tactical squad away to an early lunch. The police subsequently claimed they were confused about the starting point of the march for which they provided the permit – the same permit which they supplied to the Klan, who had no problem finding the site. **Where is the parallel?**
- Objectively, Greensboro Police proactively participated in the Klan/Nazi “counter demonstration” that resulted in the death of five people, wounding of ten others, and terrorizing of the community by collaborating with the Klan and Nazis by supplying the parade permit, by refusing to provide safety for a legal demonstration and the community, and by allowing Klan/Nazi members to escape. **Where is the parallel?**

Most citizens of Greensboro know little to nothing of what I have sketched out above. The media has played not a small role in perpetuating this dearth of valid information. Even if the Greensboro public read the factual material now available through the **Truth Report**, many would have difficulty believing what they read because my name and what we stood for have been so maligned and misrepresented. Most have heard that this was a “shootout” between two extremist groups, neither of which had any history in Greensboro but just chose Greensboro as merely a convenient place for their ideologically-driven “clash.” Mr. Hardin’s article fits the false context just described and plays to its untruths and distortions. Such is the mischievousness of the article.

Why Would the Nazis Choose Greensboro for Their Conference?

Try for a moment to enter the mind of the Neo-Nazi leaders. Consider the following:

- In 1979 Nazis, together with Klan members, killed two Jews, one Latino, one European White, and one Black in Greensboro in broad daylight and filmed by four television stations.
- That two criminal trials were held with all white juries and no one was found guilty of committing any crime.
- Felony charges were brought against six of the legal demonstrators, although later dropped because there was simply no basis for the charges.
- Greensboro Police Officers were found liable for wrongful death by a federal court; however, neither the police nor city officials accepted any responsibility, nor did they dismiss or discipline any police officers.
- That the Greensboro City Council voted to oppose the truth and reconciliation project, with all the whites voting to oppose the truth and reconciliation project and all the blacks voting to support it.
- That a White City Councilwoman stimulated a movement to have a Black City Councilwoman impeached for reasons that are now hard to remember because they were so frivolous and so without merit.
- That a White Police Chief presided over and defended the placement of a tracking device on a Black Police Officer’s car and developed a “black book,” listing Black Police Officers who felt they were the targets of discrimination and abuse. When the City Manager sought to address this situation, the Police Chief resigned.
- The City Manager – who sought to address the situation regarding the possibility of the Police Chief targeting black officers – was subsequently fired by the City Council.
- That 39 Police Officers of color have a pending suit against the City of Greensboro for racial discrimination
- That a broad base of white reaction has been built in the city, with the *Rhinoceros Times Newspaper* as its principal organizing tool and with significant, vocal presence within governmental bodies

These are a few things that might make Greensboro attractive to Nazis seeking a conference site.