



<http://gdc.gale.com/archivesunbound/>

GREENSBORO MASSACRE, 1979: SHOOTOUT BETWEEN THE AMERICAN NAZIS AND THE COMMUNIST WORKERS PARTY



On November 3, 1979 a rally and march of black industrial workers and Communists was planned in Greensboro, North Carolina against the Ku Klux Klan. The "Death to the Klan March" was to begin in a predominantly black housing project called Morningside Homes. Communist organizers publicly challenged the Klan to present themselves and "face the wrath of the people". During the rally, a caravan of cars containing Klansmen and members of the American Nazi Party drove by the housing projects where the Communists and other anti-Klan activists were congregating. What then occurred is in dispute, from rock-throwing and taunts on both sides to the sound of gunfire and deaths of five protest marchers. This collection of FBI, local and state police, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, and the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department, shed new light on the motivations of the Communist organizers, the shootings, subsequent investigations, and efforts to heal the Greensboro community.

Date Range: 1979-1981

Content: 13,239 images

Source Library: FBI Headquarter Library

Detailed Description:

"On November 3, 1979, at the corner of Carver and Everitt Streets, black and white demonstrators gather to march through Greensboro, North Carolina, a legal demonstration against the Ku Klux Klan. A caravan of Klansmen and Nazis pull up to the protesters and open fire.

Eighty-eight seconds later, five demonstrators lie dead and ten others wounded from the gunfire, recorded on camera by four TV stations. Four women have lost their husbands; three children have lost their fathers.

After two criminal trials, not a single gunman has spent a day in prison, although a civil trial won an unprecedented victory for the victims: For one of the only times in U.S. history, a jury held local police liable for cooperating with Ku Klux Klan in a wrongful death."¹

Hostility between the Ku Klux Klan and Communist Worker Party members flared in July 1979 when protesters disrupted a screening of the 1915 epic, *The Birth of a Nation* directed by D. W. Griffith, a cinematographic portrayal of the formation of the Ku Klux Klan. Taunts and inflammatory rhetoric were exchanged during the ensuing months.

On November 3, 1979 a rally and march of industrial workers and Communists was planned in Greensboro against the Ku Klux Klan. The "Death to the Klan March" was to begin in a predominantly black housing project called Morningside Homes. Communist organizers publicly challenged the Klan to present themselves and face the wrath of the people. During the rally, a caravan of cars containing Klansmen and members of the American Nazi Party drove by the housing projects where the Communists and other anti-Klan activists were congregating. Several marchers began to attack the Klansmen's cars with small wooden sticks or by throwing rocks. According to white supremacist Frazier Glenn Miller, the first shots were fired from a handgun by an anti-Klan demonstrator. However several witnesses reported Klansman Mark Sherer fired the first shot. Klansmen and Nazis fired into the demonstrators with shotguns, rifles and pistols. Cesar Cauce, Dr. James Waller, Sandi Smith, and Bill Sampson were killed at the scene. Eleven others were wounded. One of them, Dr. Michael Nathan, later died from his wounds at a hospital. Most of the armed confrontation was filmed by four local news camera crews.

One of the most questionable aspects of the shootout was the role of the police. Police would normally have been present at such a rally. However, no police were present, which allowed the assailants to escape. A police detective and a police photographer did follow the Klan and neo-Nazi caravan to the site, but did not attempt to intervene. Edward Dawson, a Klansman turned police informant, was in the lead car of the caravan. Two days prior to the march, one of the Klansmen went to the police station and obtained a map of the march and the rally. Bernard Butkovich, an undercover agent for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATFE) later testified that he was aware that Klansmen and members of the American Nazi Party unit he had infiltrated would confront the demonstrators. In a previous testimony, the neo-Nazis claimed the agent encouraged them to carry firearms to the anti-Klan demonstration.

Forty Klansmen and neo-Nazis, and several Communist marchers were involved in the shootings; sixteen Klansmen and Nazis were arrested and the six best cases were brought to trial first. Five Klansmen were charged with murder: David Matthews, Jerry Smith, Jack Fowler, Harold Flowers, and Billy Joe Franklin. During the second trial nine men were charged; in addition to David Matthews, Jerry Smith, Jack Fowler, six other men, Virgil Griffin, Eddie Dawson, Wayne Wood, Roy Toney, Coleman Blair Pridmore, and Rayford Milano Caudlewere charged with other crimes associated with the event. The two criminal trials resulted in the acquittal of the defendants by all-white juries.

This collection comprises FBI surveillance and informant reports and correspondence from a variety of offices including, Charlotte, Columbia, Birmingham, Jacksonville, New York City, Baltimore, Atlanta, Louisville, and Knoxville; Justice Department memoranda, correspondence, and analyses; Newsclippings and articles; Domestic Intelligence Section reports; Transcriptions of wiretaps, typewriter tapes, and coded messages; Memoranda of conversations; Local police reports and assessments.

¹ Bermanzohn, Sally, *Through Survivors Eyes: From the Sixties to the Greensboro Massacre* written by