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LESSONS IN TRUTH-SEEKING: INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES INFORMING UNITED STATES INITIATIVES

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**INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL EXPERIENCES IN
TRUTH-SEEKING
Greensboro and the United States
July 6–8, 2006**

Meeting Report¹

This book [the Ardoyne report] has a picture from Northern Ireland of police in riot gear, which looks eerily like the scene at the funeral march [after the Greensboro killings], and I'm sure we've all experienced this. What happened in Greensboro...happens all over the world.

*- meeting participant Dr. Paul Bermanzohn,
wounded in Greensboro in 1979.*

Executive Summary

Following the May 2006 release of the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (GTRC) Final Report—which gives an account of the context, causes, sequence, and consequence of the November 3, 1979, killings of five anti-Ku Klux Klan demonstrators—the Greensboro Beloved Community Center (BCC) and the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) convened a meeting of representatives from truth recovery efforts around the world. The meeting was sponsored by the ICTJ's "Managing Truth Commissions" (MTC) affinity group. The participating organizations and individuals represented international efforts from outside of the United States as well as domestic efforts, state-sponsored and grassroots initiatives, and efforts that were both national and local in scope.

The meeting had multiple goals, including to:

- 1) Assess the Greensboro experience and consider the challenges ahead for the community's efforts to deal with the past;
- 2) Discuss best practices and lessons learned about truth commissions, in particular:
 - a. The relative merits and challenges of local and national efforts.
 - b. Government-sanctioned truth-seeking as compared to civil society initiatives.
 - c. Inquiries into historical events, versus examinations of the more recent past; and
- 3) Reflect on the need for, and explore the potential of, truth commissions for other communities and issues in the United States.

Participants represented efforts to recover the truth about abuses in Northern Ireland, Peru, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and cities in the following states: Florida (Rosewood), Georgia, Louisiana (New Orleans), Maryland, Mississippi, New Mexico (Tewa Pueblo), North Carolina (Wilmington and Greensboro), and South Carolina (Abbeville). After the participants had described the initiatives and teachings that fell within their experience, the discussion turned to three main topics. The first was a discussion on the merits of government sponsorship and grassroots approaches, and the variable of local and national initiatives. It emerged that there was a general skepticism about state-sponsored efforts, particularly in places like the United States and

¹ This report was written by Lisa Magarrell and Blaz Gutierrez of the ICTJ, with input from co-organizers at the BCC of Greensboro. The ICTJ and BCC are especially grateful to Christina Repoley, a BCC volunteer from the Word & World group, for her detailed notes, which proved indispensable. Special thanks are also owed to Jill Williams for her work on the Executive Summary and final draft of the report, and Lewis A. Brandon III, for his photographs.

Northern Ireland, where significant governmental transitions have not taken place. Even in South Africa, where a transition was taking place during the efforts of its Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Commissioner Yasmin Sooka reflected on the importance of having local support. At the same time, most participants agreed that there was great value in the patterns that can be established with a broader, national scope, and the documentary evidence that can only be provided through some form of government involvement.

The second topic involved the scope of previous inquiries and the impact of this issue on effective remedies. Law professor Sherrilyn Ifill reflected on the relevant limitations in the law, and how various efforts in truth-recovery might seek to complement legal avenues of investigation. Legal efforts to establish accountability for an historical event run into statutes of limitations, and the requirement of “standing” (who can bring a claim) may favor investigations into more recent history. If an initiative seeks the support of media institutions, however, there may be a greater interest in delving more deeply into history. There was some agreement around a reflection by Greensboro’s Ed Whitfield, who said, “We need to look back as long as you can still distinguish the beneficiaries [of abuse] and victims.”

The final discussion topic related to truth-seeking and questions of inclusion in participatory democracy. There was consensus that truth-recovery processes can—but do not necessarily always—lead to more inclusion in participatory democracy and social justice.

The tension was discussed in terms of inclusion, or the lack thereof, in the truth-seeking process itself. Participants reflected on two different reasons community members may opt out of a truth-seeking process. First, privileged, empowered members of a community are generally comfortable with the status quo and may therefore have no interest in a truth-seeking effort. When they are interested in such an effort, there is legitimate concern that the process will turn into an effort to ‘manage the truth’. Second, less empowered members of the community often feel some fear of participating in such an effort because of a history of oppression, surveillance, and violence. As an effort towards social justice and change, therefore, a truth-seeking effort may serve the ideal of inclusion in participatory democracy by self-reflection on inclusion in its own process and educating the broader community about its related conclusions.

Although participants hailed from five continents and various political contexts, they concluded that there was great potential to gain from this type of an exchange of ideas with others involved in various types of truth-recovery efforts. They found that the Greensboro case, though not a model easily adapted to all scenarios, was an inspiration for other communities, and that truth-seeking efforts should be seen as a part of a social movement. The group noted that, although the similarities are vast, perhaps the greatest differences between these initiatives involve a distinction between political contexts in which significant transition is underway and those where change is more incremental. Finally, participants concluded that discussions of this sort should be seen as a call to continued action in terms of efforts to work towards fairness and justice.



From L to R: (front) Jill Williams, Barbara Walker, Eduardo Gonzalez (with daughter), (middle) Patricia Lundy, Joya Wesley, Muktha Jost, Pat Clark, Gail Glapion, Nelson Johnson, Joyce Johnson, Carolyn Allen, Lisa Magarrell, (back) Mark McGovern, Elijah Mungo.

I. INTRODUCTION

In late May 2006, the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission (GTRC) released its Final Report on the 1979 killings of five anti-Ku Klux Klan demonstrators. The local Greensboro group that had initiated the truth commission process—the Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Project (GTCRP or “the Project”)—felt that the time had come to highlight the work of the Commission, and to open a conversation about truth-seeking with various groups in the United States that had pursued or contemplated a similar process. It was also time to share the perspective of other truth-seeking efforts around the world, especially about the challenges experienced by communities after truth commission reports are made public.

To this end, the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), which has worked extensively in Greensboro in connection with the GTRC process, coordinated with the Beloved Community Center of Greensboro (BCC) to convene a meeting on international and national experiences of truth recovery, sponsored by the ICTJ’s “Managing Truth Commissions” (MTC) affinity group.² The meeting took place at Bennett College for Women in Greensboro over the course of two days in early July 2006. The size of the meeting (approximately 40 individuals) was decided upon to allow greater participation and to develop closer connections between participants. The sessions included press briefings at the conclusion of each day, and closed with a half-day public forum on the campus of North Carolina A&T State University and a celebration of the Greensboro TRC report.³



Rev. Nelson Johnson, Doria Johnson, Lisa Magarrell, Dr. Johnnetta B. Cole, Kathy Sanchez and Dr. Paul Bermanzohn gathering at Dr. Cole's home at Bennett College for Women on July 5, 2006.

A. About the ICTJ

The International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) assists countries and groups pursuing accountability for past mass atrocity or human rights abuse. The Center works in societies emerging from repressive rule or armed conflict, as well as in established democracies where historical injustices or systemic abuses remain unresolved.

In order to promote justice, peace, and reconciliation, government officials and nongovernmental advocates are likely to consider a variety of transitional justice approaches, including both judicial and non-judicial responses to human rights crimes. The ICTJ assists in the development of integrated, comprehensive, and localized approaches to transitional justice, comprising five key elements:

² The organizers would like to thank the Canadian International Development Agency, the staff of the Beloved Community Center, Blaz Gutierrez, Bennett College for Women, and North Carolina A&T State University for their efforts in ensuring the success of this meeting.

³ The celebration was a separate event, co-organized by the BCC, the Local Task Force of the Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Project, and the Greensboro Justice Fund.

- Prosecuting perpetrators
- Documenting and acknowledging violations through non-judicial means such as truth commissions
- Reforming abusive institutions
- Providing reparations to victims
- Facilitating reconciliation processes

The Center is committed to building local capacity and generally strengthening the emerging field of transitional justice by working closely with organizations and experts around the world. The ICTJ provides comparative information, legal and policy analysis, documentation, and strategic research to justice and truth-seeking institutions, nongovernmental organizations, governments and others.

In Greensboro, the ICTJ became involved at the request of a funder, as the organizations that would become the GTRC started to explore the possibility of engaging in a truth-seeking and reconciliation effort around the events of November 3, 1979. The Center provided comparative information and technical advice as the Project explored the idea of a truth commission, and developed a mandate and selection process. Once the Commission was seated, the ICTJ shared its expertise on truth commissions and facilitated connections with national and international experience relevant to the Greensboro process. The Center's Senior Associate, Lisa Magarrell, served as principal advisor to the GTRC throughout its mandate.

B. About the MTC

The Managing Truth Commissions affinity Group, or MTC, a group of experts, is an ICTJ initiative set up in December 2002. Its objective is to promote the exchange of ideas and strategies among senior managers of existing and past truth commissions. Members of the MTC have met in Lima (Peru), Bellagio (Italy), Freetown (Sierra Leone), Rabat (Morocco), Asuncion (Paraguay), Jakarta (Indonesia), New Haven, Connecticut (US), and Monrovia (Liberia) to share experiences on best practices and to discuss the relationship between truth commissions and other transitional justice initiatives.

Earlier meetings have covered a range of topics. These include: specific technical advice to commissions about to launch; critical feedback during the life of commissions; the relationship between non-governmental organizations and truth commissions; the potential of truth commission archives and their maintenance. A constantly growing list of high-level staff from truth commissions feeds into the diversity of MTC membership so that members' expertise can be applied to meet the needs of particular meetings.

Greensboro's relationship with the MTC affinity group began in 2003, when Nelson and Joyce Johnson of the BCC attended an MTC meeting in Peru, at the invitation of the ICTJ, to learn about truth commissions from others. In 2005, Elijah Mungo, a GTRC research division staff member, attended an MTC meeting at Yale University to participate in a discussion on truth commission archives. In addition, in August 2006, Sally Bermanzohn, one of the survivors of the 1979 killings in Greensboro, shared her experience of the GTRC process at an MTC meeting in Medellin, Colombia.

C. About the BCC

Based on the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, the mission of the BCC is to model in Greensboro a spirit of community that promotes social, economic, and personal relationships that affirm and realize the equality, dignity, worth, and the potential of all. The BCC evolved from over 40 years of connected struggles, beginning with the 1960s student sit-

in movement. In the 1990s, the BCC worked across social, economic and political divides to resolve a contentious K-Mart labor struggle. Although the BCC has a rich history of addressing a variety of issues, including labor, education, youth, homelessness, police and prison reform, the initiation of the truth and reconciliation process has impacted on the life of the whole community.

Together with the Greensboro Justice Fund, the BCC initiated the Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Project, setting up a national advisory committee and a local community task force to provide the grassroots grounding for the GTRC process. The national and local groups developed the mandate and selection process for the GTRC; the local task force engaged with the process during the Commission's work, and continues to do community work around the GTRC report and the legacy of 1979. The BCC was recently recognized by a Ford Foundation Leadership for a Changing World Award, in part for its role in the creation of the GTRC.

D. Meeting Objectives and Participants

The meeting had multiple goals, including to:

- Assess the Greensboro experience and consider the challenges to the community's efforts to deal with the past.
- Discuss good practices and lessons learned about truth commissions, particularly the relative merits and challenges of local and national efforts, government-sanctioned truth-seeking as compared to civil society initiatives, and inquiries into historical events versus examinations of the more recent past.
- Reflect on the need for, and explore the potential of, truth commissions for other communities and issues in the United States.

The meeting was convened in Greensboro and brought together commissioners and staff of the GTRC for the first time since the presentation of the Report. Attendance included three key MTC representatives (from truth commissions in Peru and South Africa and a community truth recovery project in Northern Ireland); individuals from the Greensboro Justice Fund and the local task force of the Greensboro initiating project; and activists from several other communities involved in truth-seeking and justice work in the United States. The meeting also provided a learning opportunity for an activist from Sri Lanka, who was considering how these case studies might inform her own work with Muslims displaced by the conflict in her country. This diverse and distinguished group brought to the meeting a broad range of experience and contexts in social justice efforts and was able to illustrate especially the painful and often slow-moving task of bringing accountability to bear on past abuses of human rights. The meeting was co-chaired by the BCC's Joyce Johnson and Lisa Magarrell from the ICTJ. A list of participants can be found in Appendix I.



Lisa Magarrell speaks while Joyce Johnson, Sherrilyn Ifill and Carolyn Allen listen.

E. Content of the Report

This report briefly revisits each of the cases presented during the course of the two-day meeting, and then focuses on the various thematic issues that emerged. In this respect, the report reflects the agenda for the meeting. On the first day, discussion focused on particular experiences, with an opportunity to learn a little about each, though none could be studied in depth due to time limitations. The second day was organized by topic, to allow participants to discuss common themes.

While each of the cases presented involved multiple challenges and opportunities, this brief report does not serve to convey detailed descriptions. Instead, lessons are distilled in order to illustrate the valuable information that each participant brought to the table. In fact, a good amount of time and creative effort outside of the context of this meeting has already gone into describing the work of the various initiatives represented here, as can be seen on respective websites noted at the end of the report.

The report begins by examining international experience, through the lens of commissions of national scope that were created by the state, and one local, grassroots initiative. The next topic is an examination of state-sponsored historical commissions, local and grassroots efforts, and emerging cases in the United States, with a very limited reference to national initiatives. The rich discussion on the various cases is highlighted mostly in the thematic section of this report, according to the three main agenda topics. They were:

- The variables of government sponsorship and grass roots approaches, local and national initiatives.
- The scope of previous inquiries and the impact of this on effective remedies
- The relationship between truth-seeking and questions of inclusion in participatory democracy.

Of the 12 initiatives represented, four had their beginnings in a governmental decision to address the past, although the results and recommendations of the various Commissions have not yet been entirely embraced. These include Peru, South Africa, Rosewood, and Wilmington. Four represented experiences from outside the United States: Peru, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland case also illustrated a local truth-seeking effort while, from the United States, eight of the cases studied reflected local or regional abuses. These were the Wilmington (North Carolina) “race riot” of 1898; the Rosewood (Florida) massacre of 1923; the racist anti-civil rights violence in the State of Mississippi; the legacy of racism exposed in post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans (Louisiana); Maryland’s history of lynching; the killings at Moore’s Ford bridge in the State of Georgia; the lynching and displacement of African-Americans in Abbeville (South Carolina), and the legacy of repression in one small Native American nation (Tewa Pueblo, New Mexico). These events arose out of varying circumstances and have been addressed in as many different ways. However, they also exposed similar characteristics of denial and an uphill struggle for acknowledgment and accountability.

Of course, these United States examples of past abuse represent only a small sampling of cases of the unresolved legacy of racism, class violence, and convenient ‘forgetting’ of the shameful events in the history of this country. Countless activists are working in communities around the United States, exploring a variety of ways to uncover and address past abuses whose legacy continues to be felt today. The ultimate purpose of this meeting, in addition to highlighting the recent Greensboro experience, was to consider the possibility—remote as it may seem—that the struggle for truth recovery in the United States can continue to grow in strength, effectiveness,

and common purpose, drawing on lessons from efforts to date, helping each other overcome obstacles, and taking heart from one another's support.⁴

While this report serves as a summary and written record of the meeting for the immediate benefit of conference participants, it may also prove a valuable tool for those seeking to learn more about truth-seeking, particularly from a grassroots perspective.

II. THE INTERNATIONAL CASES

There were three international truth recovery efforts represented at the meeting. The first focus was on Peru and South Africa, both truth commissions of national scope, authorized by the highest authority of the state, and whose work was completed some years ago.

A. Peru

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Peru (CVR, for its name in Spanish) was established in July 2001 by presidential decree. It was mandated to investigate human rights abuses by government, paramilitary, and guerrilla forces that occurred between 1980 and 2000 as well as to contribute to justice and to formulate recommendations. The Peruvian Commission was a large national commission that worked for over two years, with as many as 500 employees and 14 offices around the country. By the end of the process, it had cost US\$13 million dollars.

The Commission held twenty public hearings and took some 17,000 statements from individuals all over the country. Those who testified spoke to the Commission about a range of abuses that included killings, forced disappearances, massive displacement, torture and sexual violence, as well as unjust imprisonment. The nine-volume Final Report was published in August 2003 and revealed that insurgent violence and state counterinsurgency tactics had caused an estimated 69,000 deaths and disappearances, mostly in indigenous communities. The CVR recommended a comprehensive reparations plan, the prosecution of those most responsible for grave human rights abuses, institutional reforms, and a series of other measures of socio-economic justice. In the three years since the report was issued, some incremental progress was made, particularly in the areas of criminal justice and reparations.

Eduardo Gonzalez, now a Senior Associate at the ICTJ, served as a core staff member of the Commission. He was responsible for the CVR's public hearings, victim and witness protection, and was also a member of the editorial committee that worked on the Commission's Final Report. At the meeting, he shared several key lessons gleaned from the Peruvian experience.

The first task of the Peruvian Commission was to define and address the challenging notion of reconciliation. The Commission began as a truth-seeking body, designated in legislation as, simply, "The Truth Commission." However, intervening elections prior to the installation of the Commission led to an amendment in the presidential decree creating the body. The new government acceded to the pressure of the conservative wing of the Catholic Church and changed the name to the *Truth and Reconciliation* Commission. However, as the Commissioners saw it, the Commission was not a mental health project, nor would it be able to force the issue of reconciliation. As Gonzalez put it:

⁴ In fact, some network building is already occurring in the southern part of the country, as exemplified by a "Regional Summit on Racial Violence and Reconciliation" held in Oxford, Mississippi in March 2006 (sponsored by the University of Mississippi's William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliations), the Southern Truth and Reconciliation (STAR) project based in Atlanta, Georgia, and by The Birmingham Pledge (Alabama).

We did not have any right to impose any kind of forced reconciliation between victims and offenders. We did not think that was the work of a Truth Commission. Instead, we concentrated on advancing our notion of reconciliation between the state and civil society. We made recommendations and believed that if these recommendations were implemented there would be systemic change, not focused on the individuals but on the system.

The Commission's understanding of reconciliation in these terms allowed it to recommend actions, not dictate individuals' feelings about loss or shame.



Eduardo Gonzalez (with daughter)

Second, the Peruvian Commission saw itself as part of a larger process. According to Gonzalez, “We knew that the work was a high point in a campaign to recover historical memory, but we knew it had to be part of a larger societal movement or it would fail.” In that spirit, the Commission worked hard to reach out to many sectors to establish alliances. This was true even in connection with the armed forces, which could not be viewed as a monolithic entity opposed to the CVR, but as one that included both some supporters as well as organized opposition to the work of the Commission. In this sense, the process did not end with the final handover of the CVR's report, but continues today, as civil society organizations and victims press for implementation of the Commission's recommendations and other changes needed to ensure greater respect for human rights.

Third, the Peruvian experience demonstrated that part of what made the Commission possible, and lent credence to the potential for a larger process of change, was finding the best political window of opportunity for this kind of effort. There was a transitional period and a strong sentiment from socio-political arenas that this was the time to recover the historical memory of the country. The transition meant that perpetrators were not in a strong position to put up resistance, allowing the Commission to reach beyond the supportive non-governmental human rights organizations and similar groups that were its natural allies. Not all contexts involve a President being forced out of office and a military weakened by a huge corruption scandal, as was the case in Peru, but the lesson is the same: timing is important.

Finally, the Commission may have started out with the idea that it was uncovering a single official narrative of the 20-year period it was charged with examining. However, through its work, listening to thousands of people and sifting through piles of documentation and other evidence, it found instead that there were many histories that contrasted and even conflicted with one another. For example, the Commission discovered multiple ways of understanding impunity through the eyes of perpetrators and victims. Some perpetrators had been unaware that they were committing crimes; others were proud of what they had done. There were also victims who had understood that crimes had been committed, and others who had not recognized the violations for what they were. A vast range of abuses was uncovered, from disappearances in which victims were killed and tortured in secrecy, to massacres by perpetrators who left their victims on display, all with the aim of terrifying communities. The Commission could not weave all of this into a single narrative; rather, according to Gonzalez, “the most we could do was open the dialogue. This is what happened in Greensboro. People took their memories and let an independent process examine them.” The truth has multiple levels and personal narratives cannot be ignored.

B. South Africa

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established in 1995 by the South African parliament to investigate human rights violations during the apartheid era between 1960 and 1994, when the first democratic elections took place. Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu chaired the 17-member body, which held public hearings throughout South Africa. Former victims of human rights abuses told their stories; some perpetrators detailed their acts in bids for amnesty from prosecution, and institutional actors, such as representatives of political parties, the judicial system, and the media made presentations about their own roles.

Yasmin Sooka was appointed to the TRC in 1995 and served as the deputy chair of its human rights violations committee. She described the complex social reality in which the Commission unfolded:

In South Africa, one of the things was that we had to hang with each other — whites and blacks — even though we had negotiated political power, everything was in the hands of white people. We needed them and they needed us, but also the influence of perpetrators on our society was everywhere.

Understanding this context was important to understanding the difficult choices that were made in establishing the TRC. Sooka pointed out that:

[Violations of human rights] are not isolated incidents, so civil and political violations, you have to go behind that and ask why do these things happen, and then you see that a small group of people want to retain power and resources.

Sooka explained further that, in South Africa, people stood up to speak against injustice that was enshrined in legislation.

The way in which apartheid worked was to dehumanize people: you were black, you were a communist. The way in which the scare of communism was used was something the Commission had to struggle with. When the law is unjust, you have to oppose it. One of the most important findings was that the Apartheid state was a criminal state. What you find now in South Africa is that no one will say they supported apartheid. Whites say, ‘we did not know.’

In the light of these revelations, the TRC needed to focus on the systemic nature of apartheid and the underlying causes of the violations. In 2006 it had been 10 years since the South African TRC was established. The first five-volume report was handed over in 1999, two additional volumes were printed in 2003 and, in 2004, there was a study on disappearances. Sooka elaborated on the difficulties involved:



Yasmin Sooka speaks

We had to go and find the money to support that continued work. There are political moments when you enjoy support, but once the Commission completes its work there is a tendency to say, ‘okay, we did it, lets move on.’ Then the victims become the unpopular voices, and they had to struggle more to have their voices heard. This year we are pressing our government to deal with community reparations. It is important to hear what people have to say [in public hearings and testimonies before the TRC], but it is not enough. Once you have spoken up you expect something to happen, and the acknowledgement of the society and the perpetrator is very important. But the leadership of the government has never taken responsibility, has never apologized. The reality behind the violations is the political and economic issues. Reconciliation is a process, not a package, and it should never come at the expense of redress to the communities who suffered.

International examples of truth-seeking have occurred not only on a national scale, but also through local and non-governmental efforts. The international cases represented at the meeting included a grassroots based process from Ardoyne in Northern Ireland and one participant from Sri Lanka. The latter spoke to the group about her interest in addressing the issues faced by a specific religious minority community. Not only had it been displaced by the conflict, but its story had also been largely ignored in the overall picture. This report focuses on the Ardoyne case because that specific Sri Lankan case is still in the conceptual stage.

C. Northern Ireland: the Ardoyne Community

Ardoyne is a small, Catholic, nationalist⁵ working class community in North Belfast, with a population of some 7,500, and surrounded on three sides by loyalist⁶ Protestant areas. During the 30 years of the Northern Ireland conflict, 99 people from Ardoyne were killed, giving it one of the highest rates of conflict-related deaths of any area in the North. The first of these victims was killed in August 1969, when mobs of loyalists and members of the police force attacked people in Ardoyne; the last was in 1998, just after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement that more or less signaled the end of the conflict.



Dr. Mark McGovern

In the lead-up to the Agreement, the British state introduced a series of measures to deal with what became known as the ‘victims’ agenda’. This included the appointment in 1997 of a Victims’ Commissioner, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, who issued a report the following year. The Bloomfield Report, as it came to be known, was criticized by nationalists for failing to adequately address outstanding issues of truth and justice, and for excluding any mention of British state violence. A debate on what became known as the ‘hierarchy of victimhood’ emerged. In the intervening years, the ‘victims’ agenda’ and the related truth and justice debate became a highly contentious issue and a key site of struggle within civil society and the wider political arena. As Dr. Mark McGovern put it, “the British state is still the most powerful in being able to manage or deny the truth.”

Within the nationalist community, locally based groups and initiatives emerged to contest the dominant official discourse. A steady momentum in favor of uncovering the truth emerged as a

⁵ Nationalists are those in Northern Ireland (mostly Catholic) who want to see Northern Ireland separate from the United Kingdom and reunite with the Republic of Ireland as an independent state.

⁶ Crown loyalists are those in Northern Ireland (mostly Protestant) who wish to keep this region under British rule.

means of dealing with the past. It was within this context that the Ardoyne Commemoration Project of Northern Ireland was created. The Project was a grassroots initiative that collected the testimony of family members and witnesses to the killings of Ardoyne's victims. McGovern explained:

The logic comes from a basic sense of wanting to commemorate what had happened. They had been a demonized community; they were not high in the 'hierarchy of victims.' The Project was born out of an initial sense of not wanting their history to be lost. I had never heard of truth commissions [at the time], but it did allow us to have a social base and an honesty.

The report, "Ardoyne: The Untold Truth,"⁷ describes the process:

With the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, the Ardoyne Commemoration Project began interviewing relatives, friends, and eyewitnesses about all those who had been killed. It looked for photographs of the dead. It researched the circumstances of every killing and explored the broader political context prevailing at the time. Over three hundred interviews were completed.

McGovern addressed some of the challenges and opportunities presented by this case:

Northern Ireland is different than other transitional societies, in that we have not had a truth process; the transition has not been much of a transition. In a sense, that created both a problem for finding out the truth, and an opportunity. We thought it would take a couple of months and it took four years; we had not much in the way of resources. We interviewed the relatives of all 99 victims killed. We went into people's homes, we wanted people to have a sense of participating all the time. At the end, people felt ownership of the book. It meant that the real strength was that people had a sense of possession. The limit is that we can't get accountability. But the process matters; in many ways the process, giving people a sense of ownership and control, can be an end in itself. It can get at other kinds of truth.

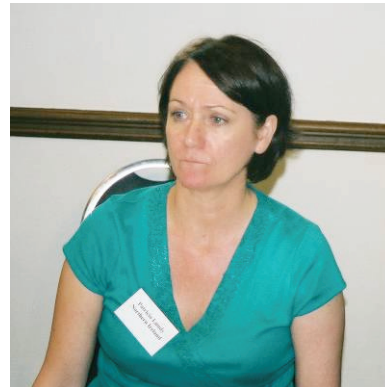
The Ardoyne Commemoration Project members conducted an evaluation of the project more than a year after the initial report was published. While there is often an assumption that providing people with the opportunity to explore and talk about the events of the past is a positive step, there is often little research done to discover whether or not this is actually the case. Dr. Patricia Lundy explained that:

Since we were concerned about whether we had done the right thing, we decided to go back and ask the participants for their feedback on the impact at the different levels—individual, family and community. We also interviewed the volunteers and the wider community.

⁷ BTP Publications Ltd. (Belfast: 2002).

Several key themes emerged as described by Dr. Lundy:

It was clear that it was important for people to be given the opportunity to tell the story; it was a political act for many people, it was bearing witness. Recognition and acknowledgement, although we could not get it institutionally, was still significant. [The process] was also seen as therapeutic, cathartic, bringing an end to a culture of silence.



Dr. Patricia Lundy

At the same time, McGovern emphasized many of the difficulties that such a process involves:

People had been subject to massive surveillance for so long, and to so much else, that people were often not inclined to tell the truth. So the gathering of testimonies took time and one-on-one engagement. But that does mean, particularly when it is carried out by local people, that it can get to truths that cannot be accessed any other way. This kind of follow-up work was needed as well, to see what lessons could be learnt.

Many of the problems facing communities are the direct consequences of state counter-insurgency strategies and the legacy of internal divisions. These pose particular problems for genuine truth recovery in post-conflict transition, and may be best dealt with by grassroots, participatory approaches. Lundy noted that:

The use of informers in a small community meant that you could not talk freely about things for fear of violence. There were some in the community who were killed by their own, and this had a massive impact. [One] needs to go back and really ask the people how the process affected them; that is also part of the story.

However, whatever the difficulties of a participatory strategy, the follow-up research also demonstrated that, for most, the process was of great value. Lundy concluded: “The evidence shows that people felt that it was important to challenge official denial on the one hand, and confront the conflicting views over deaths of individuals within the community as well.”

III. THE UNITED STATES

A. Local and Grassroots Initiatives: Greensboro

The conference put particular emphasis on the Greensboro case, due to the location of the meeting and the presence of commissioners, staff, and local activists who had worked in support of this process. At the time of the meeting, the commissioners were in the process of formally dissolving the GTRC as an organization and former staff members were closing the office, ensuring an organized handover of the archives to Bennett College and making the necessary arrangements to keep the GTRC website accessible to the public. The meeting came approximately six weeks after the release of the report, and it was an important opportunity for those closest to it to think collectively about the first lessons of the experience while the process was still very fresh in their minds.



Muktha Jost speaks as Ed Whitfield and Demetria Ledbetter listen.

1. Background

On November 3, 1979, in the low-income, mostly African American Morningside neighborhood of Greensboro, North Carolina, a caravan of Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and Nazi Party members arrived on the scene of a racially mixed “Death to the Klan” rally, seeking to provoke a violent confrontation. As the caravan drove past the gathering of political activists and labor organizers—several of them affiliated with

the Communist Workers Party, which had earlier issued a public challenge to the Klan—some of the demonstrators beat on the cars. A stick fight ensued between some Klan/Nazi members and some of the demonstrators, who had planned to march against the Klan and then hold a meeting on economic justice issues. Two shots were fired from the lead car of the Klan/Nazi caravan. Several of the Klan/Nazis then unloaded weapons from a car at the rear, and fired at the demonstrators. While news cameras filmed, five protesters were shot dead and 10 wounded by Klan and Nazi bullets, while a few armed members among the mostly unarmed demonstrators fired back without hitting anyone. Police forces—who knew about the mobilization of the Klan and Nazis against the march and had indeed given them information about it—were not deployed at the march gathering point at the time of the attack, although a police informant was in the lead car of the Klan/Nazi caravan and his police handler followed closely behind.

State and federal criminal murder trials before all-white juries resulted in acquittals of those charged. A federal civil trial found certain individuals (two police officers, four Klansmen, and two Nazi Party members) liable for damages for the wrongful death of the only victim who was not a formal member of the CWP. (Other smaller judgments for assault were entered against the Klan and Nazis on behalf of two injured demonstrators.) The City of Greensboro paid the wrongful death judgment of US\$ 351,000 on behalf of all defendants in settlement of the case (thereby avoiding appeals from both sides), but has consistently denied any responsibility.

The GTRC report examined three major questions:

- *“What brought Greensboro to November 3?”* This included a historical look at the Black Power movement and its relation to later multicultural organizing, labor, unions and anticommunism in the North Carolina textile mills, and the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan in North Carolina in the 1970s.
- *“What plans were made for November 3 and what was the sequence of events on that date?”* This covered prior federal investigations of white supremacists and the Workers Viewpoint Organization (forerunner of the CWP); the Greensboro Police Department and the ‘Communist problem’, intelligence gathering, and planning for the anti-Klan campaign.
- *“What happened after that date?”* This included a review of the Police Internal Affairs Investigation; the City’s response; the Justice system’s role; media portrayals and public opinion, and the consequences and current relevance of November 3, 1979.

The Commission found that “the heaviest responsibility” was on the Klan and Nazis, who planned to provoke violence. It also found that the demonstrators should have consulted more in the neighborhood about the rally they planned there, that they underestimated the danger and used unpopular tactics, and that they shared some lesser measure of responsibility but “did not seek or deserve to be killed.” The Commission did not find that police and Klan/Nazis had conspired to commit murder, but did find that “the deaths could have been prevented with visible police presence” and that the police “knowledge that violence was likely, combined with the lack of police action to prevent it, clearly shows negligence by the police in their duty.” The police decision to stay away, in the view of the majority of commissioners, “suggests...there was intentionality to fail to provide adequate protection,” on the part of some officers. Police decisions are criticized in the report as “reckless,” “unconscionable,” and as showing “reprehensible disregard for the safety of the marchers and local residents.” The report also criticized the City’s response to the event through heavy-handed security tactics and “clamping down on citizen protest”. It found that “a flawed system of jury selection created all-white juries unrepresentative of the community, contributing to the acquittals.



Angela Lawrence speaks while Paul and Sally Bermanzohn and Emily Harwell listen.

Finally, the Commission found that the events of November 3, 1979, “are woven through with issues of race and class.” Its report discusses “underlying issues including racial and economic justice, white supremacy, and the failure of the police and justice system to provide equal protection to all residents.”

The Commission recommended that the City, the police department, and responsible individuals acknowledge their role and apologize, as well as take steps toward reconciliation. Further, it recommended the implementation of a living wage for all City and County workers, the establishment of citizen review committees on police accountability and the creation of a community justice center. The Report referred to contemporary inquiries about police corruption and urged public release of investigative reports and appropriate legal action. All citizens were encouraged to “take an active role in understanding racism, poverty, oppression, and privilege around them, and the ways in which their own actions play a role in perpetuating disparities.”

Some of this was happening already. As of the publication of this report, the GTRC’s Final Report was being taken up in some college classrooms in Greensboro and discussed in small groups. Following the meeting reported here, the City Council held an informal discussion of the report and agreed to consider it further, and to subsequently refer specific questions to the city’s Human Relations Commission, though to date this has not occurred.

2. Lessons and Observations

In 1999, when local activists and survivors of the 1979 events were commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the killings, it became clear to them that there was enough of a social base to open a discussion. It was also apparent that there was still a lack of understanding of the meaning of 1979 and its connection to racial and economic justice.

Nelson Johnson spoke of the earliest beginnings of the process and some lessons learned there:

We began to explore what might be some ways we can begin to discuss this. The community cannot be whole or healthy with this below the surface, and whenever you push for change this becomes an obstacle. We talked about having a mock trial, and other ideas. Eventually we came to the view that what was needed was a process that could wed a struggle to understand the real forces and factors at work, with an equally determined struggle to help heal our community. The Andrus Family Fund said they knew some people who might be helpful. Then we met Lisa Magarrell [of the ICTJ]. That started a sincere discussion on Truth and Reconciliation as drawn from experiences around the world, such as South Africa. With the wisdom of [former Greensboro Mayor] Carolyn Allen and [Rev] “Z” Holler we formed the local Task Force. We spent a long time writing a declaration of intent. With any initiative like this, there needs to be real clarity, you have to write it down, and people have to agree so there is a reference point for what you are trying to do. If there were no declaration, people would be pitted against each other. Those were some of the shaping forces. Once the Commissioners were elected, they took center stage.

The co-chairs of the local Task Force that put the Commission mandate in place and organized a panel of citizens to select the commissioners spoke to the challenges of ‘institutional intransigence’. According to Carolyn Allen:

The cover for a lot of that was twofold. First, looking at a blemish in our history will ruin Greensboro’s image. Greensboro has always thought of itself as a place where civility—niceness—ruled: ‘please don’t discuss anything that will make anyone uncomfortable.’ The second argument used was that this might hurt our chances for economic development. That has also proved to carry no weight but this is still the argument that folks fall back on.

Z Holler agreed:

I do think there is in Greensboro’s leadership tremendous strength of denial—what you don’t like you simply don’t deal with. That’s what we are up against time after time as we try to address the community. I think we have a superlative document to work from. It taught me a lesson in history; I grew up here but I didn’t know the first part of the report, it had all passed me by in my middle class academic white community. In the middle, that’s who we were, we thought of ourselves as not the heavy racists elsewhere in the south. This goes against Greensboro’s sense of itself.



Z Holler speaks while Carolyn Allen listens.

Ed Whitfield, one of the members of the selection panel representing more than a dozen sectors of the community who were brought together to choose the commissioners, recalled:

There is no way to have seven people [the Commissioners] represent everyone in the city. There were people that promised to participate in the [selection] process that did not. But those who did came up with a great group of people.... The challenge was to come up with a Commission that could carry out the mandate and be broadly representative. We did not feel the need to include people on the Commission that we knew would oppose the efforts of the mandate. The selection process came out of our consultations with Peter Storey and the South Africa process. You can't represent everyone but you can do a good job.

The Commissioners and staff reflected on some of the hurdles that they had faced when the Commission was sitting, both in terms of logistics and substance. Like the local task force, the Commission faced skepticism and opposition about what they were doing and why. Many of the challenges the Commission faced mirrored the very subjects they were looking into, and were not very different from those of 1979: anti-communism, myths that demonized and blamed the anti-Klan organizers for what had happened, and the belief that the whole story was about 'outsiders' and had nothing to do with the community. The GTRC had to demonstrate to some skeptics in the community that it was a separate and independent body and should not be identified solely with one narrative. Commissioner Mark Sills noted that, "Folks didn't think we would get the Klan or police to testify, and when they began to see that it did happen, attitudes changed." Commissioner Bob Peters pointed out that the mandate served the Commission well as a reference point to their mission and kept the Commission on course.

Another challenge that was echoed throughout the meeting was the inability to motivate poor people in the work of the Commission. The typical challenges that confront the poor—having to work multiple jobs, living in parts of the city that are inaccessible to public transportation, and inadequate school systems without the resources to teach local history—all limited the impact of the Commission's outreach. According to Commissioner Angela Lawrence, there was also still fear that speaking to the Commission about November 3 could bring repercussions. She framed the question as follows: "After the education piece, what happens? How do you move people, especially when they are so afraid of losing what little they do have? ... If home is not safe and secure it is hard to focus on these issues." But for those who did engage, the experience was positive, according to Lawrence, giving them "... a platform like the TRC did. A lot of the people in that community had never had the opportunity to talk about that day, and to show them that their voices do have power. Also, to offer some solutions, not that we have answers to everything, but to give some hope."

Commissioners were part-time and mostly unpaid; all had other jobs and responsibilities. Although this resulted in hardship, it also lent credibility to their work. They had to spend more than six months of commissioner, staff, and mandate time putting together funding to allow them to do the work, and they underestimated at the beginning how expensive the effort would ultimately be. (The Commission's work ultimately cost approximately \$430,000.)

According to Mark Sills, "If I could change one thing about what we did, it would have made our life easier to have already established funding, if we had not spent six months



Mark Sills

just figuring out how we would get funding.” In fact, according to the GTRC Research Director, Dr Emily Harwell, a great deal of time was spent fundraising throughout the course of the Commission’s mandate, at the expense of research and other substantive work.

Funding had serious implications for staffing and was not easy to come by locally. According to staff member Harwell:

Truth commissions are often under tight deadlines outlined by their mandate, and in that circumstance you need to have a paid staff and not rely on volunteers to do research, which is the absolute core of the truth-seeking part of the mandate. At the same time, however, it is not a coincidence that truth commissions tend to be under-funded; they are trying to reveal things about the very people who would have the money to give. There is a reason that people with a lot of money are not going to support you. There are outside foundations that can help, but then you get criticized for taking money from people who are not from here.

The investment of time that the Commission process required from commissioners and staff was greater than anyone had anticipated. Building consensus and coming to a full understanding of the vast quantities of information the staff were gathering meant meeting after meeting, sometimes to the frustration of those who served on the Commission. Even so, there was some concern that there was still not enough time at the end to do justice to all the information gathered. Commissioner Muktha Jost felt that:

After two years of working together, we were committed to each other, but once we got all the pieces on the table there was really not enough time to take it the whole way. Everyone was tired, we had already asked for extensions. We all gave it what we could, but we did not have enough time.

Although there was some media coverage that was exciting to see, and local coverage was extensive, particularly once the Commission’s public work got underway, there was some disappointment that the national media did not take up the story more. GTRC Executive Director Jill Williams commented,

We had to make some decisions about how we would spend our time. We did decide that we had to focus ourselves here in Greensboro. To focus nationally and internationally we felt we would have to compromise. The real story was not about what the larger media wanted it to be about. The efforts were not perfect but with technology, we do have more opportunity to get the word out.

B. State-sponsored Historical Investigations: Wilmington and Rosewood

Representatives of two United States commissions created by state legislation participated in the meeting: the 1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission and the Rosewood Commission.⁸ Both groups dealt with historical events and have submitted reports. The Wilmington Commission is the most recent (its final report was submitted in May 2006) and awaits official response. Rosewood has a longer record of accomplishment in terms of steps taken in response to its report.

Professor Irving Joyner told meeting participants that Wilmington was the only recorded coup d'état in United States history. It concerned the overthrow, on November 11, 1898, of a legitimately elected city government. The Democratic Party had gained control of the North Carolina General Assembly in October of 1898, and began planning the overthrow of the Wilmington city government. Supported by the racist discourse promoted in the local press, a group of Democrats and other white racists organized in the Klan and Red-shirts went in and ran white populists and black leadership out of town, having surrounded them with armed white men and forced them to resign their offices. The death count ranged from 14–60 individuals, and there was displacement of 20 targeted individuals, and a mass exodus of over 2100 others. The absence of a public outcry and official response to the violence allowed for denial about the true nature of what occurred to settle into North Carolina history.

At the time, Wilmington was the most prosperous city in the state. It had a majority African-American population that was politically aligned with the Populist Party, made up mainly of white farmers and laborers, and which co-governed with the Republican Party. The governor of North Carolina was himself a member of the Populist Party and enjoyed support from the African-American population. After the coup, between 1898 and 1968, no African American was elected to serve in the North Carolina General Assembly, and only since 1984 have more than four African Americans served simultaneously.



Irving Joyner

Leading up to the centennial anniversary of the coup in 1998, two African-American state assemblymen, representing New Hanover County (Wilmington is the county seat), drafted the legislation required to create the 1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission. It was formed in 2000, with no financial resources. Commission members worked for three years without any funds, until they were finally reimbursed for their expenses and given the support of one staff person.

The Commission recommended economic development programs in the city of Wilmington in the parts of town where people had been forcibly removed from their land, and legislation aimed at creating a new statute of limitations so that the descendants of victims could make claims for redress. Specific recommendations were made to the News and Observer and Charlotte Observer newspapers, including acknowledgment of the papers' role in the events of 1898, an educational

⁸ The organizers also approached representatives from the Tulsa Race Riot Commission process, but they did not send a delegate to the meeting. A representative from the Southern Truth and Reconciliation group (STAR) indicated that in Atlanta there would soon be a series of important activities around the centennial of that city's 1906 "race riot," to disseminate information, using art and other forms to reflect on what happened. See http://www.1906atlantaraceriot.org/Centennial_Remembrance_Weekend.pdf for events that took place in September 2006.

supplement on the case to go out to all of their readers, and scholarships for African American students who hope to study journalism.

Rosewood, Florida had a similarly violent history of massive displacement of African Americans. A small community of approximately 25–30 families, it was located in the central part of the state. The majority of the hamlet’s population was African American. In January of 1923, a group of white vigilantes — responding to allegations that a white woman had been raped by a black man from Rosewood — entered the town. In the ensuing mob violence, some 8–17 people were killed, and the entire hamlet was dispossessed. Prior to a Grand Jury investigation of the violence, the remnants of the town were completely destroyed. This led to dismissal of the case on the grounds of insufficient evidence.

Decades later, in 1993, the Florida Board of Regents received a report submitted by five distinguished Florida academics titled, “A Documented History of the Incident Which Occurred at Rosewood, Florida in January, 1923.” The report recorded documentary evidence and testimonies from survivors, and its authors concluded that the acts of violence committed were unwarranted and that criminal justice had failed in the immediate aftermath of the massacre. The authors of the report operated on a US\$ 50,000 budget appropriated by the State House of Representatives. One year after the report was submitted, the State of Florida enacted legislation to provide US\$ 2 million in compensation to the surviving victims of the Rosewood massacre. The Bill specifically required law enforcement officers to re-interview available witnesses to determine if criminal proceedings could be pursued; created a fund to compensate Rosewood families for loss of property and for those who sustained emotional trauma; and established a scholarship fund for the descendants of the Rosewood families.

Accompanying the efforts of the Board of Regents and the state legislature, two groups in particular emerged to heighten awareness of the Rosewood massacre and displacement. The Rosewood Forum, founded in 1994, is a civil society organization that works to raise awareness about the events and their aftermath among the general public. The second organization, the Rosewood Heritage Foundation, was founded in 1995 by survivors and descendants of the victims of the massacre. The work of the Rosewood Heritage Foundation has supported the development of bus and speaking tours. Both organizations have been central to the inclusion of Rosewood in state history texts and have produced a variety of exhibitions and pedagogical materials for schools.

Both commissions were sparked by the recent modest resurgence of African American lawmakers who were instrumental in developing the mandates and securing legislative approval for the respective historical inquiries. At the time of the events in question, both communities were home to prosperous African American families immediately following Reconstruction. Black citizens not only held authority in the local community — serving as educators, doctors, and business people — but as members of local and state political leadership. Both commissions point to the violent attack on black communities as a response to the growth and the social promise these communities held out to former slaves and other African American citizens. Both commissions link that violent and racist attack to later and even present-day repercussions.



Sherry Dupree

In terms of operational style, both commissions functioned as investigative bodies assigned to research particular moments in history, with mandates that focused on describing events and consequences, as well as making recommendations for appropriate present-day redress. The commissions operated with limited funding, and each was comprised of a panel of distinguished researchers that included historians, legal experts, and educators. The two commissions investigated singular events that occurred in the relatively distant past, making the search for survivors or descendants particularly difficult. They framed reparations as a debt, not only to victims from the era, but also to their descendants and the larger community. As shown through the Rosewood case, landmark decisions on reparations have been made in Florida, while the debate on this topic is still pending for Wilmington.

The options for continued activism vary from state to state and at this time those for Wilmington have yet to be fully explored. The North Carolina General Assembly was expected to debate the findings and proposed remedies only in early 2007. A state-wide information campaign was being contemplated, and the delay in the legislative debate, while it might allow interest to cool, might also offer a greater opportunity to garner grassroots support for measures of redress and other state responses to the report. The achievements of the Rosewood Commission are measured in part by the recognition and reparations given to victims and their descendants; however, following this, the state of Florida passed legislation barring future claims related to Rosewood. In essence, the state asserted that its work has been completed and that it has made a good-faith attempt at addressing a past injustice.

In this context, Ed Whitfield raised the question, “What is the incentive for the perpetrators of these acts to come forward for reconciliation?” He continued:

The educational aspect of this is the most important. People have a need to have the myths of denial to cover for the activities they are doing. The process of taking off the layers of lies and myths that leaves bare the truth allows people to say there is something fundamentally wrong in our history. What happened in Wilmington was sanctioned at the highest levels of government, and these lies have to be exposed.

Joyner noted:

We are looking at education and community support, but we are also looking at the supposed power of our African American legislators in the General Assembly. That has never really been tested before. We are putting it on their shoulders. Republicans want to expose the Democratic Party. We have laid bare many of those open secrets and we are prepared to ride it out.

Sherry Dupree, from the Rosewood Heritage Foundation, cautioned that:

Politics is something we have to be very careful with; the country often does not want to deal with justice. There is also a lot of fear, and you have to have a couple of people to really go for it and begin. As you build the roots, you will find that church groups are strong and will support you. We have not talked about the private organizations.... They know what really happened and can talk about it among themselves. The Masons have given us a lot of good information about Rosewood.

She also spoke to the adequacy of what can be done:

Keep in mind that what reparations you receive is very small compared with the suffering that people went through. We have to tell the stories and keep these stories alive, stories from all over the world. The exhibits and so forth is another way. We could also start to offer scholarships for people who are interested in learning more about this kind of history, get youth involved, how to relate to the community.

C. Emerging and Ongoing Truth-seeking: Examples from the United States South

The meeting in Greensboro succeeded in convening activists from a small sampling of communities where the legacy of racist violence had been put on the local agenda. These case studies, while not involving truth commissions, helped the meeting participants examine the range of approaches to accountability, discuss the applicability and potential for truth commissions in these contexts, and identify the commonalities across challenges and opportunities for recovering the truth.

1. Abbeville, South Carolina

In 1916, Anthony P. Crawford, a respected and successful African American businessman, refused the low price a white man offered him for his cottonseed. He was attacked by a mob of an estimated 200–400 people. In self-defense, Crawford injured the leader of the mob and, fearing greater chaos, the Sheriff of Abbeville jailed Crawford and promised to release him once the mob leader had recovered from his injuries. Later that evening, the mob raided the jail and, with easy access to a defenseless Crawford, proceeded to lynch him.

Following this episode, the Crawford family, fearing for their lives, left Abbeville and settled in the North. This led to a larger exodus of the African American community from Abbeville and further solidified white supremacy through vigilantism in the area.



Doria Johnson speaks while Rich Rusk listens.

The Anthony P. Crawford Remembered Memorial Committee works actively to pursue justice and raise awareness of nearly 5,000 victims of lynching in the American South during the post-Civil War reconstruction period. Meeting participant Doria Johnson is the great-great-granddaughter of lynching victim Anthony Crawford. Her grandmother was born shortly before the lynching. Her father never forgot what had brought them up north. She told the gathering, “I knew I wanted to go back to Abbeville and find what was left of his property and legacy and there was not much, so I started the foundation. I found there were 11 other lynching victims who had never come forward.

Part of the foundation’s work is to help people talk about the pain.”

2. Moore's Ford, Georgia

On July 25, 1946, two young African American couples were shot hundreds of times by 12 to 15 unmasked white men. The shooting took place in broad daylight at the Moore's Ford Bridge that spans the Apalachee River, 60 miles east of Atlanta, Georgia. These killings, for which no one was ever prosecuted, were quickly forgotten by those holding the reins of power in the Oconee and Walton Counties where the killings occurred.



Rich Rusk

Inspired by attention drawn to the killings, civil rights worker Robert Howard of Social Circle, Georgia led four efforts to respond to the events at Moore's Ford. In August 1997, a large biracial group of Georgians formed the Moore's Ford Memorial Committee to commemorate the victims. They incorporated and acquired non-profit status to boost fund-raising and create a permanent, living memorial. Their initial task was an effort to locate the graves of the victims, but they have since set up a scholarship fund in memory of the victims and held several commemorative activities on the site of the lynching.

According to meeting participant Rich Rusk, Secretary of the Moore's Ford Memorial Committee:

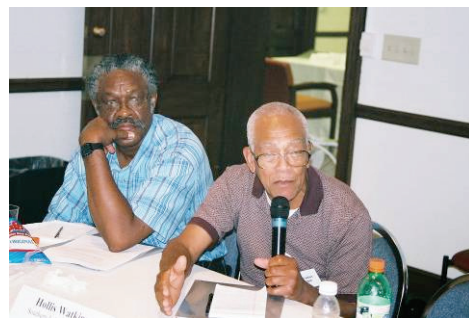
[At the time] there was huge public outcry. ... Locally it was hushed up. The FBI spent four months there but could not get anyone to talk. ... We called for indictments on the Moore's Ford killings; we believe that at least a couple of the perpetrators are still living. A reenactment of the killings happened last year. This kind of action lost us some support, but also got the FBI involved.

He pointed to the challenges of funding and of sustaining interest and commitment within the community.

3. The State of Mississippi

The United States Civil Rights Movement—the culmination of decades of repression—was a hard-fought battle, and many of its victims' stories have yet to be investigated on an official level. Many people were killed or injured and prominent leaders within the movement were directly targeted for their affiliations and activism. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a landmark case in 1977, aimed at preventing the destruction of records of the now defunct Mississippi Sovereignty Commission. A federal court ordered the Mississippi government to preserve and unseal the records, allowing the public access to the papers of this state-run body. The Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, which functioned from 1957 to 1977, was designed to preserve a segregated society and to oppose federally mandated school integration. It was well funded, staffed with former FBI experts, and operated a complex network of spies to ascertain who they should target for intimidation.

The government has since released more than 132,000 documents held by the Commission, revealing surveillance of 87,000 individuals. While the release and preservation of documentation of human rights abuses is an important step towards truth recovery, the fact the government put up a



From left to right: Jimmie Travis and Hollis Watkins, Members of the Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement.

defense is one indication that there is little support for such a process. Calls for additional prosecutions and further truth-seeking have yet to develop into an actual process, but the legacy of civil rights organizations still thrives in Mississippi. Groups such as the local chapter of the Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement and Southern Echo link activists and organizations with roots in the 1950s and '60s to their contemporary partners.

Yet the obstacles are enormous. Hollis Watkins from Southern Echo pointed out the continuity of the legacy of past abuses, the powerful forces that resist change, and the ongoing need to address injustice:

We are in a state of denial. For example, we talk about how important it is to put the civil rights movement into the public education system, yet we have an 80% black student population and only 28% black teachers. All the black businesses that existed are not there anymore, yet when I make mention of all that was done to me personally and to my family, well, you are starting trouble. When you stir in old ashes, you create a spark. We have a problem where we talk about forming networks, but the white population has not gotten to the point where they are willing to be part of a group that is black led or co-led black and white. In Mississippi we can truly say that the state was backing the operation by forming the sovereignty commission, yes the state was at the helm. When the Secretary of State apologized on behalf of the State, he was ostracized. Those who dominate and control use various means to make sure that control continues. In the media, they will identify you as the enemy and will then isolate and come with destruction. One of the vestiges from way back is the problem of gerrymandering and slashing the districts. It took us 100 years before we were able to get another black in congress. ... We ultimately have to create that system of justice, which is a principle of fair dealing with each other. As long as we don't deal fairly with one another, then the question of revenge and payback is what we are left with.

In a similar vein, Jimmy Travis of the Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement pointed out:

Restitution, as soon as it is mentioned, people want to dismiss it. Everyone else can get restitution for what was taken from them, but if blacks in this country talk about restitution it closes the door, it closes everything. ... In Mississippi, I saw a lot of legal lynching, in the sense that people were put in jail and treated inhumanely. ... The history is portrayed as being very different than what actually happened. The Mississippi Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement are trying to document what really happened. In order for people to really reconcile, they need to know what happened.

4. New Orleans, Louisiana

A series of hurricanes and massive flooding in New Orleans in 2005 brought national attention and international humanitarian assistance to the region. It also exposed the serious racial divide in New Orleans. Black refugees were refused entry to neighboring white communities, police acted with impunity to control refugees, and state and federal responses have been accused of favoring

elite and white communities. The aftermath of the crisis does little to inspire hope. The most marginalized victims are in danger of not being able to reclaim property, school systems are virtually being given away to private enterprises, and the justice system is completely devastated.



Gail Glapion

The Greensboro conference was attended by Gail Glapion, from the African American Leadership Project, a network of community, business and religious leaders and representatives. She stressed the enormous challenges ahead for displaced African Americans from New Orleans:

They are in a tragic predicament. Even if it is a housing development, it is where you live. That is your home and you are now being told that they are going to tear it down and it will take years. They have boarded it up; it is so unfortunate that people would systematically come together to keep a group of people out, where are you going to live? All of the infrastructure systems designed to help poor people were not able to handle the crisis. So

you don't have a place to live, your home will be torn down.

While the current response is focused on the emergency and its immediate aftermath, there is much to think about in terms of the potential for truth telling about what happened, and why in this devastated city.⁹

While these cases all involved some degree of organizational work in the recent past, none has undertaken a formal truth-seeking process like the Greensboro Commission. There have yet to be adequate official revelations and recognition of the cases represented—through truth-telling, prosecutions, reparations, or reform. In each of these cases, racial tensions still permeate the affected communities and many parallels are found in communities elsewhere in the world, which are also dealing with the legacies of repression and violence.

In each of these communities, local authorities have shown a lack of political will to address past abuses, separating them to some degree from the formal 'legitimacy' of the state-sponsored commissions. Nevertheless, in some respects they have achieved a similar level of visibility through their organizing efforts, and have made important headway against denial. The Anthony P. Crawford Remembered Memorial Committee was instrumental in lobbying for a Senate apology to victims of lynching and their families for failing to enact anti-lynching legislation.¹⁰ A yearly commemoration of the 1916 lynching and subsequent exodus of African Americans from the area has taken place in Abbeville, despite threats to the Memorial Committee's organizer. The Moore's Ford Memorial Committee has recently garnered national media attention on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the racially motivated murder of two African American couples in 1946. Each of these groups has succeeded in broadening what would otherwise be remembered as acts against a few individuals into rallying cries for investigations that raise larger issues of racial injustice.

⁹ Two months after the Greensboro meeting, HBO aired filmmaker Spike Lee's 4-hour documentary on New Orleans, titled "When the Levees Broke: a Requiem in Four Acts" that collects some of the stories from survivors there.

¹⁰ Senate Resolution 39, 7 February 2005.

D. The Bigger Picture

Dr. Sherrilyn Ifill from the University of Maryland School of Law has studied two lynchings that took place in eastern Maryland in the 1930s. In her book, *On the Courthouse Lawn—Confronting the Legacy of Lynching in the Twenty-first Century*, (Beacon Books, February 2007), she examines the need to acknowledge and redress the lynching of nearly 5,000 black Americans between 1890 and 1960 through some form of apology, truth-seeking or restorative justice. As she pointed out to the gathering:

An individual lynching was never meant to weaken one person or one family—the public nature of the events made them acts of aggression against an entire community that had long-lasting political and economic effects on the community at large.



Sherrilyn Ifill

Despite the sometimes isolated work done to memorialize victims, commemorative efforts are linked not only by the nature of the crime, but also in the ways that people seek reparations. Lynching occurred in public places and was accompanied by mob mentalities that stacked the perpetrators unevenly against the victim or victims. The expulsions in Florida and Abbeville, the lynching of Anthony P. Crawford, the killing of young people at Moore’s Ford Bridge, and the Greensboro Massacre all share these traits. In each of these cases, victims’ access to justice had been limited due to legal obstacles and racist application of the laws.

The Greensboro meeting also included the screening of a sample reel of *Banished*, a documentary by Two Tone Productions, and a conversation with its Director, Marco Williams. The film, which investigates “ethnic cleansing in post-reconstruction America”¹¹ through forced displacements of black communities in several southern towns, documented the various ways that individuals were recovering some of that history.

The Native American question, while too big an issue to be taken on at this meeting, was regarded as a necessary addition to the debate. Meeting participant Kathy Sanchez, from the Tewa band of the Pueblo Nation in New Mexico, spoke to the worldview that allows her people to leave behind some of the weight of the cumulative burden that comes from generations of repression and denial, and yet see it all as part of an unbroken circle. She and the veterans of the civil rights movement at the table were powerful reminders of events and communities that have made significant contributions to the American landscape, but whose struggle against denial has been only partially addressed.



Kathy Sanchez

IV. TRUTH COMMISSIONS IN THE UNITED STATES: INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL LESSONS

In the course of the meeting, participants touched on several issues common to each of the cases. This report highlights three topics that were set out in the program agenda, and related issues that arose during the course of the two-day discussion.

¹¹ See <http://www.two-toneproductions.com/>.

A. Grassroots Efforts or Government Sponsorship, Local and National Dimensions

The meeting brought together people with experience in both grassroots-sponsored and government-sanctioned truth-seeking endeavors, and generated a rich discussion of some of the opportunities and challenges offered by each. This topic shared many of the same considerations as the question of whether truth-seeking is better conducted on a national scale or on a more local one. The two questions are treated together here.

In the lexicon of truth commissions, most experts refer to bodies that are created through government decree, through the legislative or executive power, rather than the kind of grassroots effort undertaken by Greensboro or the Ardoyne community. However, the bottom line is one of political will, as underscored by the transitional shifts in South Africa and to a lesser extent in Peru that made it possible for government to initiate truth-seeking at the urging of victims and survivors. As several participants observed, this kind of transition in power structure has not occurred in the United States. There was a general wariness of government among the U.S. participants at the meeting, who considered the issue in terms of potential legitimacy and efficacy.

Government sponsorship may be necessary in order to gain access to information or the power to compel that access, but there was a concern that government could also take control, threatening the true independence of commissions. As Dr. Sally Bermanzohn put it:

The basic question is how do we create projects that get at the truth and truth-seeking commissions that can be independent? ... The biggest question any group has to wrestle with is the government. That can change from year to year and different players may use truth in different ways. The government is supposed to protect human rights but we know that they are often the perpetrators of human rights abuses. For us in the U.S. we are on the opposite pole of South Africa where we have not been through a significant transition. ... It would be easy for government to come in and control and co-opt something.

While there were positive experiences of government-initiated commissions, the experiences of meeting participants made it clear that 'official' sponsorship by government decree does not automatically convey legitimacy or efficacy. In Greensboro, the city council had voted to reject the process that was already underway, something that could have seemed a negative factor. However, upon consideration, the GTRC saw this as an endorsement of its independence and objectivity. The Wilmington commission, though state-ordered, had no mandate to conduct outreach and education around its work, and even with state sponsorship, had to wait several years for funding.

The question of grassroots versus government sponsorship was closely tied to the question of the local versus national focus of the truth-seeking effort, and it was the latter debate that most caught the attention of the group. Whether truth-seeking is primarily local or national in scale, the participants felt that each has important aspects, although a choice or focus on one or the other necessarily involves trade-offs. Mark McGovern commented from the perspective of the Ardoyne case that, on the positive side of a national process, one has the advantages of momentum, political weight, and the ability to mobilize people at a massive level. On the negative balance, he added,

One of the major initiatives taking place [in Northern Ireland] is the Bloody Sunday inquiry, this profile has been quite national, but some of the impact it has had on local people has been quite negative too. Truth processes are about

consciousness-raising, and that can be lost in a national context. If it is a national process, a huge amount of attention has to be given to people not feeling disconnected.

Local processes do not have the capacity to influence primary decision-makers in the country's political life, but a grassroots initiative focused on the community and delivering for the community can still be a means of empowerment if people become engaged in it.

Of course, the national and local dimensions of truth-seeking are not mutually exclusive. Patricia Lundy highlighted the importance of being able to show underlying systems and promote systemic change, but noted that, in order to touch the individual, processes at the community level must enter the picture. Yasmin Sooka agreed and urged participants to seek out ways to allow national and local efforts to feed into each other:

I don't think it has to be an either/or situation. I think it is very unusual to have an initiative like Greensboro or Ardoyne, but [in the context of national processes] one will often find an extraordinary alliance in the statement taking or the testimonies that is already happening in communities. The crucial issue is that there are huge advantages in having national initiatives, especially in thinking about the future impact and making the recommendations happen. ... Immediately the new government was elected, the transitional justice working group went into action to talk to the communities. The strength of the consultation that took place with civil society is that the legislation took one year to pass through parliament. There is greater accountability at the institutional and political level this way. ... The national process must be strengthened by the local level. ... The South African TRC made the decision to travel, that it would go to the people and it would involve local people; the focus being on the local political scene and the particular characteristics of that context. The difficulty later was how to tie that into the bigger picture. The use of the media, use of radio and TV was very important. A one-hour analysis twice a week on TV covered what was happening locally.

There was interest in the group and a sense that some sort of national effort is needed in the United States. As Professor Joyner pointed out:

I agree that the local character needs to be respected and appreciated in putting together commissions. I do see the possibility of there being a national group that can be put together to look at an issue that might have uniformity across the country, for example lynching. A national group that has legitimacy and credibility could look specifically at a narrow issue. At a local level you can get a lot more out of it, but the danger is that the findings are narrowed to that locality and do not get the kind of exposure that you might want.

Lisa Magarrell also noted that the larger picture is often most revealing of patterns and underlying structures that are supported at the highest levels, which is what makes national truth commissions so important.

Eduardo Gonzalez, speaking from the perspective of the Peruvian experience, cautioned that, "We need to be careful not to romanticize the community; that is tricky. Local communities are not homogeneous either... Sometimes you need an external eye to shed light on a local situation." GTRC research director Emily Harwell brought the same comment home to the Greensboro case:

For Greensboro it was a huge headache to not have governmental support. It affected funding and some people's perception of our legitimacy, among other things, and I think also had some negative effect on our ability to get information and statements from state actors that was important for our research. For other people, the fact that we were not state supported probably increased our legitimacy. In the long run, I think this type of effort has much more potential to be locally meaningful even though it was difficult, because it has 'legs' in the community. It won't be just dropped after the report is issued. However, we also need to be careful about what we mean when we say 'community'. Who is the community and who represents them? There are a lot of different communities in Greensboro. Not everything 'the community' does is wise and just. I also think 'the community' can be repressive and discriminatory and there are often deep divisions. We also need to recognize that, like everyone, community representatives are not immune to having their own interests.

In general, however, there was a great deal of skepticism about the possibility and practicality of launching any kind of national process in the United States in its current context. The focus was more on the local and finding national support to make the local work possible. Professor Ifill took this view:

I am deeply skeptical about trying to nationalize this process. My view is that racism is a shape-shifter and anti-racism has to be a shape-shifter too. I think there is strength in the diversity of approaches. I regard the issue of reparations and reconciliation as a local initiative. If I had time to sketch for you what happened in the 1930s in eastern Maryland with the lynchings, there would be a lot of similarities and a lot of differences with the Abbeville story. The place is geographically isolated, it is reliant on the sea for its economy, and it has its own character. Every community has its own idiosyncratic markers that make the racial violence and the response to it unique, so the way to do reconciliation and reparation should be unique. Not that there should not be national support and national and regional collaboration. The backlash will be stronger and more effective if there is just one [national] organization that can be targeted.

Joyce Johnson cautioned participants that, whether local or national, a truth-seeking process must be linked to some larger process of social change, be it a transition in government like South Africa, or the support of a local movement for social justice. In this vein, Ed Whitfield made a distinction between national truth-seeking efforts and national networking.

There may be some centralized way that folks can facilitate or help kick off something local. The most important resources will be drawn out of the community. The networking aspect is crucial; we need each other's strengths, stories, inspirations. I have no question about the importance of doing networking, but it does need to be grounded in local communities. The truth is that huge numbers in all of these communities pay little or no attention to this; people are engaged in a struggle for survival, which often does not give people the time to look at these other issues. Those connections have to be made close to the ground, a community at a time, and, by virtue of networking, drawing us together.

One key to connecting people to the process, whether locally or nationally, is to make the link between the past that is being examined and the issues at the heart of communities today. A couple of participants raised the question as to whether the kinds of issues of violence being addressed would engage people nationally today, or whether some consideration should be given to larger questions of social and economic rights that are experienced in communities on a day to day basis. Issues of land, reparations, and education may be important areas of common interest that arise in connection with the kind of racist violence at the heart of many of the cases discussed at the meeting.

An attempt to seek the truth in Greensboro would have been less viable had it been run by a distant state capitol, especially considering the localized nature of the investigation that was posed. However, in the absence of local groups with the resources to be able to run a truth-seeking project, it may be useful to tap into national networks and seek international assistance where relevant. The logistical difficulties of putting together a national truth-seeking effort in a large and diverse country like the United States should be considered, along with the lessons learned from the local commission in Greensboro. As Magarrell noted, “No matter at what level the truth-seeking process takes place, you have to work at a local level, both to understand the abuse and to bring it home.” Sooka agreed:

The common point is how important it is to have local support. ... Commissions come and go, but what is left behind are people who have to deal with the aftermath. If it is grounded in community, if it is part of what makes the community, then there is an impetus for the recommendations to be carried out.

B. Historical Justice and Remedies: How Far Back Should Truth-seeking Reach?

The meeting also considered questions relating to timing and truth-seeking: Whose voices raise the claim for justice? How does one think about redress for things that happened so long ago and when doors are often closed to legal remedies? Is there a difference in talking about the truth in Wilmington, more than 100 years ago, or Greensboro, just a quarter of a century past? What are the implications of that difference? As we peel the layers of the onion that is the truth, is there an end to looking back? Where does one try to establish those boundaries when trying to work on a concrete project?

Commissioner Muktha Jost spoke to the issue of the scope of historical inquiry that is due and stressed the importance of asking the right questions. If truth commissions ignore the damage done by colonialism, for example, they may be unduly restricted in their inquiry. Drawing the boundary lines on the contextual examination by any truth commission will be a big decision. Signe Waller posed the opposite concern, suggesting that the proper question is not, “How far back must we look to understand today?” but rather, “How far forward can we envision our future?” If truth commissions are about deepening (or creating from scratch) true democracy, they should be seen as constructing frameworks for creating a new story.

Professor Ifill addressed some of these questions first from a legal perspective.

I don't think anyone is under the illusion that the legal system is sufficient to deal with these things. I want to deal with the statute of limitations. It says that if you have a claim against a certain person you have to bring it within a specific time frame. The other issue is standing, which says that only a person who has suffered the injury has the right to bring the claim; you have to bring it yourself. ... We are dealing with the reality that even if the parties knew they were harmed, the cultural and social landscape was such that they could not bring a claim due

to the climate of fear and racism, or if they did bring a claim they had no hope for it being won. You have to counter the reality that the way our country has developed there were certain cases that it was just not realistic to bring or to win. In terms of standing, we are sometimes talking about a real descendant of someone who was wronged, but also sometimes about a diffuse harm, a whole community. The courts will generally not accept it. Racism once again interferes with the ability to provide the kind of data necessary for you to bring a claim. ... When I look at New Orleans I think of the Tulsa race riot litigation¹². The likelihood that the litigation will be successful now is slim, but the longer you wait, the more you risk the statute of limitations passing. This is a catch 22 built into the legal structure that makes litigation very difficult.

Ifill's experience indicated that, once outside the realm of law:

With the national media, the further back you go, the more interest there is. The further north you go, the less interest there is. It is about the South, a certain kind of violence. ... The more recent cases are problematic because we have a mythology that things got better after the civil rights movement.

Where the media has already laid the groundwork in terms of providing the history to the public, there might be better reception to a truth commission. On the other hand, more recent events mean that more first-hand observers and participants can speak to what happened and why.

Sherry Dupree had some concrete suggestions. First, that people with information be interviewed before their stories are lost to history; and second, that the focus be on the hurt or harm and how to heal. "When talking about the remedies or the harm, I first look at the healing. We have all been hurt in some way and healing is something we can all relate to, and we can bring in people of all different social strata."

Finally, Ed Whitfield suggested that the significance of the past is what it says about the present. "We need to look back as long as you can still distinguish the beneficiaries [of abuse] and victims."

C. Truth-seeking and Inclusion, Participation, Democracy

Truth commissions should never be just about themselves but should be used as a tool to move toward greater respect for human rights and, in that sense, toward recognition of the rights of all, in their inclusion and participation in democracy. Therefore, the meeting organizers urged the participants to reflect on the deeper goals of inclusion and social justice. This rather abstract topic led to a wide array of comments, but eventually found focus on three related questions.

- *"Does truth-seeking in the way it was addressed at the meeting, that is, focused mostly on acts of violence and violation of people's civil rights, reveal enough about the political economy of violence? Does it do enough to deal with the root causes?"*
- *"In Greensboro, the Commission was seen as a way to deepen democracy because it was a grassroots effort, a way to hold city leadership to account. Has the experience in Greensboro provided a model for how to work towards deepening democracy? How*

¹² A federal lawsuit seeking redress for a few survivors of the 1921 Tulsa "Race Riot" and their descendants was dismissed; the petitioners are currently seeking redress before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

does thinking about truth recovery as a democratic exercise help in thinking about who wants to hide the truth and who wants to bring it out?"

- *"Truth commissions have sometimes been used as a tool to limit change. Some people would see commissions as a way to contain truth, so that you don't dig too deep. This is something to be alert to and not to see every truth-seeking endeavor as positive. Is this a concern?"*

In general, participants saw links between the broader issue of inclusion and social justice and truth-seeking. One co-chair of the Greensboro project, the Rev. Gregory Headen, put it this way: "You cannot have a society constructed the way ours is constructed unless you hide truth... when you start telling the truth, those invested in the status quo get nervous. Getting at truth changes what it means to be a citizen of the United States." In a sense, when Greensboro commissioner Barbara Walker spoke about reconciliation, she was effectively describing real citizenship: "Reconciliation is far-reaching, powerful, and very hard to obtain, but it can be done. It means recognition, respect, understanding, recognizing the injustices."

Emily Harwell pointed out that truth commissions:

...can be used to forgo legal accountability by giving the state a space to say 'See, we don't need trials because we have a truth commission.' But truth commissions can also be used in a complementary fashion to trials to encourage more democratic participation. The courtroom is the realm of experts; they have their own language and rituals and dress and it can be daunting if you don't know the system. But a truth commission can broaden participation beyond the experts by giving people the space to sit down and tell their story. It's more accessible. Top-down legal structures tend to tell people what their identities are, and truth commissions can give people the chance to create or reclaim their own identities by telling their own stories.

Several people raised the question of the role that money plays in controlling truth and the power to suppress it. Hollis Watkins spoke from his experience in Mississippi:

There are a lot of folks out there who do not want people to be set free by the truth. The truth helps to free the spirit, the heart, the soul. If your heart and spirit is free, this little thing about money can be figured out. Those who dominate and control, dominate and control the money and want you to believe that if you don't have any then you don't have any power. It is not just about money, it goes much deeper than that and by engaging in truth telling then you can only deal with justice, which is a system of fair dealing with one another.

In almost every context discussed at the meeting, even those such as Wilmington and Rosewood in which the events were far removed in history, fear was a factor that proved a real challenge to truth seeking. Some of this arises out of the use of informants and infiltration of social movements. This was the case in Northern Ireland, but was also a tactic that was employed in Mississippi and throughout the South, resulting in destabilization and lack of trust. Building trust is also something that relates to the possibility of inclusion and real citizenship. Mark McGovern talked about the approach of the Ardoyne project to this problem:

One of the things we found was that we started off including everyone from the community who had been killed, including informers. This was hard, but it

proved to be one of the greatest strengths; whatever that person did, the family was still affected. That created a space for the community for itself to come to terms with some of the informers, and people can work together now.

From the international perspective, it is important to reflect on the next step and the relation of these efforts toward building democracy. Yasmin Sooka suggested that:

The question of who implements the recommendations is a real issue. Truth commissions have been guilty of looking narrowly at civil violations but not seeing them as part of people's opposition to unjust economic and political systems. Just looking at the factual circumstances does not allow you to look at much deeper issues of class and privilege. Truth commissions have sometimes been used to stop the question of reparations, of returning land, etc. When citizens come forward for their own justice, bearers of their own testimonies, you are moving toward participatory democracy.

Harwell agreed that, in general, truth commissions have not done a good job at broadening concerns beyond civil and political violations to underlying social and economic concerns of land and livelihood, education, housing and health, all of which are fundamental to ideas of liberty and participation.

These social and economic concerns both drive the violence and political oppression that have been the traditional focus of truth commissions, but they also are persistent casualties that are the legacies of these civil abuses. If our aim is to look not only at the causes of violence and oppression in the past as well as improving the path to the future, truth commissions have to be better at making these social and economic concerns a central focus.

Patricia Lundy spoke to the concern about truth commissions being used to 'manage truth' by repressive power structures. Within non-governmental organizations and certain Irish constituencies, it was feared that the authentic social movement could be taken over by the British power structures. That was a danger they saw in 'top down' truth commissions. There was some consensus among participants that this presented a danger, but there was, as Ed Whitfield expressed it, the hope that through grassroots work, "truth-seeking can become a movement, and even more, a culture of things possible not yet achieved. We have to believe that things can in fact get better and they will if we work toward that."

V. CONCLUSIONS

The participants at the meeting came together from five different continents and diverse political contexts—but they found common ground, not only in the kind of dehumanizing abuses suffered by victims, but in the challenges and opportunities presented by using truth-seeking as a tool in the struggle for social justice. While the obstacles of political will, self-interested denial, fear, and control of information loom enormous, the group believed that there is a real possibility of making some headway, even in the United States, through grassroots work and broader networking.

There was a distinction made between political contexts in which a significant transformation is underway and those like the United States, where change may be incremental. Significant transformations in political leadership, like those that occurred in South Africa and Peru, can open up national debates about the past and offer an opportunity to use a more truthful accounting

of the past to chart the way forward. In the United States, where there have been highs and lows in the story of the struggle for human rights, but where the current context is not marked by a positive sea change, a local approach to truth-telling seemed to be the most important step at the present time. Nevertheless, participants agreed that connecting the underlying incidents of abuse to broader patterns and higher levels of responsibility would ultimately be important.

A number of lessons were shared from the various experiences with truth-seeking represented around the table, and it became clear that, even when carried out in the unique context of a particular locale, any truth-seeking effort will gain from the exchange of ideas and strategies with others. Participants commented too, on the importance of ensuring that they are not alone in their efforts to reveal past injustice, and that there is support and understanding in others who are committed to this struggle in their own contexts. Rich Rusk from the Moore's Ford Memorial Committee commented:

We are learning that there was a great deal of terrorism committed against Americans by Americans. We started in Moore's Ford, only being aware of Rosewood, Florida doing this work, and we thought we were alone. Since then we have been made aware of other groups popping up.

Participants found the Greensboro case to be an inspiration; even if it would not translate immediately into something similar in their own context, it rang true for them. As Ruth Trujillo from the Greensboro Justice Fund observed, "We are reclaiming the importance of having a voice. This is an opportunity across the United States to see that tragedy can be converted into something positive." For Mark McGovern, "to see in Greensboro that one of the arguments against the Commission was that it would make the city look bad, well, for us it is quite the opposite, for it makes us admire this city."

Sally Bermanzohn spoke from the survivor's perspective when she reflected:

Truth-seeking should be seen as a tool for social movement. What worked, what didn't, these questions, continuing to develop and improve the working model, will help the movement develop. We will continue to improve our ability to utilize this model in the future. In Greensboro, as a survivor, it was really hard, at first, to trust these commissioners. We had worked for so long to get this thing going, and now to hand it over to this group was scary. Having come through this, I have been overwhelmed by the quality of the Report. It gets to the truth through assessing the many perspectives on the events. This model can be built on.

Finally, the meeting was a call to continued action. In Hollis Watkins's words:

There are two communities: one that wants to see what is right and best, the other who is interested in domination and control. That is where much of the violence comes through. Those of us in the community who want fairness and justice have to speak up.

Appendix I

Internet Resources:

Organizing Team

The Beloved Community Center
Joyce Johnson
Nelson Johnson
Lewis A. Brandon III
Ed Whitfield
www.belovedcommunitycenter.org

Bennett College for Women
Dr. Johnetta Cole
www.bennett.edu

International Center for
Transitional Justice
Lisa Magarrell
Blaz Gutierrez
Eduardo Gonzalez
www.ictj.org

International Commissions and Truth Recovery Projects

Ardoyne Commemoration Project
<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/victims/ardoyne>

Peru—Comisión de la Verdad
y Reconciliación
www.cverdad.pe.org

South Africa Truth and
Reconciliation Commission
www.info.gov.za/otherdocs/2003/trc/

US Commissions/Initiatives

Greensboro Truth and
Reconciliation Commission
www.greensborotrc.org

Greensboro Justice Fund
www.gjf.org
Greensboro Truth and Community
Reconciliation Project
www.gtcp.org

1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission
www.ah.dcr.state.nc.us/1898-wrrc/
1923 Rosewood Massacre
www.tfn.net/doc/rosewood.txt
Rosewood Forum and Rosewood
Heritage Foundation
www.displaysforschools.com/rosewood

Anthony P. Crawford Remembered
Memorial Committee
<http://home.comcast.net/~doriajohnson/>

Veterans of Hope Project
www.veteransofhope.org
Tewa Women United
www.tewawomenunited.org
Moore's Ford Memorial Committee
www.mooresford.org
Southern Echo
www.southernecho.org

Appendix II

Participants:

African American Leadership Project	Gail Glapion
Anthony P Crawford Remembered Memorial Committee	Doria Johnson
Ardoyne Commemoration Project, Northern Ireland	Mark McGovern
Ardoyne Commemoration Project, Northern Ireland	Patricia Lundy
Beloved Communities Network- Tewa Women United	Kathy Sanchez
Beloved Communities Network- Veterans of Hope Project	Rachel Harding
Beloved Community Center	Demetria Ledbetter
Beloved Community Center	Joyce Johnson
Beloved Community Center	Lewis A. Brandon
Beloved Community Center	Nelson Johnson
Bennett College for Women	Johnnetta B. Cole
Greensboro Justice Fund	Paul Bermanzohn
Greensboro Justice Fund	Ruth Trujillo
Greensboro Justice Fund	Sally Bermanzohn
Greensboro Justice Fund	Signe Waller
Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Project	Carolyn Allen
Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Project	Edward L. Whitfield
Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Project	Gregory T. Headen
Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Project	Willena Cannon
Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Project	Z.N. Holler
Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission	Patricia Clark
Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission	Phyllis Carter
Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission	Robert Peters
Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission	Barbara Walker
Greensboro TRC – staff	Eli Mungo
Greensboro TRC – staff	Emily Harwell
Greensboro TRC – staff	Jill Williams
Greensboro TRC – staff	Joya Wesley
International Center for Transitional Justice	Blaz Gutierrez
International Center for Transitional Justice	Eduardo Gonzalez
International Center for Transitional Justice	Lisa Magarrell
International Center for Transitional Justice	Yuki Kuraoka
Moore's Ford Memorial Committee	Rich Rusk
Rosewood	Sherry Dupree
South Africa TRC, Foundation for Human Rights	Yasmin Sooka
Southern Echo	Hollis Watkins
Southern Truth and Reconciliation (STAR)	Thee Smith
Sri Lanka, Law and Society Trust	Farzana Haniffa
Two Tone Productions	Maia Harris
University of Maryland	Sherrilyn Ifill
Veteran's of the Civil Rights Movement	Jimmie Travis
Wilmington Commission	Irving Joyner

Appendix III

TRC's effects on city praised

by Lex Alexander
News-Record
July 8, 2006

GREENSBORO - The city's truth and reconciliation project was opposed at the outset three years ago in part because opponents, such as Mayor Keith Holliday, feared it would only reinforce a negative image of Greensboro.

But participants from other communities and countries in a two-day convention of truth and reconciliation projects at Bennett College said Friday that Greensboro's effort has burnished the city's image. The only damage, they said, has been to opponents' reputations.

"People in this city may not realize what a remarkable thing you have here," said Mark McGovern, who represents a truth group in Northern Ireland, calling the work of the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission "a remarkable set of best practices," good examples for other such projects.

"This process is an extraordinary achievement, a beacon to those of us elsewhere," he said. "The problem is city officials."

Yasmin Sooka, who has served on truth commissions in South Africa and Sierra Leone and advised similar groups around the world, agreed: "What is happening in Greensboro is resonating across the country."

Eduardo Gonzalez, a former member of Peru's truth commission who works for the nonprofit International Center for Transitional Justice, which helped organize the convention, called Greensboro's report "a towering achievement" and added that its recommendations provide "a golden opportunity for Greensboro to ... reverse its imprudent decision to oppose the project."

Officials' "refusal to wrap their arms around the truth-and-reconciliation process simply exposes them for who they are," said Doria Johnson, president of a South Carolina-based committee to memorialize lynching victims.

The gathering, the first of its kind to take place in the United States, concludes today with public events at N.C. A&T. It is being held in Greensboro in recognition of the work of the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The seven members spent two years researching facts and context surrounding the killings here on Nov. 3, 1979, of five Communist Workers Party protesters, and the wounding of 10 others, by Klansmen and Nazis who later were acquitted of all criminal charges in two lengthy trials.

The commission released a report May 25 that found Greensboro police primarily responsible for failing to prevent the violence by not being visible at the confrontation despite warnings of violence from an informant. The report also faulted the Klansmen and Nazis for beginning the shooting, and it criticized CWP members for challenging the Klan publicly and holding a protest in a community that had not consented to host it.

Among its recommendations, the report called for the city and police department to apologize for failing to protect the shooting victims and nearby residents. An informant had told police that violence was likely.

Holliday has said the city should express "regret" but not apologize. Interim police Chief Tim Bellamy has declined to comment. Some City Council members will discuss the report and related issues at a meeting July 18; others have said no discussion is needed.

But learning from the past is essential, convention participants said, for democracy to be strengthened because events that took place decades ago affect how people live today. Rich Rusk, who leads a Georgia group planning to memorialize the slayings of four young African Americans on July 25, 1946, pointed out that because of a single lynching in Oconee County early in the 20th century, the percentage of African Americans in the county had fallen from about 50 percent to about 5 percent. It remained just 6.4 percent in 2000.

"This is a very young country - but it is a country with a lot of memory," Gonzalez said. "Anytime you discuss (basic principles of freedom), you go back to 1776. Anytime you discuss federal versus state issues, you go back to the Civil War. ..."

"When the U.S. looks today at issues of race and poverty, it will be well-served to engage in another exercise of memory."

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International Panel Discusses Plight for Justice

by Melde Rutledge

Carolina Peacemaker

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On Saturday, July 8, an intercontinental panel of delegates was on hand at N.C. A&T State University to speak about their struggle and accomplishments against injustice. The program, sponsored by the Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Project, was part of a three-day event that attracted representatives from South Africa, Peru, Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka, Canada, Wilmington, Atlanta, Florida, South Carolina and Mississippi.

"This is just a bit of what some of us had the privilege to experience the last couple days," Joyce Johnson said about Saturday's program. Johnson, along with Rev. Nelson Johnson, is cofounder of the Beloved Community Center and a key organizer of the GTCRP.

The GTCRP and the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission explored the incident, which occurred on November 3, 1979. Five people were killed and 10 wounded by Ku Klux Klan/Nazi gunfire that day. None of the shooters were committed of a crime. The Greensboro TRC released a 500-page report of the tragedy in May of this year. The undertaking was the first of its kind in the United States.

A celebration of the completion of the report was held after Saturday's dialogue. On the previous Thursday and Friday, guests assembled at Bennett College for Women for two invitation-only roundtable discussions about the truth seeking process.

"Some extraordinary work has been done here (in Greensboro)," said Mark McGovern, co-director of the Ardoyne Commemoration Project, based in Northern Ireland. The Ardoyne Commemoration Project was formed as a voice for the victims of the over 30 years of conflict in the North of Ireland. Between 1969 and 1998, 99 people became victims of political violence in the small close-knit, working class, nationalist community in North Belfast known as Ardoyne.

Saturday's dialogue was split in two parts. A national panel discussed "Exposing the Truth: the U.S. Experience." An international panel conversed about "The International Experience of Truth Commissions and Their Impact."

Former members of the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission were on hand during Saturday's program. Mark Sills, a former Greensboro TRC commissioner, partook in the panel discussions.

"You can't heal until you take that wound, see what it is, put that medication on it, and then allow it to heal," said Sherry Dupree, who has been involved with the 1923 Rosewood Massacre for that past 22 years. A reported 8-17 people were killed in the predominately black town of Rosewood, FL, after a group of white vigilantes responded to allegations that a white woman was raped by black man from Rosewood. The town was ruined and its people dispossessed. In 1994, the State of Florida gave \$2 million in compensation to the surviving victims.

Lisa Magarrell, the senior associate for the International Center for Transitional Justice, said that last week's discussions were useful for people who have created commissions but having a difficulty following through with the reconciliation and truth seeking process.

McGovern, for example, said the most common problem when organizing truth seeking organizations is obtaining official recognition. "So it was a very purposeful discussion to try to get us some additional ideas and tools," Magarrell said.

ICTJ Program Assistant Blaz Gutierrez presented a brief rundown of what participants discovered during the discussions. To start with, the ICTJ reported that participants learned the importance of a mandate and preparation. Moreover, many types of violence - race riots, lynching, racial expulsions - are interconnected, he said. "They're all part of a greater pattern of violence," Gutierrez said. He also indicated that corporations and governments can, and have been held accountable for racial and social injustices.

The ICTJ are planning to release a full summary of the discussions to the public in the near future.



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