

University of North Carolina at Asheville

The Atlanta Youth Murders and the Impact of the Media

A Senior Thesis Submitted to  
The Faculty of the Department of History  
In Candidacy for the Degree of  
Bachelor of Arts in History

by  
Matt Henson  
1311

Asheville, North Carolina  
20 November 2007

A few weeks before Milton's [Milton Harvey] remains were found, Yusef Bell, an extremely gifted nine-year-old, disappeared on his way to the store to buy snuff for a neighbor. After buying the snuff, a woman thought she saw him get into a blue car with a man she believed was the former husband of Yusef's mother Camille. The police later discounted this sighting.

Unlike the earlier three cases, Yusef's disappearance received some media attention as Camille begged the abductor to release her well-loved boy. Her community was rallying around her for emotional support.

Camille's hopes vanished when a school custodian in the Abandoned E.P. Johnson Elementary School discovered Yusef on November 8<sup>th</sup>. His body had been wedged into a concrete hole in the floor. He had been strangled to death, either by hand or ligature. The boy had been barefoot when he was found, but the bottoms of his feet had been washed clean.<sup>1</sup>

In 1979, a list of murdered and missing poor, black children began in the city of Atlanta. Name after name, including Milton Harvey and Yusef Bell, were added to the list over the next two years until the total reached 28 dead or missing children. Many of the murdered children were discovered stabbed, shot, or bludgeoned with a blunt object. Some bodies were found in late stages of decomposition, while others were found merely 15 minutes from the time they were dumped.<sup>2</sup> Few clues ever surfaced as the police and media worked to find the killer or killers. The case was labeled as serial murder. Atlanta suffered the loss of 27 poor black children until the police and the city caught a break on May 22, 1981. A police stakeout of the James Jackson Parkway Bridge, which stretched across the Chattahoochee River in Atlanta, provided the first clues and only suspect in the lengthy investigation labeled by the Public Safety Commissioner for Atlanta, Lee P. Brown, "the most intensive investigation" in Atlanta's

<sup>1</sup> Marilyn Bardsley and Rachell Bell, "Two More Boys," CourtTV® Crime Library: Criminal Minds and Methods, October 13, 2007, [www.crimelibrary.com/serial\\_killers/predators/williams/3.html](http://www.crimelibrary.com/serial_killers/predators/williams/3.html) (accessed October 13, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> "Langford to Lead Search Party," *The Atlanta Constitution*, January 24, 1981. sec. B, Atlanta Edition. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

history.<sup>3</sup> Early in the morning a splash was heard by police sitting under the bridge.<sup>4</sup> A car was stopped on the bridge immediately and the driver was questioned by police.<sup>5</sup> His name was Wayne Bertram Williams, a black man residing in Atlanta, and he became the main suspect in the Atlanta youth murders case. A body was found a few days later and linked to Wayne B. Williams.<sup>6</sup> It was determined that the splash was the dead body of Nathaniel Cater colliding with the water below. National and international media coverage quickly made this event known as the "splash heard round the world."<sup>7</sup> Williams's arrest, trial, and conviction labeled him the Atlanta youth murderer.

The string of murders reoccurring over 22 months sent a shock through Atlanta, the nation, and the international community. The Atlanta youth murders became an interesting story for people because Atlanta was an evolving city concerned about its image on racial and economic progress;<sup>8</sup> furthermore, serial murder cases often create an entertainment source (much like a soap-opera) for the public.<sup>9</sup> This was evident through the numerous publications from the media in Atlanta, the wide circulating national newspapers, and the international press.<sup>10</sup> An enormous audience was able to keep up with daily updates concerning the Atlanta youth murders which placed pressure on the local law enforcement and local media to provide information to the public in an effort to maintain the image of Atlanta.

<sup>3</sup> Gail Esptein and T.L. Wills, "Body of 9<sup>th</sup> Child Victim is Identified." *The Atlanta Constitution*. October 16, 1980. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

<sup>4</sup> "The Atlanta Case: Murder Times Two," *Newsweek*, July 27, 1981. Page 14. UNCA Microfilm.

<sup>5</sup> *Newsweek*, 14.

<sup>6</sup> *Newsweek*, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Robert D. Keppel, PH.D., *The Riverman: Ted Bundy and I Hunt for the Green River Killer*. New York, NY: Simon & Shuster, Inc., 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Bernard Headley, "The Atlanta Establishment and the Atlanta Tragedy," *Phylon*, Volume XLVI, no. 4, (1985): 333-334.

<sup>9</sup> David Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities*. Chicago, II: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> James Baldwin, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston Publishing, 1985.

<sup>1</sup> Headley, 333-334.

The media coverage of the Atlanta youth murders did more than attempt to preserve the image of the city's racial tolerance and economic expansion. It also showed how the community and local authorities reacted to the Atlanta youth murders and Wayne B. Williams's trial and conviction. Although the media coverage brought the community together by fueling activism, it separated the community from the truth by pressuring police and local officials for answers, making incorrect assumptions about the investigation, and labeling Wayne B. Williams as the serial killer without any legal proof.

The media played an important role in the way in which society viewed the Atlanta youth murders.<sup>12</sup> The media coverage of the Atlanta youth murders expressed how persuasive and unreliable the media could become. The media was often the only source of information for the public concerning the Atlanta youth murders.<sup>13</sup> For this reason the media had great control over what was known, felt, and allowed in the minds of the public. Journalists communicated their ideas in a variety of ways, especially journalists in Atlanta trying to protect the image of Atlanta, and deception was a common form.<sup>14</sup> David Pritchard, an expert in journalism ethics, argues:

In the specific context of Journalism, deception can take many forms, from outright lying, to deceiving, or misleading, or misrepresenting, or merely being less than forthright,...and all of these actions are intended to cause someone to believe what is not true.<sup>15</sup>

Journalists did use deception, by lying, deceiving, misleading, misrepresenting, or merely being less than forthright as a tool to save the image of Atlanta.<sup>16</sup> The encouraging news displayed through the media sparked community activism, but looking under the surface of the Atlanta

<sup>12</sup> David Pritchard, *Citizens, Ethics, and the Law: Holding the Media Accountable*. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000. Page 1.

<sup>13</sup> Pritchard, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Pritchard, 13.

<sup>15</sup> Pritchard, 12.

<sup>16</sup> Bernard Headley, "The Atlanta Establishment and the Atlanta Tragedy." *Phylon*. Vol XLVI, no. 4, Page 333-340.

youth murders coverage one can see the media played a more important role than simply providing the public with information.

Few books have been written on the media coverage of the Atlanta youth murders and the trial and conviction of Wayne B. Williams. Most books specific to the topic are focused on the murders, investigation, and trial of Wayne Williams. However, there are many books which focus on the broader scope of the issues, such as media ethics, serial murder, and the state of Atlanta's politics, economics, and racial divide. Books including content on media ethics, media roles in society, serial murders, serial murderers in the media, and the state of Atlanta were of particular importance.

Gaining strong background knowledge in how and why the media reported what it did allows for a better understanding of the motive, or motives, behind the media's coverage of the Atlanta youth murders. It was especially important to focus on the ways in which the media used tactics to guide the readers into a direction of thought. David Pritchard's book, *Citizens, Ethics, and the Law: Holding the Media Accountable*, was an excellent starting point for understanding basic motives behind journalists' writing.<sup>17</sup> Pritchard explained the role of the media and the biased nature of journalism. This book gave helpful knowledge on the motives behind journalism and can be directly applied to the media coverage of the Atlanta youth murders and Wayne B. Williams.

The media and police worked together in Atlanta to provide the information to the public. This relationship was important to examine because the media and police were in constant contact, and the actions of one reflected the action of the other. David Perlmutter's book, *Policing the Media: Street Cops and Public Perceptions of Law Enforcement*, was helpful in

<sup>17</sup> David Pritchard, *Citizens, Ethics, and the Law: Holding the Media Accountable*. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000.

showing the relationships between the police and the media.<sup>18</sup> The book discussed how the police are often concerned about being the first to provide information even if it may not be completely accurate or necessary for the public good. The coverage of the Atlanta youth murders and case against Wayne B. Williams became dependant on the media and police relationship.

In a similar work, *Natural Born Celebrities*, by David Schmid, the relationship of the media and serial murderers was discussed. The book argued that the public seems to be entertained by serial murder cases. Also, serial murderers often feed off of the reaction of the media in their actions. This book showed the strong influence the media and serial murderers can have on each other.

Understanding serial murderers, like Wayne B. Williams, was necessary to see why the media was so involved in the Atlanta situation. Along with *Natural Born Celebrities*<sup>19</sup>, the books *Serial Murder?*<sup>20</sup> by James DeBurger and Ronald Holmes, and *Serial Murders and Their Victims*, by Eric Hickey, were helpful in gaining knowledge about what serial murder is and who becomes serial murderers. These books also include sections on how the public reacts to serial murder. Because the public reacts to information given by the media, these books provide helpful knowledge of how media affects the public.

To understand why the media became so interested in the Atlanta youth murders, a critical research of Atlanta's social, political, and economic states must be in order. Multiple books discussed the issue of racial differences and tensions in the decades leading up to the Atlanta youth murders. Race played an important role in the Atlanta youth murders because the

<sup>18</sup> David Perlmutter, *Policing the Media: Street Cops and Public Perceptions of Law Enforcement*. Sage Publications, Inc. 2000.

<sup>19</sup> David Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities*. Chigaco, IL: University of Chicago, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> Ronald Holmes and James De Burger, *Serial Murder*. Sage Publications, Inc. 1988.

<sup>21</sup> Eric Hickey, *Serial Murderers and Their Victims*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Wadsworth Group, 2002.

victims were all black. Plus, Atlanta was under political control from its first African American mayor and police chief.<sup>22</sup> There were four books specifically discussing the racial scene in Atlanta before, during, and after the Atlanta youth murders. They were: *African-American Mayors: Race, Politics, and the American City*, by Jeffery Adler and David Colburn, *Race and the Shaping of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Atlanta*,<sup>24</sup> by Ronald Bayor, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia. 1940-1980*<sup>25</sup> by Stephen Tuck, and *The Black Middle Class Family*<sup>26</sup> by Annie Barnes. These books gave facts and statistics about the state of Atlanta's black community, politics, and economics, which is especially important because the black community was affected greatly by the Atlanta youth murders. A reoccurring theme emerged as political and economic status came into the equation. Race usually influenced both politics of Atlanta as well as effected economics in Atlanta. Understanding the social, political, and economic states of Atlanta gives information on why the media would want to focus on the Atlanta youth murders.

Two important works dealt specifically with the Atlanta youth murders. James Baldwin's *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*,<sup>27</sup> and *The Atlanta Youth Murders and the Politics of Race*<sup>28</sup> by Bernard Headley gave detailed accounts of the Atlanta youth murders and Wayne B. Williams. These books were all encompassing histories of the Atlanta youth murders and the man Wayne B. Williams. These two books were great for overall knowledge of the events.

<sup>22</sup> Jeffery Adler and David Colburn, *African American Mayors: Race, Politics, and the American City*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001.

<sup>23</sup> Jefferey Adler and David Colburn, *African-American Mayors: Race, Politics, and the American City*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Ronald Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Atlanta*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

<sup>25</sup> Stephen Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia. 1940-1980*. Athens, G A: The University of Georgia Press, 2001.

<sup>26</sup> Annie Barnes, *The Black Middle Class Family*.

<sup>27</sup> James Baldwin, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston Publishing, 1985.

<sup>28</sup> Bernard Headley, *The Atlanta Youth Murders and the Politics of Race*. Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1998.

They contained specific dates, names, and locations of key elements of the Atlanta youth murders and Wayne B. Williams. These books began with brief histories of Atlanta covering social, political, and economic issues tied to the city. They gave details of the murdered youths, explored Wayne B. Williams's life and trial, and provided general information which was necessary to form a base for research. Combined, the two books also provided many references to helpful primary and secondary sources.

The city of Atlanta had been the economic powerhouse of the South for many years

\*Q

before the Atlanta youth murders. The mid 1960's marked the peak of economic success for Atlanta in the South, and this dominance lasted well into the Atlanta youth murders and trial of Wayne B. Williams.<sup>30</sup> The city's airport became so overcrowded with businessmen and tourists that plans to build a new \$750 million dollar airport went into effect in 1978.<sup>31</sup> The Hartsfield International Airport was born, and quickly became a major travel center introducing new businessmen, tourist, and money to the city. The summer of 1979 marked the grand opening of Atlanta's new Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA). At the time the Atlanta youth murders began in 1979, Atlanta was considered "the transportation and banking center of the South."<sup>32</sup> Wayne King, writer to *The New York Times*, noted the economic attraction of Atlanta, "As population, commerce and industry continue to shift southward, the economic attractions of the Sun Belt are being felt in Rome and Rio as surely as in Seattle and Chicago, leading the city of Scarlett O'Hara to begin calling itself the 'Paris of the South'." <sup>33</sup> Atlanta

<sup>29</sup> Bernard Headley, *The Atlanta Youth Murders and the Politics of Race*. Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1998. Page 12.

<sup>30</sup> Headley, 12.

<sup>31</sup> Bernard Headley, *The Atlanta Youth Murders and the Politics of Race*. Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1998. Page 10.

<sup>32</sup> Drummond Ayers, "South's Economic Boom Attracts Industry and Banks from Abroad." *New York Times*. July 4, 1977. UNCA Microfilm.

<sup>33</sup> Wayne King, "Trade is Giving Atlanta International Status." *The New York Times*. June 25, 1979. UNCA Microfilm.

made great strides to make itself an economic leader on the surface, but not every class of Atlanta society would benefit from the economics. The lower income blacks, a large section of the population, did not benefit as much as the other citizens of Atlanta.<sup>34</sup>

The relationship between economics and race went hand in hand in the city of Atlanta. Until the election of Maynard Jackson as mayor for Atlanta in 1974, there had never been a black representative in the mayor's seat. Jackson's election was viewed as the turning point for lower income families.<sup>35</sup> His election was to be a time of new opportunity for the black population in economics as a whole.<sup>36</sup> This economic opportunity did not reach the lower classes where all 28 Atlanta youth murder victims would emerge. James Baldwin described the scene in Atlanta as a one way street.<sup>37</sup> The black population would go downtown where mostly white owned businesses were located, but rarely would a white person go uptown to the black owned businesses.<sup>38</sup> As a result, the black owners of small businesses had difficulty staying in business because most of the consumer community was lower or middle class citizens with little money to spend.<sup>39</sup> With a boom in economic activity in the middle and upper classes, there came a collapse of wealth in the lower economic strata by money leaving the poor communities. "White Flight" from the inner city caused property values to decrease in certain areas, not the black arrival into the city.<sup>40</sup> The loss of money in the black community raised the need for government action.

<sup>34</sup> James Baldwin, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston Inc.: 1985. Page 24.

<sup>35</sup> Jeffery Adler and David Colbura. *African-American Mayors: Race, Politics, and the American City*. Chicago, II: University of Illinois Press, 2001.

<sup>36</sup> Ronald Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Atlanta*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996. Page 119.

<sup>37</sup> Baldwin, 25.

<sup>38</sup> Baldwin, 25.

<sup>39</sup> Baldwin, 25.

<sup>40</sup> Baldwin, 35.

There was a need for improvement and the government did take some action. Programs such as the Economic Opportunity Atlanta Inc., a white lead institution, were established to improve the city's economic expansion capabilities by bringing more money into the city, therefore placing more money in the hands of all Atlanta citizens, regardless of social status, but these programs did little.<sup>41</sup> There was not an established pattern of response by the government to make policies to support economic growth for lower class citizens.<sup>42</sup> A white led organization instilled little confidence in the black community.<sup>43</sup> Mayor Jackson's program, the Minority Business Enterprise, designed to increase the size of the entire city's economy, also did little for the black lower class because training for workers was poor and insufficient.<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, policies aimed at equaling the black community's opportunity in the economy did poorly under both white and black leadership from the city and the entire state of Georgia. Despite the few government policies to allow all citizens to benefit from the economy, the lower class citizens in the black community became victims of high poverty and racial dissent.

The lower income citizens, such as the Atlanta youth murder victims, were not only left out of the economic success. This group was also considered a threat to the economy by the middle and upper classes.<sup>45</sup> James Baldwin, a respected writer of the Atlanta youth murders, described the poor as a group who were "strangers" to the safety provided by most communities, such as financial security and police protection. He argued, "The poor do not exist for others," and they provide an illusion of an "inconvenience or a threat" to the community.<sup>46</sup> All 28

<sup>41</sup> Bernard Headly, *The Atlanta Youth Murders and the Politics of Race*. Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1998.

<sup>42</sup> Stephen Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia. 1940-1980*. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2001. Page 239.

<sup>43</sup> Ronald Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Atlanta*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996. Page 119.

<sup>44</sup> Bayor, 124.

<sup>45</sup> Andrew Baldwin, *Evidence of Things Not Seen*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston Inc.: 1985. Page 62.

<sup>46</sup> James Baldwin, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston Inc.: 1985. Page 62.

Atlanta youth murder victims came from the lower class with little or no benefit from the local economy.<sup>7</sup>

The economic successes of the upper and middle economic groups, unfortunately, as image preservation for the city, led the media to attempt to hide the problems of racial tension and poverty in the lower economic groups. As a result, the media in its attempts to hide racial and economic tensions gave Atlanta the title previously used in the 1950's: "the city too busy to hate," referring to the fact that Atlanta was too busy making money to hate or neglect anyone.<sup>48</sup> The "city too busy to hate" would soon be put under the spotlight as multiple children disappeared in the low income black community. *The Atlanta Constitution* ran article after article in their daily press on the subject of the Atlanta youth murders and eventually Wayne B. Williams. The coverage spread overseas to France where James Baldwin became inspired to write on the issue of blacks and the Atlanta youth murders after being asked to write an article for *Playboy*.<sup>49</sup> *The Globe and Mail*, a paper reaching citizens in Toronto, Canada, gave the north a solid source for material.<sup>50</sup> News stations became fixated on the story and talk radio discussed the event thoroughly.

The media and public became interested in the Atlanta youth murders because these murders disrupted the economic and racial balance within the city, and serial murder provided a "vibrant market" for both the media and public.<sup>51</sup> David Schmid, a writer who discusses the relationship between the media and the public, argues this in his book *Natural Born Celebrities*.

Although murder constitutes a tiny fraction of all crimes committed in the United States, murder and other crimes of

<sup>47</sup> Baldwin, 62.

<sup>48</sup> Drunonond Ayers. "Mayor of Atlanta Suspends Police Head, Giving the City's Image a Blow." *The New York Times*, March 11, 1978. UNCA Microfilm.

<sup>49</sup> Baldwin, X.

<sup>50</sup> Lawrence Martin. "Despite Psychics and Dollars, The Atlanta Killers May Go Free." *The Globe and Mail*, March 21, 1981. <http://0-www.lexisnexis.com.wncln.wncln.org/us/> (Accessed September 1, 2007).

<sup>51</sup> David Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005. Page 17.

violence dominated media reporting of crime. ...Criminal events and issues receive brief but incredibly intense media coverage. The intensity of the media coverage creates an equally intense reaction among mass media consumers, and as a result a few isolated events can quickly become defined as a major social problem.<sup>52</sup>

National press, such as *Time Magazine* and *Newsweek*, ran articles addressing the racial and economic concerns in Atlanta. They used eye-catching headlines such as, "Terror on Atlanta's Southside,"<sup>53</sup> "The Mood of Ghetto America,"<sup>54</sup> and "Worry Time for Blacks."<sup>55</sup> The press became a literal soap-opera for entertainment, but also informed the public on the Atlanta youth murders and the underlying issues of race and poverty.

In a bitter-sweet manner, the Atlanta youth murders fueled community activism like no other murder case in the city's history, and this activism was aided by the media's coverage. Multiple new programs to protect children and keep Atlanta safe were advertised in the press. Scheduled searches, curfew times, new program information, and program successes were displayed in the local papers, while national papers focused on the results of the searches. *The Atlanta Constitution* ran articles discussing the future actions of police officers and local politicians to give the community ideas and options for keeping their children safe during the Atlanta youth murders.<sup>56</sup> Mayor Jackson used the media as a medium to send messages of encouragement and thanks to the community for their assistance.<sup>57</sup> He was quoted in *The Atlanta Constitution* as saying, "In this age of apathy, you [the community] have shown that by

<sup>52</sup> David Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005. Page 14.

<sup>53</sup> "Terror on Atlanta's South Side." *Time*, November 3, 1980. UNCA Microfilm.

<sup>54</sup> "The Mood of Ghetto America." *Newsweek*, June 2, 1980. UNCA Microfilm.

<sup>55</sup> "Worry Time For Blacks." *Newsweek*, December 1, 1980. UNCA Microfilm.

<sup>56</sup> "Langford to Lead Search Party." *The Atlanta Constitution*. January 24, 1981. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

<sup>57</sup> T.L. Wells and Frank Wells, "Slayings Reward Growing." *The Atlanta Constitution*. October 18, 1981. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

putting your foot in the street, you can make a contribution to our city." Community activism was aided and encouraged through the media's coverage.

Important information concerning plans and organizations to protect Atlanta's children were displayed in the media for the purpose of reaching large audiences. There was a desperate need to keep children off the streets and accompanied by an adult, and the media provided a great medium to disperse information to help children. The city discussed plans for a curfew to be imposed on the children of Atlanta and *The Atlanta Constitution* relayed the government's ideas.<sup>59</sup> Grace Davis, a member of the newly formed group "Atlanta Women Against Crime," asked the city to go further and ban trick-or-treating for the Halloween holiday.<sup>60</sup> She claimed the group did not "want any more kids knocked off."<sup>61</sup> As a result, the local Atlanta Police Special Task force, formed specifically to handle the Atlanta youth murders case, gave their response to the city's public, "We are just urging parents to make sure that if their children go out, they go with them."<sup>62</sup> Messages like these were dispersed to a vast audience in Atlanta and across the country.

To aid community activism, the media provided information regarding local events and actions focused on stopping the Atlanta youth murders. The need for search crews became apparent as the list of murdered and missing children rose. The press became the best source for advertising the necessity of volunteers. Specific meeting locations, dates, and times for searches of bodies or clues concerning the Atlanta youth murders, were displayed on front pages with regularity. The 1980, October 20 headline for *The Atlanta Constitution* read: "Whites, Blacks

<sup>58</sup> "Search." Quote from Mayor Maynard Jackson. *The Atlanta Constitution*. October 19, 1981. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

<sup>59</sup> "Curfew." *The Atlanta Constitution*. October 15, 1980. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

<sup>60</sup> "Curfew." October 15, 1980.

<sup>61</sup> "Curfew." October 15, 1980.

<sup>62</sup> "Curfew." October 15, 1980.

Uniting in Search for Children."<sup>63</sup> The volunteer search would begin with a meeting at Cumberland Mall at 9 a.m. on Saturday.<sup>64</sup> The paper chose to appeal to church members and the white community to aid in the volunteer search effort. The paper made a point to mention the support from local churches by mentioning the actions of several church pastors, preachers, and rabbis. Some members of the black community viewed the actions of whites as being idle in the search for a murderer, and whites were simply "watching" events unfold instead of helping with searches.<sup>65</sup> Journalists saw a lack of support in the white community and made a point to appeal to this group by using many majority white churches to show support.<sup>66</sup>

The community's actions toward the child murders, as well as the government's actions, were displayed through the media. The media displayed these actions by informing the public of the work within local committees, such as the SAFE committee, the "Committee to Stop Children's Murders," which changed its name to "Stop the Children's Murders" due to mismanagement in the previous CSCM, and "Atlanta Women Against Crime."<sup>67</sup> The media also displayed the responsiveness of committees established prior to the Atlanta youth murders, such as "The United Youth Adult Conference of Atlanta," the "Atlanta Police Special Task Force,"

AS

and "People United to Save Humanity." The media was a good source of information for discovering the actions of the community and the government during the Atlanta youth murders. The media, for the most part, highlighted the works of these committees, especially the locally organized groups, and allowed them to gain strength and support. The "Stop the Children's Murders" group was formed by three mothers of murdered or missing children. The

<sup>63</sup> Brenda Mooney and Sharon Salyer, "Whites, Blacks Uniting in Search for Children." *The Atlanta Constitution*. October 20, 1981. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

<sup>64</sup> "Whites, Blacks Uniting in Search for Children." October 20, 1981.

<sup>65</sup> "Whites, Blacks Uniting in Search for Children." October 20, 1981.

<sup>66</sup> "Whites, Blacks Uniting in Search for Children." October 20, 1981.

<sup>67</sup> "Atlanta Suspect Called Task Force a Year Ago." *The New York Times*, November 13, 1981. UNCA Microfilm.

<sup>68</sup> Eugene Robinson, "Atlanta Mothers Call for Rally Here." *Washington Post*, May 1, 1981. UNCA microfilm.

media coverage during the formation of this committee was weak at first.<sup>69</sup> The location of their first meeting had obvious racial importance, and the media displayed these actions to the public. The committee met at a restaurant where Martin Luther King Jr. had met years before to discuss plans for non-violent action against the government.<sup>71</sup> When the group began to grow the media coverage increased the popularity of the "Stop the Children's Murders" committee.<sup>72</sup>

Local committees used the media to increase awareness of the Atlanta youth murders. Camille Bell, the president of "Stop the Children's Murders," provided a good example of how community committees used the media to increase awareness of the Atlanta youth murders. A panel of parents whose children had become victims of the Atlanta youth murders called on national attention through the media. Expressing her hope for national recognition from the press, Bell insisted, "Nationally, what we are hoping for is that the experience of Atlanta will make the nation say, 'We will not allow Atlanta to happen again.'" The SAFE organization, formed by civilian police task force members, decided to use the local media as an advertising venue for their actions. *The Atlanta Constitution* ran an article in the October 14, 1980 issue discussing a new "Child Safety Program."<sup>74</sup> SAFE informed the community of an "education program" which would provide information to 70,000 downtown workers on how to keep the children safe.<sup>75</sup> The media informed their audience of pamphlets and posters that would be handed out to the workers and stores. A member of the SAFE organization informed *The*

<sup>69</sup> Bernard Headley, *The Atlanta Youth Murders and the Politics of Race*. Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1998. Page 47.

<sup>70</sup> Headley, 47.

<sup>71</sup> Headley, 47.

<sup>72</sup> "The Mothers of Slain Children Start a New Group in Atlanta." *The New York Times*. September 13, 1981. UNCA Microfilm.

<sup>73</sup> "Parents of Missing Children Unite in Plea for Help." *The New York Times*. December 2, 1981. UNCA Microfilm.

<sup>74</sup> "Child Safety Program is Underway." *The Atlanta Constitution*. October 18, 1980. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

<sup>75</sup> "Child Safety Program is Underway." *The Atlanta Constitution*. October 18, 1980. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

*Atlanta Constitution* that, "Participating stores would be clearly marked so that children who feel threatened would know where to turn for help."<sup>76</sup> The media was used as a reliable source for distributing information and relaying the actions of the government and community organizations.

Though the media coverage of the Atlanta youth murders sparked community activism as well as government programs, the media was also concerned with image preservation for the city. There was not evidence to suggest the media was involved in a conspiracy, but an effort to save the city's image required the media to separate the community from the truth by making incorrect assumptions about murder investigations and pressuring the police and local officials for information regarding the case. To see this misconstruing of the truth, it is necessary to start from the beginning of coverage of the Atlanta youth murders.

The media's assumptions led the community to believe the Atlanta youth murders were a white versus black issue, and was part of a nation wide racial conspiracy. The years before the Atlanta youth murders, the late 1970's, were years of change and prosperity for the upper classes of society in Atlanta, which was predominantly white. Though Atlanta bustled with business on the upper levels, many of the poor blacks of Atlanta were engulfed in poverty. An estimated 31 percent of black families were considered below the poverty line.<sup>77</sup> To place that number into perspective on racial terms, only 7 percent of white families were included below the line.<sup>78</sup> Though Atlanta tried to display itself as the "city too busy to hate," the "problems relating to race and class were often largely neglected unless they immediately affected Atlanta's economic

<sup>76</sup> "Child Safety Program is Underway." *The Atlanta Constitution*. October 18, 1980. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

<sup>77</sup> Ronald Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Atlanta*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996. Page, 125.

<sup>78</sup> Bayor, 125.

vitality."<sup>79</sup> This unofficial policy was usually enforced under a majority white power structure in Atlanta. A writer for *The New York Times*, Reginald Stuart, argued in March, 1981, that poor blacks living in Atlanta were viewed by the local government as "not being part of [Atlanta's] overall stride forward."<sup>80</sup> The article discussed the possibility of a racially motivated killer or killers trying to cause havoc to the city's racial harmony with no credible evidence to back his argument.<sup>81</sup> The Atlanta youth murders were linked to other various disasters that occurred to the black citizens in Atlanta and across the nation portraying the idea that the murders were racially motivated.<sup>2</sup>

The media led the community to believe the murders were racially motivated and unfairly linked to a nation wide conspiracy. *The Atlanta Constitution* related the Atlanta youth murders to a case in Buffalo, New York, where six black men were murdered and their hearts were cut out.<sup>83</sup> The article also related the Atlanta youth murders to several dropped charges on Ku Klux Klan members for the accused shooting of five black women in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and a housing project nursery explosion that killed four young black boys and a teacher in Atlanta.<sup>84</sup> The article portrayed the Atlanta youth murders as a problem where missing or murdered children were part of a racially motivated killer or killers trying to cause havoc to the city's racial harmony.<sup>85</sup> The media suggested the murders were part of a national conspiracy linked by racial motivation, and the media assumed a white killer or killers were responsible for the murders.

<sup>79</sup> Jefferey Adler and David Colburn, *African-American Mayors: Race, Politics, and the American City*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001. Page, 178.

<sup>80</sup> Reginald Stuart, "Tensions Over Atlanta Killings Test Racial Harmony." *The New York Times*. March 3, 1981. UNCA Microfilm.

<sup>81</sup> "Tensions Over Atlanta Killings Test Racial Harmony." March 3, 1981.

<sup>82</sup> "Tensions Over Atlanta Killings Test Racial Harmony." March 3, 1981.

<sup>83</sup> "Blacks." *The Atlanta Constitution*. October 16, 1980. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

<sup>84</sup> "Blacks." October 16, 1980.

<sup>85</sup> "Blacks." October 16, 1980.

The media did not have the investigative skills or knowledge, like skills obtained by police and criminal investigators, to make correct assumptions about the profile of the killer or killers in Atlanta. Dr. Robert Keppel, a former investigator of the Ted Bundy murders and the Atlanta youth murders, and expert in serial murder investigations, argued that the media should

8A

have realized a white person could not have committed these murders. Every child involved in the Atlanta youth murders came from poor black neighborhoods, where it would have been impossible for a group of white men to have gone unnoticed in a black community already on

117

notice for anything unusual, such as a white male in a predominantly black community.

Keppel argued that a group of white men would not only have been noticed, but also, white men

00 —

would have set the community into "full alarm." The media did not have the proper skills or knowledge to assume a white person or group of whites were committing the Atlanta youth murders.

Not only did the media attempt to produce a profile of a killer or killers; the media also influenced the actions of police and local officials by rushing them for answers, which often led to conflicting stories. The media, under pressure to produce a story, pressured the local law

00

enforcement for a "quick solution." Keppel recalls his introduction to the pressure applied by the media in Atlanta:

Long-term investigations gave the opportunity to deduce in a logical manner and in relative quiet what step to take next. The rush-rush attention of police supervisors for a quick resolution in the pressure cooker of public scrutiny had usually subsided by the time the case got to me because I was one of the detectives who usually handled the long-term cases. Thus additional pressure

<sup>86</sup> Robert D. Keppel, PH.D., *The Riverman: Ted Bundy and I Hunt for the Green River Killer*. New York, NY: Simon & Shuster, Inc., 2005. Page, 93-94.

<sup>87</sup> Keppel, 93-94.

<sup>88</sup> Keppel, 94.

<sup>89</sup> Keppel, 92.

from the media for a quick solution wasn't usually something I had to deal with. But all that was about to change.<sup>90</sup>

The press needed a new story often in hopes of selling more papers and keeping the community satisfied that action was being taken to stop the crimes, so the media "prodded" the local officials and police for information.<sup>91</sup> The police, "having a sense of image consciousness" as well, wanted to be the first to tell the new lead or give their opinion.<sup>92</sup> An unnamed state official in Atlanta remarked on the attempt of the media and police to be the first to tell the story.

Brown [Commissioner of Atlanta], has a real problem on his hands trying to disseminate enough information to these [police] agencies, but not too much. Because the fact is, when they're close to doing something that looks good, everybody wants to go court the news media to tell them all about it.<sup>93</sup>

This often led to different stories being produced about the killer from different police officials, because, according to Keppel, "The press creates its own magnified version of an event. The more intense the feeding frenzy for exclusives, the more the story changes from reporter to reporter until what the public gets is a distorted version of the truth."<sup>94</sup> *The Atlanta Constitution* published an article focused on police responses to an anonymous call from a man claiming to be the Atlanta youth murderer. The man also claimed to know the location of the body of the next victim. Sheriff Vic Davis of Atlanta was quoted as saying there was "no connection" between the ongoing Atlanta youth murders and a body that was discovered near the location suggested by the anonymous caller. "Other investigators" believed it was "too fantastic of a coincidence"

<sup>90</sup> Keppel, 92.

<sup>91</sup> Hyde Post and Michael Schwartz, "Rockdale Phone Calls Heighten Mystery in Child Slaying." *The Atlanta Constitution*. January 25, 1981. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

<sup>92</sup> David Perlmutter, *Policing the Media: Street Cops and Public Perceptions of Law Enforcement*, Sage Publications, Inc. 2000. Page, 1.

<sup>93</sup> "Is He a Suspect or Isn't He?," *Newsweek*, June 29, 1981. UNCA Microfilm.

<sup>94</sup> Robert D. Keppel, PH.D., *The Riverman: Ted Bundy and I Hunt for the Green River Killer*. New York, NY: Simon & Shuster, Inc., 2005. Page, 93.

for the murders to be unrelated.<sup>95</sup> Pressure from the media pushed the police into a race to discover the truth first, and in the wake of reporting, many stories were misconstrued or conflicting.

Prior to the identification of Wayne B. Williams as the killer in Atlanta the media was responsible for falsely connecting the stream of murders to one suspect. The media set in motion the belief that the murderer was responsible for a series of murders that were connected. The fact that a murderer is a horrible person is normally not disputed, especially after Wayne B. Williams was convicted of two child murders, but the press, without any legal proof, had already tagged Williams as the murderer of all 28 children before his court hearing. In this state of mounting pressure between the media and law enforcement, the media had shaped the public's view of the killer before there was even a suspect. The idea of the killings being linked to a single serial killer was not a firm argument, based on the "lack of a pattern" in causes of death and the deaths of two females victims (also going against the pattern of male victims only), but it was strongly suggested after 11 children had been found murdered and 4 missing.<sup>96</sup> Serial killers usually have a distinctive pattern and most "serial killers do not fit the pattern of a ... Wayne Williams."<sup>97</sup> Of the 28 total deaths of the Atlanta youth murders, only a few of the cases shared similarities which suggested a pattern. The lack of pattern can be seen by reviewing the profiles of the victims. One child was murdered by gunshot, two by blunt trauma to the head, two by stabbings, 12 by strangulation of multiple forms, 6 by unknown forms of strangulation, and 6 undetermined.<sup>98</sup> The age range of the youths was 7 to 28 years.<sup>99</sup> Twenty-six victims were male and 2 were

<sup>95</sup> "Rockdale Phone Calls Heighten Mystery in Child Slaying." January 25, 1981.

<sup>96</sup> "Atlanta Goes on a Manhunt." *Newsweek*. December 1, 1980. UNCA Microfilm.

<sup>97</sup> Ronald Holmes and James De Burger, *Serial Murder*. Sage Publications, Inc. 1988. Page, 20.

<sup>98</sup> Bernard Headley, *The Atlanta Youth Murders and the Politics of Race*. Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1998. Page, 207-214.

<sup>99</sup> Headley, 207-214.

female. A few cases appeared to share a sexual motive, such as bathing of dead bodies and the unbuttoning of pants found on victims,<sup>100</sup> but other cases had no visible sexual motive attached.<sup>101</sup> Throughout the early part of the investigation police admitted there was no common factor in linking these cases because there were no "patterns, trends, or similarities" to be determined, besides the victims were young and black.<sup>102</sup> However, the media had placed the guilt of 28 murders on a single killer, who would eventually be Wayne B. Williams, though he was only convicted of two murders.

The truth would finally be revealed about the media's coverage, but only after the trial of Wayne B. Williams. *The New York Press's* article on March 1, 1982 highlighted what the media had portrayed and what people were finally feeling for themselves in regards to the guilt of Wayne B. Williams. The article quoted several people directly and indirectly involved with the case. After denying Williams's guilt, Stevie Rogers, a victim's sister, claimed she thought there was more than one killer.<sup>103</sup> She thought Williams might be a part of the killings, but did not firmly believe they got the right person.<sup>104</sup> Camille Bell, president of Stop the Children's Murders and mother of a victim, claimed Williams's guilt made him the 30<sup>th</sup> victim of the "Atlanta slayings," because he was labeled by the media as the single killer and he was only found guilty of two murders.<sup>105</sup> She was so convinced that the media's portrayal of Wayne B. Williams as being the only killer was incorrect that she continued a private investigation.<sup>106</sup> A resident unrelated to the Atlanta youth murders, was also quoted, and his words spoke volumes.

<sup>100</sup> "Atlanta Goes on a Manhunt." *Newsweek*, December 1, 1980. UNCA Microfilm.

<sup>101</sup> Eric Hicky, *Serial Murderers and Their Victims*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Wadsworth Group, 2002. Page, 50.

<sup>102</sup> Robert D. Keppel, PH.D., *The Riverman: Ted Bundy and I Hunt for the Green River Killer*. New York, NY: Simon & Shuster, Inc., 2005. Page, 101.

<sup>103</sup> Reginald Stuart, "Atlantans' Feelings Mixed on Verdict." *The New York Times*, March 1, 1982. UNCA Microfilm.

<sup>104</sup> *The New York Times*, March 1, 1982.

<sup>105</sup> *The New York Times*, March 1, 1982.

<sup>106</sup> *The New York Times*, March 1, 1982.

Dale Love claimed that there was pressure on the city and that Williams might have been the killer but something was wrong.<sup>107</sup> The "wrong" was the way in which the media had hyped the stories and led the public into a belief that Wayne B. Williams was the one and only serial murderer involved.

The media's portrayal of Wayne B. Williams had negative effects on his chance to a fair trial. June 4, 1981 marked the beginning of Wayne B. Williams's fame in the public eye. *The New York Post* reported on this day that the "monster" had been captured; referring to the title given to the unknown killer before the capture of Wayne B. Williams, and Williams's capture

1rs

gave the media a face to place with this title. Bernard Headley, author of *The Atlanta Youth Murders and the Politics of Race*, suggests the article had damning consequences.

Completely disregarding any lingering protocol that might have existed between the news media and the agencies of officialdom, and paying scant attention to the complicating little matter that no one had been charged, the *New York Post* went straight for the racial hot button. Emblazoned on the front page of its early edition on June 4, 1981, was this damning headline: 'Atlanta Monster Seized; Police Nab Black Suspect.'<sup>109</sup>

References to the case and Williams's life "made their mark on the public mind," and eventually led to the belief that Wayne B. Williams was the Atlanta youth murderer, which, has still not been proven in court.<sup>110</sup> The pressure felt by the media and "unusually talkative police sources" who wanted to be the first to tell the great story, "kept providing the kind of information that could only fuel damaging speculation," against Wayne B. Williams.<sup>111</sup> Williams and his lawyer Mary Welcome knew the influence the media could have on his chances for having a fair

<sup>107</sup> *The New York Times*, March 1, 1982.

<sup>108</sup> "Is He a Suspect or Isn't He?" *Newsweek*. June 29, 1981. UNCA Microfilm.

<sup>109</sup> Bernard Headley, *The Atlanta Youth Murders and the Politics of Race*. Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1998. Page, 149.

<sup>110</sup> *Newsweek*, June 29, 1981.

<sup>111</sup> *Newsweek*, June 29, 1981.

trial. Welcome issued a request on June 19, 1981, that the media be barred from "publishing or broadcasting virtually anything about her client."<sup>113</sup> The press admitted there had been

110

"Reporters, photographers, and television crews descending] upon his home..." Her request was denied and the press continued its intense coverage. After the trial, Welcome explained that she felt Wayne B. Williams was on trial for multiple children's murders, not the two murders for which he was charged.<sup>114</sup>

It should be noted that Wayne B. Williams has never been convicted of killing a 'youth.' The two victims for which Williams was responsible for killing were 27 and 22 years old.<sup>115</sup> These two adults were far from their child or adolescent years, at least by the law's standards. The media had depicted Wayne B. Williams as the Atlanta youth murderer to the public, causing a public hungry for answers to assume Williams's guilt in all of the Atlanta youth murders.

An important lesson can be gained through examining the media coverage of the Atlanta youth murders and the investigation and trial of Wayne B. Williams: "You always have to be wary of what the media reports because the media itself has created parts of the story."<sup>116</sup> The media displayed two faces to the public. Community activism directed toward keeping children safe and stopping the murders displayed a strong side of Atlanta citizens. The media became an advertising medium for the local government and local citizens, providing a place for dispersing information about local events and searches to the public and federal government. On the other hand, the media's pressure to keep a sellable story and save the image of Atlanta caused trouble

<sup>112</sup> Wedell Rawls, "Figure in Atlanta Inquiry Asks Curb on News Media." *The New York Times*, June 20, 1981. UNCA Microfilm.

<sup>113</sup> *The New York Times*, June 20, 1981.

<sup>114</sup> Wedell Rawls, "Figure in Atlanta Inquiry Asks Curb on News Media." *The New York Times*, June 20, 1981. UNCA Microfilm.

<sup>115</sup> Walter Isaacson, "A Web of Fiber and Fact: Wayne Williams is Convicted of Two Atlanta Murders." *Time*, March 8, 1982. UNCA Microfilm.

<sup>116</sup> Robert D. Keppel, PH.D., *The Riverman: TedBundy and I Hunt for the Green River Killer*. New York, NY: Simon & Shuster, Inc., 2005. Page, 93.

for the investigation and shaped the view of a serial killer without any evidence. The lack of a racial motive, lack of a pattern, and the fact that Wayne B. Williams was convicted of two murders of adult men proves there is some doubt still associated with Wayne B. Williams guilt as the Atlanta youth murderer. Looking back, many experts are looking intensely at the possibility that Wayne B. Williams was not the only murderer. DNA evidence was used as recently as February 2, 2007 to discover more about the Atlanta youth murders. There is a truth to be uncovered in Atlanta concerning the deaths of multiple children from 1979 to 1981. Since the conviction of Williams, most believe there is not a question of whether or not he was a murderer, but the hype of the story and deceptive press created an image the public could not shake away, ultimately giving the public a distorted image of the truth in Atlanta.

## Bibliography

- Jeffery Adler and David Colburn, *African American Mayors: Race, Politics, and the American City*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001.
- Annie Barnes, *The Black Middle Class Family*. Bristol, IN: Wyndham Hall Press, 1985.
- James Baldwin, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston Publishing, 1985.
- Marilyn Bardsley and Rachell Bell, "Two More Boys," CourtTV® Crime Library: Criminal Minds and Methods, October 13, 2007, [www.crimelibrary.com/serial\\_killers/predators/williams/3.html](http://www.crimelibrary.com/serial_killers/predators/williams/3.html) (accessed October 13, 2007).
- Ronald Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Atlanta*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996.
- Bernard Headley, *The Atlanta Youth Murders and the Politics of Race*. Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1998.
- Eric Hickey, *Serial Murderers and Their Victims*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Wadsworth Group, 2002.
- Ronald Holmes and James De Burger, *Serial Murder*. Sage Publications, Inc. 1988.
- Robert D. Keppel, PH.D., *The Riverman: Ted Bundy and I Hunt for the Green River Killer*. New York, NY: Simon & Shuster, Inc., 2005.
- David Perlmutter, *Policing the Media: Street Cops and Public Perceptions of Law Enforcement*. Sage Publications, Inc. 2000.
- David Pritchard, *Citizens, Ethics, and the Law: Holding the Media Accountable*. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000.
- David Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Stephen Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia. 1940-1980*. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2001.
- Newsweek*
- "The Atlanta Case: Murder Times Two," *Newsweek*, July 27, 1981. Page 14. UNCA Microfilm.
- "Atlanta Goes on a Manhunt." *Newsweek*, December 1, 1980. UNCA Microfilm.

"Is He a Suspect or Isn't He?" *Newsweek*. June 29, 1981. UNCA Microfilm.

"The Mood of Ghetto America." *Newsweek*, June 2, 1980. UNCA Microfilm.

"Worry Time For Blacks." *Newsweek*, December 1, 1980. UNCA Microfilm.

### *Phylon*

Bernard Headley, "The Atlanta Establishment and the Atlanta Tragedy," *Phylon*, Volume XLVI, no. 4, (1985): 333-334.

### *The Atlanta Constitution*

"Langford to Lead Search Party," *The Atlanta Constitution*, January 24, 1981. sec. B, Atlanta Edition. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

Gail Esptein and T.L. Wells, "Body of 9<sup>th</sup> Child Victim is Identified." *The Atlanta Constitution*. October 16, 1980. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

T.L. Wells and Frank Wells, "Slayings Reward Growing." *The Atlanta Constitution*. October 18, 1981. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

"Search." Quote from Mayor Maynard Jackson. *The Atlanta Constitution*. October 19, 1981. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

"Curfew." *The Atlanta Constitution*. October 15, 1980. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

Brenda Mooney and Sharon Salyer, "Whites, Blacks Uniting in Search for Children." *The Atlanta Constitution*. October 20, 1981. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

"Child Safety Program is Underway." *The Atlanta Constitution*. October 18, 1980. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

"Blacks." *The Atlanta Constitution*. October 16, 1980. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

Hyde Post and Michael Schwartz, "Rockdale Phone Calls Heighten Mystery in Child Slaying." *The Atlanta Constitution*. January 25, 1981. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

*The Globe and Mail*

Lawrence Martin. "Despite Psychics and Dollars, The Atlanta Killers May Go Free." *The Globe and Mail*, March 21, 1981. <http://0-www.lexisnexis.com.wncln.wncln.org/us/> (Accessed September 1, 2007).

*The New York Times*

"The Mothers of Slain Children Start a New Group in Atlanta." *The New York Times*. September 13, 1981. UNCA Microfilm.

"Parents of Missing Children Unite in Plea for Help." *The New York Times*. December 2, 1981, UNCA Microfilm.

Reginald Stuart, "Tensions Over Atlanta Killings Test Racial Harmony." *The New York Times*. March 3, 1981. UNCA Microfilm.

Reginald Stuart, "Atlantans' Feelings Mixed on Verdict." *The New York Times*, March 1, 1982. UNCA Microfilm.

Wedell Rawls, "Figure in Atlanta Inquiry Asks Curb on News Media." *The New York Times*, June 20, 1981.

Drummond Ayers, "South's Economic Boom Attracts Industry and Banks from Abroad." *The New York Times*. July 4, 1977. UNCA Microfilm.

Wayne King, "Trade is Giving Atlanta International Status." *The New York Times*. June 25, 1979. UNCA Microfilm.

Drummond Ayers. "Mayor of Atlanta Suspends Police Head, Giving the City's Image a Blow." *The New York Times*, March 11, 1978. UNCA Microfilm.

"Atlanta Suspect Called Task Force a Year Ago." *The New York Times*, November 13, 1981. UNCA Microfilm.

*Time*

Walter Isaacson, "A Web of Fiber and Fact: Wayne Williams is Convicted of Two Atlanta Murders." *Time*, March 8, 1982. UNCA Microfilm.

"Terror on Atlanta's South Side." *Time*, November 3, 1980. UNCA Microfilm.

*Washington Post*

Eugene Robinson, "Atlanta Mothers Call for a Rally Here." *Washington Post*, May 1, 1981.  
UNCA microfilm.

## Annotated Bibliography

### Secondary Source Material

Jeffery Adler and David Colburn, *African American Mayors: Race, Politics, and the American City*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001.

This book written by authors interested in the black power structures of major cities throughout the United States. The book deals with race issues in large cities and why the elections of black mayors were important to the particular city. Atlanta's first black mayor, Maynard Jackson, is included in this book. This literature is helpful for giving good background information on Atlanta's political, economic, and racial state.

Annie Barnes, *The Black Middle Class Family*. Bristol, IN: Wyndham Hall Press. 1985.

This book is mostly filled with statistics about the average black middle class family. There are numerous statistics that are helpful to understanding the racial scene in Atlanta. This book is not referenced but it was helpful in discovering the truth in Atlanta.

James Baldwin, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston Publishing, 1985.

This is a book written by an author who studied the Atlanta child murders and was asked to write an article for playboy magazine about the subject. The author is particularly concerned with how the issue of race in the particular cases against Wayne Williams. He does not think Williams is innocent. Baldwin admits he believes Williams is guilty, but not guilty of all twenty-eight murders. He makes mention of the media coverage and the politics of race and class. This book is a great primary source because it is 115 pages. There is a lot of material for me to sample.

Marilyn Bardsley and Rachell Bell, "Two More Boys," CourtTV® Crime Library: Criminal Minds and Methods, October 13, 2007, [www.crimelibrary.com/serial\\_killers/predators/williams/3.html](http://www.crimelibrary.com/serial_killers/predators/williams/3.html) (accessed October 13, 2007).

This source is a website containing information about crime and criminals. It gives general information about the Atlanta youth murders and Wayne B. Williams. The site is updated daily and provided information about events which are still occurring in the ongoing investigation of the Atlanta youth murders. The opening quote of the paper comes from this source. The quote described gives a strong image of the scene in Atlanta as two victims are found.

Ronald Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Atlanta*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

This book gives an overall history of Atlanta from the late 1860's to the 1980's. The book covers everything from the racial setting, economic setting, and social setting in Atlanta. The book is filled with facts about how race shaped the economy and changed Atlanta. The book is filled with good primary and secondary source material. The book is important to understanding why the Atlanta youth murders would have caused trouble in a city where race had such a strong influence in the every day lives of its citizens.

Bernard Headley, *The Atlanta Youth Murders and the Politics of Race*. Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 1998.

This book is a detailed all inclusive book discussing the Atlanta youth murders and how they effected the community. It looks at every individual case and is basically a tribute to the power of the Atlanta youth murders. He uses a creative writing style to captivate the reader. The focus of his writing is to show how the Atlanta youth murders were handled by the government as well as the citizens. He uses sources from around the country and personal interviews of victims' families. This book will be my most important and most used secondary source. It discusses cases and emotions of an entire community.

Eric Hickey, *Serial Murderers and Their Victims*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Wadsworth Group, 2002.

This book was written by an expert in the field of serial murder. The book discusses what a serial murder is and how a person becomes a serial murderer. This book gives information about how a community is affected by a serial killer and how they can be stopped. Using *Serial Murderers and Their Victims*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition was helpful in learning how Atlanta was affected by a serial murder, such as Wayne Williams. This book was helpful when used with other books discussing serial murder.

Ronald Holmes and James De Burger, *Serial Murder*. Sage Publications, Inc. 1988.

This book was much like Erik Hickey's book, *Serial Murderers and Their Victims*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, in that it listed the profile of typical serial murderers. The book attempted to separate and define serial murder from mass murder. The book gave examples of why serial murders are interesting to people. This book helped define the title 'serial murder' and showed why the people of Atlanta were so interested in the man Wayne Williams. It was easy to see why the media took such great interest in the Atlanta youth murders after reading this book.

Robert D. Keppel, PH.D., *The Riverman: Ted Bundy and I Hunt for the Green River Killer*. New York, NY: Simon & Shuster, Inc., 2005.

This book was written by an author who is an expert in criminal investigations. This book is focused on the Ted Bundy serial murders, but there is a large part of the book dedicated to the Atlanta youth murders and the hunt for Wayne Williams, the man responsible for the youth murders. The author is not arguing a thesis, but instead he is giving another side of the story. He is explaining the murders and the hunt for Wayne Williams through the eyes of a member of the government. This is a new perspective since few sources are available that were written by police or government officials. This book is valuable to my research because I will

get a sense of what the government was doing and how the government was working during the murders.

David Perlmutter, *Policing the Media: Street Cops and Public Perceptions of Law Enforcement*. Sage Publications, Inc. 2000.

This book focused on how law enforcement, citizens, and the media work together in society. This work was critical for understanding how these three groups work together. By relating the Atlanta youth murders' media coverage to how the police and public react to the coverage, showed why the media produced the information they found. This was a helpful book for understanding how strong the media can influence the public eye.

David Pritchard, *Citizens, Ethics, and the Law: Holding the Media Accountable*. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000.

This book was similar to *Policing the Media: Street Cops and Public Perceptions of Law Enforcement*. This book focused more on the role of the media. Learning the ethics of journalist showed why coverage of the Atlanta youth murders and Wayne B. Williams was so harsh. This book was critical in understanding what motivates the media. Learning that the media usually prints the information that will sell the most copies was interesting. I quoted this book in several places.

David Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

This book showed the relationship between the media, public, and serial killers. The book explained why the public is so interested in serial killers. The book argued that the media views their coverage as an attempt to sell more copies, and the way to sell more copies is to create a story that is interesting. The book shows why the man Wayne B. Williams and the Atlanta youth murders were so interesting to the public.

Stephen Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia. 1940-1980*. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2001.

This book discussed the background of Atlanta on political, economic, and racial grounds. It was necessary to learn the background of Atlanta, especially the political, economic, and racial background. The Atlanta youth murders involved only poor black youths, therefore, a critical analysis of Atlanta's background on politics, economics, and race was needed. This book was used in conjunction with *African-American Mayors: Race, Politics, and the American City*.

## Primary Source Material

*Newsweek*

"The Atlanta Case: Murder Times Two," *Newsweek*, July 27, 1981. Page 14. UNCA Microfilm.

This is an article written for the national newspaper *Newsweek*. The article describes the victims for which Wayne B. Williams was charged for killing. The article gives a brief overview of the charges and victims.

"Atlanta Goes on a Manhunt." *Newsweek*, December 1, 1980. UNCA Microfilm.

This article covers many aspects of the Atlanta youth murders. There was a description of the scene in Atlanta, a description of the victims, and the progress that had taken place by the community and police to catch the murderer. It is a long article written for the national public. The article also featured many pictures of key figures in Atlanta at the time of the Atlanta youth murders. This article is a great place for finding general information during the Atlanta youth murders.

"Is He a Suspect or Isn't He?" *Newsweek*. June 29, 1981. UNCA Microfilm.

This article was written for the national public. It was written a month and a half after Wayne B. Williams was recognized by the police and a month after he was arrested. The article reflected an idea that the local and national media give differing accounts of the events in Atlanta. It mentions how harshly the media portrayed Wayne B. Williams in *The New York Post*. The article relayed the profile of Wayne B. Williams and gives some good information about the upcoming trial.

### *Phylon*

Bernard Headley, "The Atlanta Establishment and the Atlanta Tragedy," *Phylon.*, Volume XLVI, no. 4, (1985): 333-334.

This article by Bernard Headley is from the journal Phylon. The author argues that the position taken by Atlanta's white ruling class during the period when the child murders took place was basically one of image-preservation and damage-control. This author is an expert in the Atlanta youth murders and has written several articles and a book on the issue. The author uses articles from the Atlanta Journal Constitution and interviews conducted by Headley. I think this article gives me a sense of what was going on in Atlanta in regards to how the media covered the murders. I think I can use this to see how the media in Atlanta perceived the youth murders.

### *The Atlanta Constitution*

"Langford to Lead Search Party," *The Atlanta Constitution*, January 24, 1981. sec. B, Atlanta Edition. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

This is a short article inserted in the Atlanta paper. It gives the time, place, and location of a search party that was to look for missing and dead children. This was a good example in seeing how the Atlanta community was involved in searching for children. It also shows how the media was used as an advertising medium.

Gail Esptein and T.L. Wills, "Body of 9<sup>th</sup> Child Victim is Identified." *The Atlanta Constitution*. October 16, 1980. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

This is an article discussing the identification of a murder victim in the Atlanta area. The article discussed the terrible details of the discovery. There is an excellent quote describing the investigation in Atlanta which sums up the importance of the Atlanta youth murders for the city. The article describes the investigation as the most intense investigation in Atlanta's history.

T.L. Wells and Frank Wells, "Slayings Reward Growing." *The Atlanta Constitution*. October 18, 1981. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

This article was published by the local Atlanta paper. The article discusses the reward for information concerning the Atlanta youth murders. Mayor Maynard Jackson was quoted often and is seen as being very enthusiastic and confident that a killer will be discovered. This article is a good example of how the government used the media as an advertising medium.

"Search." Quote from Mayor Maynard Jackson. *The Atlanta Constitution*. October 19, 1981. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

This article discusses the actions of the government and police in trying to solve the case of the Atlanta youth murders. Several police officers and city officials are quoted in this article. One particular quote stands out late in the article. Mayor Maynard Jackson is quoted in this as he makes a plea to the community and federal government to give the city of Atlanta money or help out in any way possible.

"Curfew." *The Atlanta Constitution*. October 15, 1980. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

This article discusses the possibility of a curfew for the city of Atlanta during the Atlanta youth murders. The curfew was to be placed on children 16 and under and was designed to keep the children of Atlanta indoors at night. This article shows a small piece of the action that was taking place by the city and the community at large. The city officials are quoted as well as the citizens of Atlanta.

Brenda Mooney and Sharon Salyer, "Whites, Blacks Uniting in Search for Children." *The Atlanta Constitution*. October 20, 1981. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

This article appeals to the racial issues in Atlanta. This article was written as an attempt to show how race was not an issue in Atlanta's search for the Atlanta youth murderer. The article shows how the community was coming together, but there was an apparent lack of

support from the white community. The article appeals to the white community by targeting white churches and white communities.

"Child Safety Program is Underway." *The Atlanta Constitution*. October 18, 1980. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

This article was written to provide information to the citizens of Atlanta on actions that would be taken by the government. These actions were set in place to keep the Atlanta children safe. This article is an advertisement to the community as well, giving time and location of programs to keep children safe.

"Blacks." *The Atlanta Constitution*. October 16, 1980. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

This was a long article written to *The Atlanta Constitution*. The article focuses on racial issues in Atlanta that had been raised due to the Atlanta youth murders. The article discusses the possibility that the Atlanta youth murders are linked to a national conspiracy against black people. The article relates the murders to multiple other disasters in the nation and in Atlanta as well. This article was used to show how the issue of race was so important during the Atlanta youth murders.

Hyde Post and Michael Schwartz, "Rockdale Phone Calls Heighten Mystery in Child Slaying." *The Atlanta Constitution*. January 25, 1981. Appalachian State University Microfilm.

This article was written on the front page of the Atlanta newspaper. It discusses a phone call received by the Atlanta police concerning the discovery a missing child. The caller was anonymous and claimed to be the Atlanta youth murderer. The article proves how uninformed the police were, because they gave differing opinions. There is also a good quote used from this article in the main paper.

### *The Globe and Mail*

Lawrence Martin. "Despite Psychics and Dollars, The Atlanta Killers May Go Free." *The Globe and Mail*, March 21, 1981. <http://0-www.lexisnexis.com.wncln.wncln.org/us/> (Accessed September 1,2007).

This article was written for The Globe and Mail newspaper for Toronto, Canada. It is an interesting article which gives a different perspective on the Atlanta child murders. The article discusses the use of psychics to investigate the Atlanta child murders. He gives a different account on the use of psychics than papers in Atlanta gave. He makes a comment that people are realizing that the case is out of control and the killer or killers may never be found. This article seems to be the most accurate depiction of what is going on in Atlanta because the author is telling his own feelings and not worrying about trying to please others. It is also a great source of international press coverage.

### *The New York Times*

"The Mothers of Slain Children Start a New Group in Atlanta." *The New York Times*.  
September 13, 1981. UNCA Microfilm.

This article in the New York paper gives information concerning the group of victims' mothers creation of a group to stop child murders in Atlanta. The article discusses Camille Bell's involvement in the group. The article shows how the media displayed the actions of the community as well as the actions of the government.

"Parents of Missing Children Unite in Plea for Help." *The New York Times*. December 2, 1981.  
UNCA Microfilm.

This article was written as a special to *The New York Times*. The article discusses the involvement of the parents in Atlanta pleading for help to the federal government. The article looks at many the many issues raised by the Atlanta youth murders. This article can be viewed as an advertisement to the national government. The article is helpful because it shows how the media used its advertising abilities to get aid for Atlanta.

Reginald Stuart, "Tensions Over Atlanta Killings Test Racial Harmony." *The New York Times*.  
March 3, 1981. UNCA Microfilm.

This article takes an in depth look at the racial problems in Atlanta caused by the Atlanta youth murders. The article was written to show the problem on all levels of Atlanta society. The economic problems of blacks, the poverty situation, and racial dissention are all discussed in this article. The article title is an eye grabber and shows immediately there was a problem with race in Atlanta. Understanding the racial problems in Atlanta allows for a better understanding of the impact of the Atlanta youth murders.

Reginald Stuart, "Atlantans' Feelings Mixed on Verdict." *The New York Times*, March 1, 1982.  
UNCA Microfilm.

This article was written for The New York Times newspaper. It is an interesting look at how the media can make someone seem guilty or innocent. The reporting seems to focus on the fact that so many people believe that Wayne Williams may have been guilty, but he could not possibly be completely responsible for the slaying or disappearance of all 28 victims. There are several quotes from people in the community about the fact that the public seems unhappy with the verdicts and actions of the legal system. It also discredits the fiber evidence which was used in the case as damaging evidence. This article is a great look at how the media can lead the public in directions they choose.

Wedell Rawls, "Figure in Atlanta Inquiry Asks Curb on News Media." *The New York Times*,  
June 20, 1981.

This article was written for The New York Times newspaper. It discusses the actions of Wayne Williams's lawyer toward the media. His lawyer called for the complete removal of

Wayne William's name, pictures, and address. The article shows how strong the media's role in this case was. The defense was concerned that the media would portray Williams in a negative way, or at least make him guilty in the eyes of the public, before the trial had even begun. This will be a great piece concerning the strength of the media and the power they enforce on the public.

Drummond Ayers, "South's Economic Boom Attracts Industry and Banks from Abroad." *The New York Times*. July 4, 1977. UNCA Microfilm.

This article describes the economic scene in Atlanta prior to the Atlanta youth murders. The article mentions the city's economic power in the South and how Atlanta intends on keeping the power. This article is critical to understanding why Atlanta would want to preserve its image to the nation. This article is also a good defense of why Atlanta would disregard the lower economic group in Atlanta.

Wayne King, "Trade is Giving Atlanta International Status." *The New York Times*. June 25, 1979. UNCA Microfilm.

This article is an explanation of the economy in Atlanta prior to the Atlanta youth murders. The article explains how Atlanta is holding economic power and how the commerce and trade are spreading to the international stage. There is a great quote in the article to explain where Atlanta is placed in the economic South. The city is called the Paris of the South and the article uses this title to highlight Atlanta's success.

Drummond Ayers. "Mayor of Atlanta Suspends Police Head, Giving the City's Image a Blow." *The New York Times*, March 11, 1978. UNCA Microfilm.

This article reflects the desire for the city to have a good image in the eye of the nation. The title supports this by saying the image was damaged. The article goes on to say that Atlanta was a 'city to busy to hate.' The article suggests the economic drive in the city kept whites and blacks from hating each other. The city was too busy making money to hate or forget a group of people, such as poor black citizens. This article tried covering the truth in Atlanta.

"Atlanta Suspect Called Task Force a Year Ago." *The New York Times*, November 13, 1981. UNCA Microfilm.

This article shows how the media influenced Wayne B. Williams. The article discusses the actions of an interviewer and photography crew which spoke to Williams and took his picture. Wayne B. Williams was paid for allowing the interview and giving photo opportunities. The article shows how valuable the Atlanta youth murders case and Wayne B. Williams were to the media.

*Time*

Walter Isaacson, "A Web of Fiber and Fact: Wayne Williams is Convicted of Two Atlanta Murders." *Time*, March 8, 1982. UNCA Microfilm.

This article was written after the conviction of Wayne B. Williams. The article is used to see the profiles of the two victims of which Wayne B. Williams was convicted for killing. The article proves that the Atlanta youth murders title placed on Wayne B. Williams was unfair. The two victims were adults. The article only briefly used in the main paper, but it was a great source for finding details about the trial and conviction of Wayne B. Williams.

"Terror on Atlanta's South Side." *Time*, November 3, 1980. UNCA Microfilm.

"The Mood of Ghetto America." *Newsweek*, June 2, 1980. UNCA Microfilm.

"Worry Time For Blacks." *Newsweek*, December 1, 1980. UNCA Microfilm.

These three articles are used together for their titles. They all represented the state of Atlanta's black population. These articles were displayed in national magazines and are very powerful. They discussed the social and economic struggles the poor black population in Atlanta was facing during the time of the Atlanta youth murders. These articles are used to show how influential the media could be as well as giving great background information on Atlanta's black status.

### *Washington Post*

Eugene Robinson, "Atlanta Mothers Call for a Rally Here." *Washington Post*, May 1, 1981.  
UNCA microfilm.

This article was written to show the community activism in Atlanta. The situation in Atlanta seemed to be getting desperate for change. The mothers of victims are expressing their concern. The article suggests that a war against children is taking place and a rally should be in order. The article also lists several organizations that had formed due to the Atlanta youth murders in Atlanta.