

African American Women and Violence: Gender, Race, and Class in the News

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This study uses discourse analysis to examine the representation of violence against African American women in local TV news coverage of Freaknik, an annual “spring break” ritual that drew African American college students from throughout the country to Atlanta, Georgia in the 1990s. It draws on Black feminist theory in its examination of the ways that gender, race, and class intersected to shape the representation of the victims, the perpetrators, and the violence. The results indicate that the convergence of gender, race, and class oppressions minimized the seriousness of the violence, portrayed most of its victims as stereotypic Jezebels whose lewd behavior provoked assault, and absolved the perpetrators of responsibility. Coverage also reinforced race and class stereotypes by representing locals as underclass troublemakers prone to crime while students were linked to law-abiding, middle class values and norms. In demonstrating the utility of addressing the intersectionality of gender, race, and class, this study argues that such an approach is necessary to the study of representation.

Throughout the 1990s, Freaknik was an annual rite of spring in Atlanta. The pre-final exams weekend of street parties and cruising¹ drew African American college students from across the U.S. Begun in 1982 as a “modest picnic in the park for a couple of hundred students” from historically Black Morehouse and Spelman colleges, the event attracted, at its peak in 1994, up to 200,000 student and non-student participants (Helton, 1996, p. H4). It unofficially ended in 2000 after the city decided strictly to enforce traffic and curfew laws, crack down on lewd public behavior, and spread the word that Freaknik was not welcome (Suggs, 2000). A 1998 editorial in the *Atlanta Constitution* explains: Freaknik had “turned into a

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destructive, chaotic and abusive affair years ago. Its main focus became sexual harassment and sexual attacks on women” (Resolution for Atlanta, 1998, p. 12A).

The problem of Black men’s violence against Black women raises sensitive issues of gender and race. While some scholarship has addressed the representation of these issues in the news (see, for example, Lule, 1995), this study represents a new approach, informed by Black feminist theory, which recognizes the interconnected nature of gender, race, and class. It seeks to examine how these signifiers of domination and exclusion shape meaning within news coverage of violence against African American women. Black feminist theorists argue that gender, race, and class cannot be decontextualized or divorced from each other. They are “simultaneous forces” (Brewer, 1993, p. 16) whose meaning can be understood only within the context of their intersection. In addition, this study is unique in that no previous news study has looked expressly at the representation of African American women (other than coverage of specific, well-known figures) or focused on their portrayal as victims of violence.

In using discourse analysis to explore violence against African American women in local Atlanta, Georgia, TV news coverage of *Freaknik*, I argue that the convergence of gender, race, and class oppressions minimizes the seriousness of the violence and portrays its victims primarily as stereotypic Jezebels who provoke male violence through their own behavior. Male perpetrators are invisible and passive within this discourse. The news also reinforces race and class stereotypes by positioning locals as inner-city troublemakers and students as middle class, good citizens. I conclude that the news’ juxtaposition of locals and students works ideologically to affirm middle class values and norms as a remedy for poverty and racism while supporting the belief that success and failure depend upon individual initiative.

Women, Violence and the News

Critical news scholars claim that the news supports the values, beliefs and norms of a ruling elite that wields social, economic and political power within a hierarchy of social formations (Hall, 1977, 1982; Hall, Connell, & Curti, 1977; Hartley, 1982). While social, political and cultural hegemony depends on a combination of force and consent, it is most effective when its ideological underpinnings appear natural, normal and common-sensical (Althusser, 1971; Gramsci, 1971, 1983). Thus, to effectively build and maintain support for the ruling elite, the news must appear neutral and disguise its ideological roots (Hall, 1977, 1982; Hartley, 1982). “Neutrality” is won through the choice of words and use of language, the delimiting of arguments so that truly oppositional positions are never presented as legitimate considerations, and the framing of stories so that they appear not to be ideological at all, but instead seem natural and grounded in everyday reality. Although any number of interpretations are possible given the polysemic nature of texts, some discourses are privileged and most likely to shape meaning because they carry the weight of cultural assumptions and expectations (Eco, 1990). As Hall (1977) states, “The media serve, in societies like ours, ceaselessly to perform the critical ideological work of ‘classifying out the world’ within the discourses of the dominant ideology” (p. 346).²

hooks (1992) emphasizes that White supremacist and male supremacist ideologies are institutionalized in the media, which produce “specific images, representations of race, of blackness that support and maintain the oppression, exploitation, and overall domination of all black people” (p. 2). However, little is known about the images and representations of Black women in the news. News studies that have explored the representation of African Americans either explicitly target men or implicitly neglect women while typically concluding that Blacks are portrayed as both a problem and threat to society.³ For example, Dixon and Linz (2000) found that African Americans are over-represented in the news as criminals and under-represented as victims. Entman and Rojecki (2000) claim the news portrays Black criminals as more threatening and Black politicians as more self-serving than their White counterparts. By ignoring the specificity of gender, these studies imply that Black women and men are similarly over-represented as criminals, under-represented as victims, and appear more threatening and self-serving than Whites.

In addition, while a handful of studies have examined the general representation of women in the news, they elide either race (the Women, Men and Media Project, 1994, 1995) or racial difference. For example, while Rakow and Kranich (1991) found that “only white women are allowed to signify as ‘women’” (p. 19) they did not address the ways in which the signification of women of color differs from that of White women.

Black feminist theorists argue that the convergence of male supremacist and White supremacist ideologies is reflected in stereotypes of Black women. These include the sexually promiscuous black woman—the “oversexed-black-Jezebel”—the mammy and the welfare cheat (Painter, 1992, p. 210), as well as the overachieving “black lady” who emasculates the Black males in her life (Lubiano, 1992). Collins (1991) points out that racism, sexism, and poverty are normalized and naturalized by defining African American women as “stereotypical mummies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mammas” (p. 67).

Studies of news coverage of violence against women indicate the news tends to blame women for their own victimization while absolving their assailants of responsibility (Benedict, 1992; Bumiller, 1990; Chancer, 1987; Cuklanz, 1997; Meyers, 1994, 1997; Steeves, 1997), thereby perpetuating a good girl/bad girl or virgin/whore dichotomy (Benedict, 1992; Meyers, 1994, 1997). Media coverage of violence against women supports the interests of the state (Edwards, 1987; Finn, 1989–1990; Steeves, 1997), with the news rarely covering violence against African American women unless it is sensationalistic or highly unusual (Benedict, 1992; Meyers, 1997).

Black feminist theorists emphasize that the nature of sexual assault can only be understood within its social and political context, which reflects the “complex interconnectedness of race, gender, and class oppression which characterize that society” (A.Y. Davis, 1985, p. 10). Angela Y. Davis (1998) notes that Black women “have always suffered in far greater proportion and intensity the effects of institutionalized male supremacy” (p. 186). The experience of violence against Black women is “magnified by racism and classism, given the stigma of Africanist sexuality,” and “the public is not socialized to view black females sympathetically in rape cases, given their historical construction as whores” (James, 1996, pp. 142, 144).

This socialization is not limited to a White public. Women of color who accuse men of color of sexual assault are often not believed by their communities, but are labeled “race traitors” instead (James, 1996, p. 143). A number of Black feminists have criticized the tendency within their communities to silence female victims of male violence while rallying around the men who abused them (hooks, 1981; Lorde, 1992; Richie, 1985; Smith, 1992). Lorde (1992) notes that the need for racial unity has made Black women “particularly vulnerable to the false accusation that anti-sexist is anti-Black” (p. 500). Black women and men who support patriarchy, explains hooks (1981), “have a tremendous investment in presenting the social situation of Black people in such a way that it seems we are only oppressed and victimized by racism” (p. 115). Indeed, D.E. Davis (1997) notes that African American men, like White men, engage in street harassment because they “have been socialized to exercise their male status to oppress women” (p. 197). Defining street harassment as a form of sexual terrorism that includes verbal and non-verbal markers that frighten women and reinforce fears of rape, she claims that this harassment is “genderized and racialized for every woman”: its racial aspect relates to the woman’s background, and its gendered nature maintains male supremacy and female subordination (p. 195). Because this study examines the interconnections of gender, race, and class in television news reports of violence against women, it relies on an overarching analytical frame informed by Black feminist theory.

Theory and Methodology

A Black feminist perspective “doesn’t require the shortchanging of any aspect of Black women’s experience and ... doesn’t assume that racial oppression is more important than sexual oppression or vice versa” (Smith, 1992, p. 185). It views gender, race, and class as bound together so that the “racialization of gender and class” means that “gender identity is inextricably linked to and even determined by racial identity” (Higginbotham, 1992, p. 254). Angela Davis (1998) emphasizes that the oppression of Black women in America is linked not simply to class, but also to national origin and capitalism.

As society’s marginal “others,” Collins (1991) states, African American women define the boundaries of society and therefore are central to social analysis. The social location of African American women as the “ultimate outsiders” (Alexander, 1995, p. 15), as “perhaps the most consistently marginalized segment of our society” in terms of economic and political power (p. 6), provides Black feminists with a unique vantage point for theorizing gender, race, and class “as simultaneous forces” (Brewer, 1993, p. 16). While feminist standpoint theory more generally “advocates that knowledge production and validation should be grounded in one’s everyday life, and especially the everyday lives of the oppressed” (Griffin, 1996, p. 181), the self-defined standpoint of Black women provides the foundation of Black feminist thought (Collins, 1991).

This perspective differs markedly from Weberian or Marxian approaches, which traditionally have been applied to the analysis of class structure and identity. Unlike

Black feminist theory, they have not been able to address the interconnection of class, gender, and race. Weber saw class identity relying not on “an infallible list of occupations for each class” but on “overall, gross differences in the real economic rewards” received by those in different occupations (Landry, 1987 p. 11). Education was a means to provide workers with different levels of skills that could be bartered in the marketplace:

from a Weberian point of view, education is a *cause* or *source* of an individual's class position, rather than a defining characteristic, and income is *one* of the many rewards resulting from one's class position. Neither income nor education, therefore, are part of the definition of class. (Landry, 1987, p. 5)

Early Marxism viewed class consciousness as arising from the experiences of wage laborers under capitalism, with class position determined by occupation and the individual's relationship to the means of production. Contemporary social theorists have come to view class identity as complex and contradictory, reflecting “multiple class positions that individuals can occupy at different moments in their lives” (Gandy, 1998, p. 26). Boxill (1992) points out that Marx's characterization of the lumpenproletariat is similar to contemporary descriptions of the underclass, but without the appeal to racism.

Despite their contributions to the theorizing of class, neither Weberian nor Marxian perspectives have successfully combined the concept of class with an understanding of both gender and race oppression. Barrett (1988) notes the difficulty traditional schools of social and economic thought have had in integrating race into the already stressed analysis of gender and class:

existing theories of social structure, already taxed by attempting to think about the inter-relations of class and gender, have been quite unable to integrate a third axis of systematic inequality into their conceptual maps. Theoretical perspectives using the more flexible vocabulary of subjectivity and discourse have made it possible to explore these issues without being constrained by the need to assign rank in what is effectively a zero-sum game of structural determination. (p. x)

Socialist feminists have debated the relationship between gender and class, particularly whether women's oppression can be independent of class division and the capitalist mode of production. For example, German (1983, 1989) argues that women's oppression is a function not of patriarchy but of class society and the role of the family in reproducing labor power. However, as Barrett (1988) points out, the most effective voices “addressing questions of class, inequality, poverty and exploitation ... are those of black women, not white socialist-feminists” (p. xxiv).

This study thus draws upon a Black feminist paradigm that includes gender, race, and class in the analysis, asking how, in what ways, and to what effect these signifiers of exclusion and domination work within representation. In the analysis that follows, I employ discourse analysis to explore the representation of: (1) the women, (2) the acts of violence against them, and (3) the perpetrators of this violence. The concern here is not with the effect of representation on audiences, but of the effect of class, race and gender on representation.

Local television news coverage of Freaknik was chosen for analysis because, given the paucity of news involving violence against African American women (Meyers, 1997) and Freaknik's propensity for anti-female violence, the event seemed to guarantee that at least some reporting of this violence would be inevitable. Exact numbers are impossible to come by because rape and other acts of physical assault are infrequently reported to police—and African American women are less likely to report such abuse than White women (A.Y. Davis, 1985; Wright, 1998). However, 1996 rape statistics gathered by the city's rape crisis center from the Grady Memorial Hospital emergency room provide some indication of the magnitude of the problem. In the Friday through Monday *prior to* Freaknik, four rape victims were seen in Grady's emergency room, and in the Friday through Monday *following* Freaknik, eight women were treated. In four days *during* Freaknik, from April 19–22, the number skyrocketed to 20 (Nikki Berger, former acting director of Grady Rape Crisis Centre, personal communication; Berger, personal communication, September 18, 1996), a 400% increase over the weekend before and a 150% increase over the weekend after.

For two weeks, from April 12 to 25, 1996, the 11 pm, half-hour newscasts from the ABC, NBC and CBS network affiliates in Atlanta (WSB, WXIA and WGNX, respectively) were taped.⁴ Although Freaknik was primarily a weekend event—beginning the afternoon of Friday, April 19, and continuing through Sunday, April 21—this study includes news stories before, during and after Freaknik so as to evaluate the pre-Freaknik framing of violence as well as any post-Freaknik follow-up stories about violence against women.

All stories that mentioned Freaknik were transcribed. Those that did not involve violence against women were examined for underlying themes and patterns to provide a context for understanding the stories of violence. The discursive analysis of these stories was a necessary first step to providing a framework for the analysis of the stories involving violence against women. News stories specifically involving or referring to violence against women during Freaknik in any way were isolated from the other stories for more in-depth analysis. These stories were analyzed individually for their representation of the victims, the violence itself, and the perpetrators. In addition, news stories and editorials about Freaknik in the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* for the years 1994, 1995, and 1996 were examined less formally to enlarge the framework for understanding.⁵

TV news coverage of Freaknik appeared as “packages” in which related topics were segued together into one, relatively seamless story. For example, two days before Freaknik, WXIA aired a package with three topics: the city's denial of a park permit for Freaknik events, hiring extra security for Freaknik, and Freaknik's effect on baseball ticket sales. Although different topics were covered, they were presented as aspects of one story, with Freaknik the central theme.

Discourse is closely associated with ideology and the reproduction of social hierarchies, and its analysis provides a way to examine ideologies as expressed in written, spoken and visual texts. Discourse is not simply a linguistic practice; it refers to and constructs knowledge about a particular topic. The analysis of discourse

examines not only how language and representation produce meaning, but also the relationship between representation, meaning and power, and the construction of identities and subjectivities (Hall, 1997).

In news studies, van Dijk (1991) explains, discourse analysis looks at the following: the topics as they are expressed in headlines and story leads; overall schematic structures, which express the meaning of the text through conventional categories that include headlines, leads, layout and sentence structure; local meanings or “local coherence,” which make sense of a story by relying on a community’s “knowledge and beliefs about society” (p. 178); semantic strategies, which are goal-directed properties of discourse; and implicitness, which is the “implied or indirect meanings or functions of news reports” and may, in fact, “be even more important, from a critical point of view, than what is explicitly said or meant” (p. 17).

Implicitness resides at the microlevel of news discourse, where rhetoric and style can be systematically analyzed for underlying meanings and ideologies. Microlevel rhetorical devices include: (a) *vagueness*, which conceals responsibility for negative actions, (b) *over-completeness*, which adds irrelevant details that may, in fact, be “relevant within a more general negative portrayal of a person or group” (p. 185), (c) *presupposition*, “a special case of implications” in which the news media “may indirectly and sometimes rather subtly state things that are not ‘known’ by the readers at all, but which are simply suggested to be common knowledge” (p. 183), and (d) *implication*, through which information inferred from “previous knowledge and beliefs is combined with information actually expressed in the text” (p. 181). An example of implication, van Dijk (1991) notes, is when a news report states a person “claims” she is being discriminated against, which may suggest the person is lying.

Semantic strategies, which are “goal-directed properties of discourse” (van Dijk, 1991, p. 187) include: (a) *blaming the victim*, a strategy which faults the victim for “acting in such a way that prejudice or unequal treatment is justified” (p. 193), (b) *admission*, commonly used by the news media to avoid charges that they are discriminatory and which involves the occasional assertion that most members of a particular minority group are law abiding citizens (pp. 197–198), (c) *comparisons*, “not only between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ but also between different ethnic groups or different situations” (p. 195); and (d) *contrast and division*, which include “the implicit contrast between (good) ‘us’ and (bad) ‘them’” (p. 197). These rhetorical devices and semantic strategies, along with topics and structures, were examined within the discourse of Freaknik news to explore how the news represented violence against African American women. In the sections that follow, I provide a brief overview of Freaknik coverage in the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* from 1994 to 1996 and then examine the major themes and frames in television coverage of Freaknik 1996 in the week prior to the event. Finally, I examine the incidence of violence against women in Freaknik reporting from a Black feminist perspective that emphasizes the interconnection of gender, race, and class.

Freaknik Coverage

Freaknik coverage in the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* from 1994 to 1996 placed the event within a racialized context that blamed locals rather than students for any acts of violence and initially failed to recognize sexual harassment as an issue. In 1994, traffic congestion and gridlock—which caused financial hardship for businesses—as well as trash and public urination in residents' yards were cited as the primary problems caused by Freaknik. Mayor Bill Campbell noted “relatively few acts of violence” that year, adding that those who committed them were all Atlanta residents (Scruggs & Blackmon, 1994, p. 1A). Post-Freaknik articles in 1994 noted the dilemma Campbell faced in reversing his prior policy of welcoming students to Freaknik. While White residents primarily opposed the event, Black residents supported it. The heated debate between supporters and opponents prior to the event that year was played out in the city council, where “members exchanged harsh words, tinged with racial overtones” (Vickers & Helton, 1994, p. 1A).

In 1995, articles dealt with Campbell's efforts to discourage students from coming to Atlanta for Freaknik. Sexual assaults, along with looting, were newly identified as problems during Freaknik 1995. Ten rapes were reported between Saturday night and Sunday afternoon during Freaknik, and Police Chief Beverly Harvard was quoted as being “mad as hell” because some of the women at Freaknik “stripped and permitted men to grope them” (Scruggs & McDonald, 1995, p. 5B). While residents expressed shock at the sexual undercurrent Freaknik had taken on (Harrison, 1995), Atlanta gangs were blamed for taking advantage of Freaknik and causing most of the looting (McDonald & Cowles, 1995). Articles also noted the racial divide among Atlanta residents: a poll conducted by the newspaper found that 69% of African American residents thought Freaknik was good for the city, while 62% of Whites considered the event harmful and cited traffic, sexual harassment and looting as problems (Fears, 1995a). The city council also was split over the issue along racial lines (Fears, 1995b).

The newspaper's 1996 coverage noted that Campbell had softened his opposition to Freaknik, ostensibly to placate the city's African American community (Campbell shows little leadership, 1996). Other articles concerned the city's traffic plan, the business community's response to the event, and police efforts to arrest potential and real troublemakers. These issues were echoed in Freaknik television coverage before and during the event that year.

The TV stations aired a Freaknik-related story or news package almost every day during the period of study, from April 12 to 25.⁶ The stories became longer and their placement within the program earlier the closer to Freaknik they ran, with the most time and attention occurring during the event. By April 24, the only Freaknik stories were follow-ups to a murder.

Even before Freaknik began, the news represented the event as a threat to law and order and a potential descent into crime and chaos. Pre-Freaknik stories utilized videotape from the previous year of unmanageable traffic jams and gridlock; they showed long lines of stalled traffic with young African Americans hanging out of

their car windows, walking among cars, dancing inside, on top of, and beside cars. Other pre-Freaknik stories dealt with organizations preparing for Freaknik by training volunteers “to help maintain order and register a lot of voters,” or, in the case of a group of lawyers, assisting students who have been arrested for non-violent crimes. One pre-Freaknik story reported that volunteers were being trained to mediate confrontations and “set examples for those people that may have hostile attitudes.” An organization of local Black ministers, another story reported, called for a day of fasting and prayer “to ask for calmness, to ask for peace, to welcome these young people that are coming to the city.” The emphasis on the need to maintain calm and order in the face of anticipated “hostile attitudes” and crime served to emphasize the danger and threat Freaknik posed to the city.

During Freaknik, reporters in helicopters pinpointed the most congested roads while reporters on the ground interviewed participants and chronicled events. Coverage centered on the tension between police trying to keep traffic moving and efforts by participants to literally party in the streets. WXIA’s Bruce Erion, reporting live on Saturday night from the “sky cam” helicopter, noted that: “Kids have gotten things figured out, out there. What they’ve been doing, believe it or not, is ... They’re just getting out of their cars until a police officer arrives and says, ‘Hey, no party here on the interstate, please.’”

News stories before and during Freaknik frequently referred to looting and vandalism the previous year. The stations showed videotape of young, Black males, en masse, rushing into shops whose front doors had been forced open. Other videotape showed streets littered with the aftermath of looting, as well as baton-wielding police walking through streets strewn with rubble. Looting footage from Freaknik 1995 was also shown on the Friday of Freaknik 1996, as WGNX anchor John McKnight reported that “All 1,500 Atlanta police officers will be working the streets. The plan is to avoid the traffic gridlock and sporadic looting connected with the event last year.” Other pre-Freaknik stories dealt with Atlanta businesses hiring extra security during Freaknik, “just in case things get out of hand,” or attempting in other ways to prevent looting. These stories invariably included file footage of looting from the previous year. A continuing story throughout Freaknik and the week following was the shooting to death on Thursday night or early Friday morning (stories were inconsistent) of a 23-year-old Ohio man who had driven to Atlanta for Freaknik. With one exception, the investigation and arrests were the only Freaknik news after the event.⁷

References to the previous year’s looting routinely mentioned that those involved were local, and this distinction was continued in the 1996 coverage. On the Thursday before Freaknik, for instance, WGNX covered a pre-Freaknik party that mentioned “a few arrests; these young men for attempted robbery” over videotape of two men handcuffed by police. Reporter Leigh Green later in the broadcast referred back to the videotape: “Now, I need to add one other point to all of this. Many of the people you saw in the piece that we just showed you are, of course, not visiting students at all. That includes the two men who are under arrest. They are locals simply out taking part in the Freaknik festivities.” While the locals Green is referring to *could*

be local students, they were not described as such, and the context of other stories which contrasted locals with students implicated locals as criminally inclined non-students. The distinction between locals and visiting students ignores the presence at Freaknik of the many African American students attending area colleges.⁸ Disregarding local students ideologically serves to simplify and emphasize the distinction between locals as inner-city thugs and out-of-towners as well-behaved students. In addition, as a semantic strategy, the admission or assertion that students, as opposed to locals, are generally law-abiding citizens allows the news to deflect charges that its coverage may be racist.

Reporters kept a running tally of Freaknik arrest statistics, with the figures broken down by in-state (local) and out-of-state figures. The frequent tallying of arrests attested not so much to the criminal nature of Freaknik, but to the dangers of giving locals an opportunity to create trouble. It also reinforced the contrast and division between locals and students. WGNX reported:

Atlanta police have made dozens of arrests this Freaknik weekend, but they tell us the majority of them were not out-of-towners, and a large number of those arrested were children—228, to be exact, some as young as 12 years old. The charge, violating the city's curfew law—children under 16 can't be out alone past midnight.

WXIA's arrest breakdown for Saturday night's newscast was 195 Georgia residents and 164 from out-of-state. By Sunday night, the numbers were 846 people arrested or charged, of which "the majority were from Georgia—461; 364 were from out-of-state; 307 cars have been impounded and 14 weapons seized." WGNX anchor John McKnight reported on Sunday night that police "arrested 846 people over the weekend, most of them locals using Freaknik as a chance to cause trouble." The contrast and division of Freaknik participants into problem-causing locals and law-abiding out-of-state students was class-based, with the locals linked to inner-city crime, a hallmark of White public perceptions of the underclass. The police's treatment of these two groups also highlights the differences between them. While transgression by the locals resulted in their arrest, that of the students merely warranted a polite request to not "party here on the interstate, please."

Much of the police department's crime prevention plan during Freaknik centered on keeping local youths under 16 years of age at home under a curfew. As WGNX's Leigh Green reported: "The latest police technique for avoiding trouble is to round up local juveniles, mostly for minor offenses and mostly to try and keep large groups of young locals from spoiling the party." The implication is that the locals—particularly young locals—had best be rounded up to prevent them from ruining Freaknik. The rhetorical device of over-completeness was used to stigmatize these youths as coming from dysfunctional homes with little adult supervision or caring. For example, on Saturday night, WXIA's Jim Shuler reported that 228 juveniles were detained the night before for breaking curfew. Of that number, he said, 111 were still in jail Saturday morning "because their parents didn't want to come and pick them up." By Saturday afternoon, he added, only 21 juveniles remained at detention centers, and "they were being escorted home personally by Atlanta police." Claiming

that their parents didn't want to come and pick them up may seem superfluous within the context of a story about crime prevention, but its relevance exists within the negative portrayal of these youths and their families. By emphasizing the number of youths arrested for breaking curfew, and that many of their parents would not get them from jail, the news reinforces popular notions of inner-city families as consisting of dysfunctional, negligent parents unable or unwilling to discipline or control their lawbreaking children. This echoed a major theme of Freaknik coverage—that the locals are underclass troublemakers prone to crime and out to spoil the party for the primarily law-abiding students who are Freaknik's only legitimate participants.

Freaknik Violence Against Women

The news media's Freaknik coverage plan focused on traffic and potential property damage—as evidenced by the use of helicopters to spot gridlock, repeated references to the previous year's looting, and the presence of reporters at shopping malls and other areas that had been the site of past looting. Significantly, the news did not warn women that attending Freaknik might put them at risk of physical harm, nor did it actively seek out stories that dealt with violence toward women. Only when the cameras just happened to be where a woman was being or had just been physically assaulted did the violence become news. This occurred three times during Freaknik coverage. In addition, two other stories referred to attacks on women. In almost all cases, the news minimized the seriousness of the violence, blamed the victims, and absolved the perpetrators of responsibility. This section examines in chronological order these five instances.

Instance #1

WXIA opened its newscast on Friday night with footage of three women trying to walk past a gauntlet of men reaching out to grope and grab them. As a man attempts to grab the last woman around the waist, she pulls away and keeps walking. This scene is shown with a voice-over by anchor Angela Robinson, who is African American: "Short skirts draw a crowd tonight at Underground Atlanta. Freaknik '96 is underway." Her comment about short skirts implies the women's clothing—and, by extension, the women—are to blame for the street harassment shown. Co-anchor Mike Landess then introduces himself and continues the story: "Now those young girls had to ask police for escorts to be able to get back to their cars. We have team coverage of the first day of Freaknik, beginning with Nina Jimenez at Underground Atlanta. A big crowd already?"

Jimenez moves the story's focus to the crowd size and interviews with students before returning to the incident that opened the newscast. In a voice-over, she says:

Down Peachtree Street, it's like a parade—and at times quite a show. But for Madeema Jones and her friends who drove in from Little Rock, this is not the kind of Freaknik

fun they expected. The group needed the police to help them get away from a mob of young men.

When Jimenez states that Freaknik is at times quite a show, a woman in a bikini top is shown dancing provocatively out of a car window. Cheering men surround her car and attempt to grab her, but she glides into the car and out of reach. The combination of the verbal and visual texts implies that the woman's actions are the show to which Jimenez refers.

As Jimenez mentions Madeema Jones and her friends, the camera cuts to Dana Patterson, identified in caption as a "Little Rock visitor." Patterson is with two other women in a parking deck. She describes what happened: "Guys came from everywhere, overwhelming, grabbing your purse, grabbing your butt. And you couldn't, you can't do nothing, cause it's just from all, just all of them, just come in a huddle. And it's ridiculous—you can't even walk up the street." The camera then turns to Madeema Jones, also identified as a "Little Rock visitor." She is wearing a sheer, white shirt (a bra is visible underneath). She tells the reporter: "It's really not safe, you know, and I really do think that if they can't control, they just need to cut it out, you know. Because I did not come here to expect, you know, my clothes being half-way torn off." The video cuts to a long shot of the women being escorted down the street by a police officer on motorcycle. The camera focuses on Jones, who is wearing a very short, white skirt. This appears to support the opening statement that short skirts provoked the men to action. The camera cuts back to the parking deck, to Maleesha Medlock, another "Little Rock visitor." She says: "It's scary. I was scared. I never experienced anything like this before."

The story then cuts to officers running through a parking lot while Jimenez provides the closing voice-over: "Atlanta police are here in full force trying to control the few troublemakers who usually turn out not to be college students." This again implies that non-students are troublemakers, and students are law-abiding. The camera focuses on Jimenez: "Now, other than those problems that the young women were having walking through the crowds, police report that they've had no official arrests related to Freaknik. And right now, it's just a matter of keeping traffic moving—something they seem to be doing pretty well right now."

This story reinforces several themes that were repeated in various forms throughout Freaknik coverage. By positioning the harassment of these women against the gyrations of a woman who appears to be welcoming and encouraging male attention and desire, the story suggests violence against women is the result of female provocation. Indeed, the opening of the story—"Short skirts draw a crowd at Underground Atlanta"—places the Little Rock visitors in an active role, for they chose their clothing as well as to walk through Underground Atlanta. This reflects the myths that what a woman wears and where she goes are the cause of sexual assault.

Robinson's comment is vague in not specifying the type of crowd being drawn by short skirts—that is, leering, groping men. Nor does she attribute any action to them, other than being passively drawn to short skirts. The men are invisible and

passive in the spoken text, although the video clearly shows them groping, leering, and reaching out to grab the women. The spoken text—which is privileged in the newscast because it makes sense of, contextualizes and explains the visual—establishes the harassment as the women’s fault and responsibility. It also is constructed as a matter of minor consequence. Robinson initially denies the seriousness of the harassment, and this denial is emphasized when Jimenez focuses first on the size of the crowds and interviews with students. Co-anchor Landess’s account of how “those young girls had to ask police for escorts to be able to get back to their cars” also suggests that nothing serious happened to the “girls,” for had a crime been committed, arrests would have been made. Landess’s reporting reflects the lack of concern on the part of both the police and the news about sexual assault. Indeed, a very different picture would have emerged had the story represented the men as attacking the women.

The use of the term “young girls” further implies the real problem may be their youth. Had they been older, the discourse suggests, they might have known how to avoid this situation—or how to get out of it on their own. Because the situation was resolved by returning the women to their car, the issue appears not one of sexual assault and harassment, but of the women being in the wrong place at the wrong time, and perhaps too young and inexperienced to control the crowd. Jimenez’s characterization of what occurred as a “kind of Freaknik fun” trivializes the harassment, as does her closing reference to “those problems that the young women were having walking through the crowds.” By not specifying what the problems were, this statement implies the difficulty was the women’s inability to navigate the crowds, rather than that the men were sexually harassing them.

This news segment also underscored another theme in Freaknik coverage—that there were, in the words of Nina Jimenez, “few troublemakers, who usually turn out not to be college students.” This denies the pervasiveness of violence against women during Freaknik while reinforcing the contrast and division between troublemaking non-students and law-abiding students. This division draws on class and race stereotypes that link Black college students to middle class aspirations and behaviors (Landry, 1987) and local, Black non-students with inner-city poverty and crime associated with the underclass (Abramovitz, 1995; Lawson, 1992). Within the context of Freaknik coverage, “local” becomes code for inner-city, non-student Black youth who engage in crime and may be seen as part of an underclass with deviant values and behaviors.

Instance #2

That same Friday night, WSB reporter Pam Martin introduced a segment within a larger story of Freaknik coverage: “As we’ve said before, there have been few problems. But there have been some tense moments tonight.” From the beginning, then, this story is constructed as an incident of tense moments rather than a serious problem.

Footage from WSB’s Chopper 2 showed two women crawling on the trunk of a

car as a group of men around the car attempt to grab them. Martin's voice-over describes the scene:

Two young women were seemingly trapped by scores of young men. Some of the men, it appeared, touched and groped the women as they tried to get off the trunk of the car. Soon after, a police patrolman rode by and dispersed the crowd. No one was cited in the incident.

This story was rare in directly attributing abuse to "scores of young men" rather than blaming the women: the men "trapped" the women; some men "touched and groped" as the women tried to escaped. However, the criminality and seriousness of the assault is undercut by the fact that "no one was cited in the incident," for it appears that no crime occurred. This supports Martin's comment that what occurred was tense, but nothing more.

Instance #3

On Sunday night, WGNX opened its newscast with a voice-over by anchor John McKnight and videotape of a crowd of Freaknik participants, followed by footage of Police Chief Beverly Harvard and other police officers talking to two women. The caption "Freaknik Dies Hard" appears upon the screen. McKnight states: "Freaknik dies hard on the streets of Atlanta with parties and gridlock running into the night. The city's police chief herself has to step in when one street party gets out of hand." The story continues with reporter Tiffini Diaz who "has our look at last-minute parties and one case that got out of hand."

Diaz opens live from Auburn Avenue, in the heart of Atlanta's historic Black district,⁹ with a general wrap-up of Freaknik, including a positive evaluation by students, before she returns to the party that "got out of hand." Diaz states:

Here on Auburn Avenue, it's gone from partying in the streets to street sweepers. Everyone says they had a pretty good time. With the exception of a few problems, Freaknik '96 turned out fairly well. Young people enjoyed themselves, cut loose, liked to party. In fact, they were having such a good time this afternoon that instead of heading home and back to school, a lot of them brought their partying here to Auburn Avenue and the Sweet Auburn Festival. It was here on Auburn Avenue, though, this evening, that some of the fun got out of hand.

The camera focuses on a street crowd and then zooms in on what appears to be a light blue cloth crumpled in the street while Diaz's voice-over explains that she "stumbled upon this crowd moments after two young ladies are attacked dancing in the street. One woman's underpants torn off, thrown to the ground."

The screen cuts to a student identified as "Kenya Smith, Witness." She says: "As everyone dispersed, you saw two women coming out, holding their clothes up to their bodies because they had almost gotten raped." Diaz then states, over footage of Smith talking to Police Chief Harvard:

That attack terrified college student Kenya Smith. She shared her concerns with

Atlanta's Police Chief Beverly Harvard. Harvard spent today out with Freaknik partyers and arrived here just seconds after the attack ended. Harvard told us she worries about the lewd behavior taking place during the Black college spring break.

The camera then turns to Harvard, who states: "It shows disrespect as it relates to women disrespecting themselves. But it also causes problems for other women who don't want to be groped, who don't want to be fondled. And so it's a very serious concern." With these two sentences, Harvard constructs the near-rape as a problem created by the women not simply for themselves, but for other, "innocent," women, as well. The contrast between lewd and innocent women not only positions the former as bad and the latter as good, but also leaves no room for the men who stripped the women of their clothing and almost raped them. Because the men are neither mentioned nor blamed, the news implies the fault lies solely with the women.

Harvard's comments are legitimated by both her office as the Chief of Police and her social location as a Black woman. As Police Chief, she speaks both for the law and the City of Atlanta. As a Black woman, Harvard's contrasting of the stereotypic good girl/virgin with the bad girl/whore bears the authority of one speaking from knowledge of her own gender and race.

From the beginning of this story, the news denies that the near-rape of two women is anything more than fun that got out of hand. What transformed it into something "out of hand" is vague. The only clue is that the women were attacked while dancing in the street, which implicates their dancing as the lewd behavior that is the probable cause of the assault.

After Harvard, the footage shows a scantily clad woman dancing suggestively, her legs around a man's waist and arms around his neck, in what can be considered a representation of Harvard's bad girl. Diaz intones over this video: "Some young people argue that it's all part of Freaknik fun. They dance in traffic jams for all to see, and a few say they think they can handle the crowds." The camera then cuts to an unidentified female, in short shorts, dancing with several men around her and a large stick in her hand. The camera focuses on her as she shimmies and explains: "See, when I shake, see, they like the way I shake. And I'm gonna have to bust on 'em, you see what I'm saying, if they touch," she adds as she brandishes her stick.

This woman appears to be dancing for male attention—"see, they like the way I shake." But, unlike the women who were disrobed and almost raped by the mob of men, she appears prepared to defend herself from the inevitable result of that attention. The message to viewers may well be: "If you are going to tease, you had better be prepared for the consequences."

Diaz then says: "Aside from some complaints about the city's traffic diversion plan, Freaknik '96 is getting overall good reviews." Later in the newscast, Chief Harvard states: "Overall, I am very pleased. We have not had any significant problems at all." At the end of the Sunday night newscast, anchor John McKnight summarizes events on the final day of Freaknik:

To sum up for now our coverage of Freaknik '96: Freaknik dies hard on Atlanta streets

with partying and traffic congestion continuing into the night. One incident on Auburn Avenue started to get out of control, where a group of men were observed by Atlanta Police Chief Beverly Harvard assaulting two women. But overall, the chief says smaller crowds and increased police force kept Freaknik '96 under control with fewer arrests than last year.

Thus, the news agrees with Harvard that no significant problems arose. The attacks on women are trivialized and considered minor—certainly not as important as the city's traffic congestion. Indeed, Diaz states that the Auburn Avenue "incident ... *started* to get out of control," implying that it never got beyond the initial stages. This story also contains a contradiction. Early in the report, Diaz notes that Harvard "arrived here just seconds after the attack ended." By the end of the report, the anchor claims "a group of men were observed by Atlanta Police Chief Beverly Harvard assaulting two women." The presence and role of Harvard and other officers remain unclear. What is clear but unstated is that no arrests were made, despite the fact that numerous witnesses were present and the police either witnessed or were present "seconds" after the assault. The lack of arrests denies the criminality and seriousness of the assault. The guilty party remains the lewd women.

Instance #4

WXIA's coverage of a news conference with Chief Harvard on the Monday after Freaknik indicated the police's traffic control plan had worked well. "All in all," reporter Paul Crawley states, "she gives her troops and most Freaknikers high marks for good behavior." Crawley continues:

Another thing she said was better this year was the not so much lewd conduct on the part of women being groped and fondled here in the middle of Freaknik here. Last year, a couple of rapes. As of this evening, apparently one possible rape on Stewart Avenue—still not sure it was Freaknik connected—that only a few hours ago. But all in all, the police chief gives her troops, those from 20 other departments that helped—including the GBI, state patrol, Dekalb County, surrounding areas—and the students, pretty much of an "A".

The comment about not as much "lewd conduct on the part of women being groped and fondled" clearly blames women for encouraging men to sexually assault them. Although the story failed to identify the form this lewd conduct took, the context of Freaknik coverage implies it may have been their short skirts, dancing, or other sexually "provocative" behavior.

By claiming a "possible" rape occurred, Crawley legitimates speculation that this could be a woman's false accusation. The news also suggests that the exact number of rapes last year—and, by extension, the rapes themselves—are insignificant, for statistics could have been obtained. (Many would argue that the 10 rapes reported the previous year hardly constitute "a couple.") This lack of specificity stands in marked contrast to the frequent updates in the number of arrests and criminal charges, and their classification by local and out-of-state offenders.

Instance #5

A follow-up Freaknik story on WXIA Monday night opened with video of an unidentified, White male, seemingly college-age, seated in a car and displaying through his rolled-down side window what appears to be his driver's license. He complains: "We're not happy with Freaknik. We don't want it back." In a voice-over, reporter Keith Whitney states: "From the motorists who were stripped of their rights," a clear reference to the unhappy motorist. The video cuts to a woman walking past a group of men. She is holding a silver, sleeveless dress or shirt against her chest. Over this video, Whitney adds: "To the women who were stripped of their clothes, the fallout from Freaknik '96 still hangs like a mushroom cloud of anger over the city." The story then moves to a classroom of criminal justice students at Georgia State University where students, who had studied the city's response to Freaknik, charged city government and the police with racism, including the practice of "red-lining" to keep Freaknik traffic out of White neighborhoods while letting it over-run Black neighborhoods. A student also states that police attempts to keep students away from a mall "reeked of racism."

This story equates motorists caught in gridlock with women who have had their clothes ripped from their bodies—an equation which denies the criminality and seriousness of this violence. And while the story opens with an angered motorist and a physically assaulted woman, it does not deal with their anger, as suggested by the introduction. Instead, Whitney's reference to women stripped of their clothes, along with footage of the woman holding her clothes against her body, is a gratuitous introduction to a story about racism in Freaknik policing. Racism, the real focus of the story, is positioned as far more important than the sexual abuse of Black women. The assault is, after all, only accorded a fleeting image and a clause in the story's lead.

Conclusions and Implications

News coverage of violence against African American women during Freaknik blamed them for their own victimization and minimized the seriousness of the violence. The news implied these women were either naifs, such as the Little Rock visitors who unwittingly placed themselves in harm's way, or, more commonly, oversexed Jezebels whose lewd behavior provokes men to grope, fondle and even rape. Both characterizations reflect the intersection of gender, race, and class oppressions. The naifs were identified as out-of-staters, code for law-abiding students. Their representation was gendered as victims of sexual harassment, class-based in terms of their association with middle class behavior and values, and racialized within the context of their background and the event. Their comparison to the Jezebels who—unlike the naifs, according to the news—*do* want to be "fondled and groped" also reflects the racialization of gender.

The naive student may be forgiven her transgressions by virtue of her inexperience, but not so the Jezebel. By casting her in the role of the sexually aggressive Black woman, the news justifies her abuse. The news also largely denies that men actually

raped or attacked women. With one exception, men who assaulted women were rendered both invisible and passive: unnamed when women were stripped of their clothing, they were involuntarily drawn to short skirts, and enticed by shaking, dancing female bodies to touch or even rape.

The Jezebels' lewd conduct links them to the bad behavior and moral lapses associated with Black women and poverty. Portraying women as "the Jezebel, whore, or sexually aggressive woman" (Collins, 1991, p. 77) implies a lack of socially appropriate values that corresponds not to popular perceptions of White, middle class, female behavior but to cultural presuppositions and stereotypes of Black, underclass women. As Painter (1992) points out, sex is the "main theme associated with poverty and with blackness" (p. 206). Moreover, skin color, sexuality, and class are connected within popular iconography, such that the sexually active "bad girl" is linked to dark hair and dark skin, as well as the "wrong side of the tracks"; "her willingness or desire to be sexually active could be dismissed as the allegedly hypersexualized, unrestrained behavior of the lower classes" (Douglas, 1995, p. 66).

Black and poor are often conflated within cultural understandings of race (Lawson, 1992), so that all African Americans—male and female—are presumed within the popular (White) imagination to be poor unless qualified in a way that indicates middle or upper class. The classification of African Americans as college students is just such a qualification, moving them out of the presumed category of poor into that of the middle class. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) emphasize that the educational system contributes to the reproduction of class relations by legitimating and certifying class privilege. As Landry (1987) states, the significance of a college education as a means of moving into the middle class "cannot be overstated" (p. 104).

Within TV news coverage of Freaknik, education appears as central to representation and serves, *in the absence of other class signifiers* (the lewd behavior of the Jezebel being such a signifier), as a primary definer of class identity and belonging. The news, lacking other class markers, appears to link both male and female African American students to the middle class because a college degree is perceived to be a middle class aspiration as well as a form of social mobility that enables the lower classes to move into the middle class.

While the news identified male troublemakers as non-student locals, the Jezebels are not similarly identified, thereby leaving open the possibility that, while their lewd behavior may be that of the lower classes, at least some of them might, in fact, be students. Rather than undermining the role of education as a class signifier, this may instead serve to reinforce gendered, racial and class stereotypes about Black women. In short, it may suggest to some that even a college education is not sufficient to dampen the unrestrained hypersexuality of Black women.

Barring displays of lewd conduct and other markers associated with the lower classes, the presumed middle class status of the students distances them from the "codes of crime, drugs, and social problems activated by the urban underclass" (Gray, 1989, p. 383). Classifying African Americans as responsible students or crime-prone

locals supports cultural beliefs and stereotypes about race and class that uphold and justify the inequitable distribution of material resources. As Gray argues:

Media representations of Black success and failure are ideological precisely to the extent that they provide a way of seeing underclass failure through representations of middle class success. Implicitly operating in this way of viewing the underclass (and the middle class) is the assumption that since America is an open racial and class order, then people who succeed (and fail) do so because of their individual abilities rather than their position in the social structure. (p. 382)

Drawing on Bhabha's (1983) theory of the ambivalent nature of the stereotype, Cloud (1992) notes that images of racial differences are "ambivalent," contained in a binary meaning system in which "apparently oppositional representations of racial identity participate in a conservative, multistructured yet hegemonic social totality" (p. 314). The image of crime-prone or lewd underclass youth gains salience and has meaning within the context of its inverse—educated, well-behaved, middle class Black youth. Of course, middle class White youths also serve as a type of inverse, but with different implications. Comparing White college students to Black non-students may elicit charges of racism as an explanation of social inequities. But comparing Black students to Black non-students ties success or failure to individual responsibility and initiative.

This racial and class-based binary system is complicated by the addition of gender, which is similarly ambivalent. To say that gender, class and race are linked in social consciousness and popular imagery, and must be understood and analyzed as such, is not to deny that commonalities exist among those within a particular race, class or gender. However, the meaning and representation of class status is both gendered and racialized: racialized through historical background, and gendered within a system of male supremacy and female subordination. The news' representation of the Jezebels' lewd behavior reflects a gendered, racialized and class-based understanding of trouble-making which differs from that of the male locals, who were arrested for having weapons, looting and fighting—but, significantly, not for sexual assault and other forms of anti-woman violence.

In essence, the news criminalized Black men primarily with respect to property damage while decriminalizing them concerning their abuse of Black women. The safety of Black women appears of less consequence than that of property. In addition, by blaming the victim, by turning the abuse against her so that she appears responsible for it, the news establishes and reinforces the parameters of appropriate public behavior for women, providing all women with a warning about the dangers of transgression while reaffirming middle class values and behaviors as the antidote for the male violence against women.

Smith (1992) and hooks (1981) have criticized the African American community for its reluctance to hold Black men accountable for violence against Black women. The news appears similarly reluctant. This may be a function of the news' general tendency to blame most women who are the victims of violence for their own abuse (Benedict, 1992; Meyers, 1997). It also may be reflective of an "extra sensitivity"

Atlanta reporters profess to have concerns regarding issues of race given the city's predominantly Black population (Meyers, 1997, p. 95). Any extra sensitivity, however, apparently does not extend to gender issues. Instead, the news seems to mirror society's interest in protecting men at the expense of the women they abuse.

The characterization of Black women as Jezebels also reflects the role of age in representation. While older women may still be portrayed as Jezebels, their depiction within the news will differ from that of the Freaknik participants because of their years, as well as the context of news coverage. Frequent references to under-age, curfew-breaking locals as troublemakers, and the depiction of young adult African American women as Jezebels who entice men to sexual assault, emphasize the presumed threat young African Americans pose to society.

This study also found that although the spoken text blamed women for their own victimization, the visual text at times contradicted this. While the words may work to recuperate any challenge to a patriarchal understanding of women "leading men on," the images potentially provide an alternative perspective that holds men accountable for their violence. Whether and how various audiences perceive this contradiction are areas for further investigation. In addition, comparison of news coverage of spring break for Black and White students is likely to disclose race-related differences that this study could not address.¹⁰

This study is indebted to Black feminist theorists for conceptualizing the inseparable and overlapping nature of gender, race, and class. Applying this theoretical model to violence against women in the news demonstrates the feasibility of analyses that view gender, race, and class as intertwined signifiers of domination and exclusion, inevitably pointing to the poverty of news studies that have singly explored race or gender as if they were unaffected by the other or by class. For, as Smith notes, political analysis and strategies that address how multiple oppressions "dovetail and interlock provide the clearest and most revolutionary agendas for change" (1992, p. 185).

Notes

- [1] Cruising is a popular activity for high school and college-age young adults in the U.S. It involves driving slowly in designated areas, where the goal is to see and be seen. A related outcome is traffic jams and gridlock.
- [2] The "dominant ideology," as used by Hall and other critical cultural studies theorists, does not imply a monolithic ideology, but rather a convergence of multiple, naturalized systems of domination which support those in positions of economic, social and political power. It does not deny the fissures and contradictions within this convergence.
- [3] See, for example, Campbell (1995), Entman (1990, 1992), Entman and Rojecki (2000), Ferguson (1998), Gray (1989), Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, and Roberts (1978), Hartmann and Husband (1974), Shah and Thornton (1994), and van Dijk (1991).
- [4] The late evening newscast of these three stations was chosen for uniformity. Earlier newscasts vary in length between the three stations. The Fox-affiliated station, WAGA, airs an hour-long, local news show beginning at 10pm, as opposed to the half-hour format at 11pm of WSB, WXIA and WGNX. The UPN and WB affiliates do not provide local news.
- [5] The words "Freaknik," "Freaknic" and "Freak Nic" were used in a search of all *Atlanta*

- Journal and Constitution* articles. Once the articles that were not specifically about Freaknik, but simply mentioned the event within the context of another topic, were eliminated, a systematic random sample of every 10th article was chosen. However, the goal was not to obtain a representative sample of all Freaknik articles, but rather to obtain a variety of Freaknik-related articles so as to enlarge the contextual framework for understanding the televised news coverage of violence against women. A total of 52 articles from 1994, 1995 and 1996 were examined.
- [6] WGNX and WXIA did not run a Freaknik story on April 25; WSB had no story on April 14.
 - [7] The exception was a story about animal cruelty involving carriage horses during Freaknik that aired on WXIA on April 23.
 - [8] Spelman and Morehouse colleges, Clark Atlanta University, Georgia State University, the Georgia Institute of Technology, Emory University, Agnes Scott College and a number of other four-year and junior colleges serve the Atlanta area.
 - [9] Auburn Avenue is also known as Sweet Auburn because of its historical role at the center of Black life in Atlanta during segregation. It was once home to some of the city's most successful Black-owned businesses and its most prominent Black families, including that of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.
 - [10] Such comparisons are often fraught with difficulties because of the different contexts in which the events occur. For example, Atlanta is not a resort town with a beach, as is Panama City, Florida, a key destination for White students during spring break. In addition, the fact that Panama City officials actively work to attract students for spring break (Panama City officials, 2000) while Atlanta officials attempted to discourage students from coming to Freaknik may be as much, or more, a function of economics than racism.

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