

# OPINION

## Students Criticize College Response to Shooting Incident

Columbine. Virginia Tech. Northern Illinois.

These words, once just simple words, now carry significant meaning. They are the tragedies of our generation. Words that evoke fear, anger, uncertainty, sorrow. School violence seems to be at an all time high. The prevalence of school violence, coupled with the events of a few weeks ago, makes me wary, even uneasy about coming to campus, and going to class.

Something is seriously wrong when you are afraid to go to school. Something is seriously wrong when the city police are on campus twice in as many weeks. Something is seriously wrong when you find out someone had a gun on campus by watching the evening news.

And don't say: 'oh, nothing happened on campus. The shot was fired in the Food Lion parking lot.' Home plate or the pitcher's mound - makes no difference; it's still the same ballpark. The Food Lion is still too close for comfort. Walking distance. You think bullets will respect boundaries? Property lines?

Also, the recent situation involving our students, off-campus students, and whoever else, was handled rather poorly by the administration. I'll be the one to say it, although I know I am not the only one who thinks so. There is a general air of disappointment concerning the way things were handled.

Why were students not notified before all information was released to the press and news stations? Our own academic community should have been given the heads up before the community at large.

I found out through word of mouth. Everyone knows how reliable the grapevine is. It wasn't until I heard 'the official report' on the radio a day or two after the incident that I realized it was true. Something had happened; or rather 'almost' happened. And what's worse, it happened here. What if someone had been hurt? ... Killed? What if ...

What has to happen before an incident like this one is taken seriously? In a story featured in the March 28 online edition of The Rocky Mount Telegram I read a statement: "'In a way, some of this is being blown out of proportion,' college President Dr. Ian Newbould said. 'Our campus was never threatened.' Out of proportion? Never threatened? When someone is driving around campus brandishing a gun out the car window - at least that's the version of the story I heard - I consider that very threatening, dangerous, and serious. What, may I ask, will the school consider threatening?

This problem - and it is a serious and growing problem - needs to be addressed. I don't know what needs to be done, what measures might increase security. But I do know this: You should never be afraid to go to school. The college needs to figure out its own way of making that truth a reality.

—Jessica Smith.

### Letter to the Editor from March 28, 2008

Dear Editor:

Dean Perkins sent out an email Friday afternoon regarding the shooting Wednesday evening. To say it mildly, I don't appreciate such a late informative letter. Despite the fact that the shooting itself occurred off campus, the initial confrontation and brandishing of a firearm occurred on campus. Pair Rocky Mount's high crime rate and the increase of college campus violence together and this should be considered a serious problem to the school. What has to happen for something like this to be taken seriously? Someone injured? Someone dead? A bomb? Why was the campus not put on lock down? Why no immediate email? Why are we just now hearing the official story? I am astonished at how nonchalantly our leaders are behaving. I feel betrayed as a student for not being informed earlier and because of the lack of action taken by our leaders. I feel like I am not protected as a student and tremendously disappointed in the school. We, as students, should not have had to hear through the grapevine and on local news prior to hearing from our own campus leaders. What has happened with students who attend the school? A slap on the wrist? Are we safe (what is your definition of safe)? Unacceptable.

I have enjoyed my experience at Wesleyan thus far. But as of late, I feel like the social environment on campus is going down hill. What standards does our school have compared to the students' standards? I work hard at being a good student, but if the school allows such characters to attend, what motivation do I have to stay? Where is the immediate student meeting to discuss this? We, as students, have no place to speak about things that matter and so I feel very lost. What about introducing defense classes or security classes? My mind is racing with ideas about preventing this from happening again and ways to better communication. Is yours?

I expect change.

—Kathleen Penrod

## Issue In-Focus: Race Relations Today

We just marked the 40th anniversary of the Martin Luther King's assassination. In light of this, what do you think is the current state of race relations in your communities?

### Jarad Brown

Being at college away from home, I have leaned on my football teammates as family members. So now when I think of my community, I really think of my fellow players and the coaching staff. So for me, race relations are good. I don't think there is extra competition or dissention among the black and white players, or other races, for that matter. It feels as though the team is truly a family, all working toward the same goal of being the absolute best we can be.

The same can be said for the coaching staff. There are both white and black coaches and I don't think either have a racial agenda. All of them are working to make every player the best person, student and athlete they can possibly be, regardless of race. As warm and fuzzy as all of that sounds, I'm not blind to the fact that this sense of unity is not present in all aspects of life. Yes, on the football team here at Wesleyan race is not an issue, but there are teams around the country with divided locker rooms and really divided feelings based on race. As disturbing as this is, even more disturbing is the fact that race is still an issue of distrust, hate and even violence in the "real world" outside of sports or school. Although both blacks and whites have come a long way in improving the balance and state of relations since Dr. Martin Luther King's death, both sides still have plenty of work to do.

### Nastasia Burnette

My community consists of people of all different nationalities and they are all friendly. We all greet one another and usually engage in the regular conversation daily (How are you? How has your day been? etc.). Everyone respects each other's property, policies and privacy. When one hosts a gathering, the majority of the times all are welcome to join in the festivities. Though my community is "rainbow" (all races) and pleasant, not all are.

### Kyair Daniels

It's hard to say the exact state of race relations in any community. You think about all Dr. King accomplished to get us to this point. Think about all we have accomplished since his death and how much more we need to accomplish until his/our dream is realized. I think to improve the race relations we as Americans need to do some serious self reflection.

I still believe that racism is a major issue in America and the world. I believe

that it will always be an issue. It's not one of those things that can be cured if no one talks about it. It also won't get any better if people talk about it so much that you can't say "hello" without it having some sort of racist undertone.

### Jenna Davis

On April 4, America reached the fortieth anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King. Dr. King fought tirelessly to bring equality and cooperation between the white and black races in America. Today, his fight was not futile. Equality and cooperation are a far cry better than what they were in the 1960s. However, in the 1960s and before, black and white citizens were forced into segregation, and now after everything has been desegregated, black and whites segregate themselves.

On NC Wesleyan College's campus, this self segregation can be seen everywhere. In the cafeteria, there are a couple of tables of just white kids on one side of the room, and then on the other, there are a couple of tables of just black kids. A lot of the times when you see mingling, it is from students who play on some athletic team together. Even in the classroom, black students sit to one side of the room and whites to the other. Apparently people just feel comfortable mingling with their own race. So in a way the race situation has gotten better since MLK, but I do not believe this was quite the future Dr. King had in mind.

### Meghan Herd

I would characterize the state of race relations today in my community as one that is improving. I feel that the community of North Carolina Wesleyan College has improved and gotten a lot better as far as discrimination goes. It is more common that you see students of all races, classes, genders, and sexual orientations interact with each other on a daily basis. I think that the college provides group organizations, events, and related activities to not only support the students of a different background but also to inform the other students. Being a college student, I think that it is significant for us to understand everyone's background and learn to accept each other for the person they are.

### Jade Johnson

With the 40th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. upon us, I feel that the state of race relations in our community has gotten a bit better over the years. People seem to be more accept-

ing of more diverse backgrounds within society. Throughout the community you can find people from all races meeting in various social situations. At the time Dr. King was assassinated, American citizens seemed to be at odds with one another based solely on the color of the other person's skin.

I think that over time, Americans have learned that different races can provide things that are valuable and unique to society. This in turn will bridge the gap in race relations in this country for future generations. The dream of Dr. King was for people not to be judged "by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" and I think that in today's America we are reaching closer to that dream.

### Chris Ochoa

Race relations in my community have definitely changed since Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Although open racism is not around today as far as segregation, there is a tension between the different races. I would not go as far as say that people of different races don't like each other, but there is an uncomfortable feeling attached when there is interaction. The main reason for the tension may be that different races live different lifestyles, and the lifestyles don't mesh. Dr. King helped to eliminate discrimination, but there needs to be more work on bringing together all people of all lifestyles. I was raised in a non-racist family to be open-minded, and I believe Dr. King was the reason for that.



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**Q:** Most importantly, what security measures have been taken in response to the incident? Several students have voiced a concern about lack of security at the Campus' entry points. Are there plans to change security in any way?

**A:** It is important to know that campus security arrived at the scene of the campus incident very quickly and that it ended in a matter of minutes, with the off-campus individuals leaving the campus. Security was increased on campus immediately following the campus incident Wednesday evening with the assistance of the Rocky Mount police, and this assistance continued through the following weekend. Additionally, most of the gates at the back of the campus were shut and locked earlier in the evening, and some have remained locked.

**Q:** In an article by the Rocky Mount Telegram, President Newbould is quoted as saying the event was "in some ways" blown out of proportion. What is your reaction to that statement?

**A:** As I reported, the incident on campus Wednesday evening ended very quickly. Reports later that shots were heard near Food Lion could not be confirmed by the police until the next day. It became clearer late Thursday afternoon that several students went by car or foot to the parking lots near McDonalds and Food Lion. Television news and newspaper reports Thursday evening and Friday that an individual was driving around the campus with a shotgun sticking out the window of the vehicle and implying that gunshots may have been fired on campus were

inaccurate.

President Newbould and I were on campus until late Wednesday evening. I personally did not leave the campus until around 10:30 p.m. What I saw as I walked around [were] about 60-70 students watching the comedian or studying in the Hartness Center as part of Spring Fling Week, another 90-100 students playing intramural basketball in the gym, 20-30 students studying in the library, and several groups of students talking and laughing outside their residence halls on what was a warm, quiet evening on campus.

**Q:** A student who claims to have witnessed the event said that the incident started because several Wesleyan students vandalized the vehicle of the young lady who was arrested. Can you confirm this?

**A:** As I said above, a commuter student reportedly called her boyfriend (a non-student) because she claimed several male students had vandalized her car (spit and threw apple peels on the car). He came to the campus with reportedly eight to nine other non-students and confronted several male students exiting the Hardees Student Union.

**Q:** Of course there are concerned students and parents who have heard about the incident. Is there anything you would like those individuals to be aware of? Are there other statements you would like to make to the Wesleyan student body and community?

**A:** Campus Security did a great job responding quickly to the incident on campus, and the Rocky Mount police have been very helpful as well. We have continued to work closely with

them since the incident on campus. Dr. Newbould and I have spent a great deal of time since the incidents responding to concerns from parents and members of the campus community.

Prior to last week's incidents, the college had been working on a more extensive crisis response plan for the campus and this will be implemented over the summer and be in place when students return next fall. In the meantime, I have recommended that we limit access to the campus by closing most of the back entrances except for scheduled Dunn Center events and other major campus events. I have also recommended that lighting be increased on campus as well as the number of speed bumps on campus roads.

Let me close by saying that most campus crime, at Wesleyan and other colleges, is committed by students against other students. Much of the theft, vandalism, assaults (including acquaintance rape) on campus goes unreported because students do not want to get involved. When I was a student in the 60s we frequently quoted Eldridge Cleaver who said "if you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem." In my mind, being a member of a community involves a responsibility to look after the welfare of the community and its members. It would be very helpful if community members were more proactive than reactive, especially when it comes to campus safety issues.

As always, I am very open to meeting with students and other members of the campus community to discuss concerns and ideas related to campus security.

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