

**Lives Interrupted!: A Case Study of Henry Louis Wallace - an African-American  
Serial Murderer in a Rapidly Expanding Southern City**

Charisse T.M. Coston, Ph.D.  
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte  
Charlotte North Carolina

Joseph B. Kuhns III, Ph.D.  
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte  
Charlotte, North Carolina

**ABSTRACT**

This work is a case study of an African American serial murderer, Henry Louis Wallace, who stalked and preyed on a rapidly industrializing southern city. The study begins by examining the city and the overall context of the murders within it. We proceed to look back on the police department, examine national and local crime trends, and explore the case and the victims. We also review the developmental history of the killer and attempt to understand his motivations. Finally, we consider some lessons learned which further emphasize the importance of crime prevention planning during the development of a rapidly growing city.

All correspondence should be addressed to the first author in care of The University of North Carolina at Charlotte; Department of Criminal Justice, 226 Garinger Building, Charlotte, NC 28223

---

*"Conditions of a society at its center tell us a great deal about the nature of behavior at the fringe" - Bruce Arrigo, Ph.D.*

## INTRODUCTION

We are fortunate that very few communities within our country have had a serial killer stalk and prey victims within their local borders. While often bringing passing fame or notoriety to local police and prosecutors, involved citizens, and media personalities, the presence of a serial killer in a city creates panic, fear, and sometimes loss of confidence in law enforcement. The end result often includes orphaned children and grieving parents, distraught friends, neighbors and employers, and past and future lives left in ruin.

This case study examines important social, political, and psychological issues surrounding an episode of serial killing in a southern, medium-sized city from 1989 to 1997. By exploring, describing and explaining the phenomena of serial murder using the case of Henry Louis Wallace, several themes are examined and relevant scientific literatures are applied from sociology, economics, criminal justice/criminology, victimology and serial murder. We explore and scrutinize the effective and ineffective processing of the case, from investigation through arrest, sentencing, and ongoing appeals. Social policies, including a discussion about important lessons learned, are considered and offered as evidence of our continued struggle to understand and deal with the full impact of serial murder.

Much of the previous research on serial killers has taken the form of descriptive data with very small samples and/or single case studies. This work can best be described as an ecological case study of a fairly prolific serial killer in a dynamic southern city.

The sources of information for this article include existing crime and population statistics, personal interviews with individuals involved with the case, content analysis of local and national newspaper articles, reviews of official documents (e.g., trial transcripts), and reliance on scholarly research.

This case study should be helpful to researchers studying the phenomenon of serial murder. We offer a series of considerations and recommendations for homicide detectives, city planners, social service providers, mental health professionals and our average citizens who might live and/or work in rapidly developing urban areas. Additionally, this study might be useful in terms of crime prevention as we consider law enforcement and judicial mistakes, identify observations that were missed or ignored, and discuss patterns that might have inadvertently been overlooked during the investigation of this particular murder spree.

### **The Setting - Charlotte, North Carolina**

Most, but not all, of the murders occurred in or near the city of Charlotte, a rapidly growing, vibrant city located in southwestern North Carolina. Mecklenburg County's (population of 747,000) land area encompasses 527 square miles, of which approximately 268 square miles comprise the City of Charlotte. As is common among larger counties, Mecklenburg County continues to incorporate additional outlying rural areas and, as a result, growth of the County and Charlotte continues at a rapid pace. The recent U.S. Census identified Charlotte as the 21<sup>st</sup> largest city in the United States, with an estimated 2003 population of 584,658 citizens, and the City continues to grow at a healthy 4.8 percent a year (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003).

The bulk of the ongoing population growth occurred over the past 20 years (Clay et al., 1999), as approximately thirty-seven percent of the residents in Charlotte moved to the city over that time frame (US Census, 2000; 1990). Local estimates indicated that there were an estimated 315,000 citizens in Charlotte back in 1980. The City grew to 470,000 citizens by 1994 (the year in which Henry Louis Wallace was finally captured), and subsequently expanded to 579,000 residents as of 2002. As such, while Charlotte grew by a respectable 49% from 1980 to 1994, the city's urban population swelled by a staggering 84% over the 22 year timeframe from 1980 to 2002. Corresponding figures for Mecklenburg County suggested that there were an estimated 404,000 county citizens in 1980, growing to 585,000 by 1994, and further expanding to 746,000 residents by 2002. Again, this increase represents an 85% population growth over this 22 year timeframe and a 45% increase in population from 1980 to 1994 (Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, 2004).

As such, whether the City of Charlotte or Mecklenburg County is considered, local and regional population growth was quite significant from 1980 to 1994, and that growth continued into 2002 and beyond. The Charlotte Chamber of Commerce estimated that the County could house approximately 910,000 citizens by 2010, which would represent another 48%-57% increase in the metro area population depending on the various estimates considered (Chamber of Commerce, 2004). In summary, Charlotte was a modest size city that was experiencing a tremendous population surge when Henry Louis Wallace arrived in 1992. Any city that is experiencing rapid growth, significant population transition, and the social disorganization that ultimately results provides an ideal setting for a serial offender of is interested in staying under the radar.

## **Local Population Demographics**

The age range of Mecklenburg County residents varies, of course, although 18-49 year olds comprised just over half of the population in recent years. There were slightly more women than men in the county, and the women were slightly older (median age of 34.4 years compared to 32.3 years for males). In 2003, African-Americans comprised about 28% of the population while whites represented about 63% of the population, and the remaining 9% was a racially diverse mixture of Hispanics, Asians, and American Indians (Chamber of Commerce, 2004). From a demographic perspective, the residents of Charlotte paralleled residents of many other comparably-sized cities in our country. However, the proportion of African-Americans in Mecklenburg County was significantly higher than their prevalence in the general population. In 2000, the United States had an estimated population of 281,421,000 citizens, 75.1% of whom were white, 12.3% were Black/African America, and 12.5% were Hispanic/Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). As such, the proportion of African Americans living and working in the Charlotte area was over twice as high as their proportion in the general U.S. population.

## **The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department**

In 1980, the Charlotte Police Department (prior to a merger with the Mecklenburg Police Department) had 594 sworn officers and an additional 152 civilian employees for a total of 746 full time staff.<sup>1</sup> In 1993, the Charlotte Police Department merged with the Mecklenburg Police Department, and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department subsequently reported crime statistics for the Charlotte area going forward. By 1995, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) employed 1,208 sworn officers and 326 civilian employees for a total full time staff of 1,534 (FBI, 1995). By 2002 (the most

---

<sup>1</sup> The Mecklenburg Police Department did not report crime statistics to UCR in 1980.

current year of data available), the CMPD sworn ranks had grown to 1,501 officers, and another 501 civilians were also on board for a total of 2,002 employees (FBI, 2002). As such, from 1980 to 1995 the sworn force of the department grew by 103% while the overall full time staff increased by a healthy 105%. Over the 22 year time frame considered here, CMPD increased its sworn force by 154%, and their overall full time staff grew by 168%.

Considered within the context of the corresponding population data, it appears that the police department's growth (in terms of sworn officers and overall staff) kept fairly close pace with the ongoing influx of citizens from 1980 to 2002. While the population grew in the City of Charlotte by 84% and in Mecklenburg County by 85%, the sworn force grew by 154% and the overall law enforcement staff increased by 168% during that timeframe. Whether the department was adequately staffed is another matter, of course. Examining officers-per-citizen ratios, for example, might lead one to conclude that CMPD remained relatively understaffed compared to similar sized cities and counties throughout the United States.

### **Local Economic Conditions**

The major economic factor driving the City and County growth was the finance sector. Charlotte is considered to be the second largest banking area in the United States following New York City (Clay et al., 1999). The tremendous financial success of the finance and banking industry in the late 1980s and early 1990s had substantially increased external interest in the local area and correspondingly resulted in rapid and increased sales in real estate markets (Hill, 2000). Statistics also indicate, however, that the manufacturing sector (primarily the textile industry) suffered financially over the past

10 years in the face of cheaper imports and lower cost labor offered by nearby countries (Sanford, 1986)

### **Henry Louis Wallace Arrives**

As Charlotte was experiencing this shift from a small close-knit society (a Geimenschaft type of society) to a society that relied primarily on secondary relationships because of the rapid influx of people moving into the City (a Gesellschaft type of society), Henry Louis Wallace arrived. In 1992, Wallace moved to Charlotte from Barnwell, South Carolina when he was 28 years old. Research suggests that many serial killers usually begin acting on their fantasies of violence and murder during their twenties (Hickey, 2002) and it appears that Wallace was not an exception to this general rule. He found a city in rapid transition from a small, friendly town to a growing medium-sized city, a setting that allowed him to remain under the radar for a couple of years. Other cities that experienced comparable rapid growth have also been victimized by serial murderers (Seattle, Washington, for example, battled with the Green River Killer for years).

### **Did Victim and Offender Race Matter in the Henry Louis Wallace Case?**

Henry Louis Wallace, an African American, was an intra-racial killer who was ultimately convicted of killing nine African American women over a 22-month period in a Charlotte urban area. Criminologists have consistently concluded that the majority of crime is committed intra-racially. Further, murders and serial murders are primarily intra-racial (FBI, 2002; Hickey, 2002). In 2002, for example, in cases where the race of the offender and the victim were known, 84% of white victims were murdered by white

offenders and 91% of black victims were murdered by black offenders (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2002; Table 2.8).

The fact that Wallace was an African American serial killer, living and working in a growing city with a large African American population, may have contributed to his ability to escape capture for some time. A common misperception exists suggesting that few serial killers have been African American, at least according to media sources and many scholars (Jenkins, 1993). Much of the previous academic research also suggests that serial killers are typically white males (Lent, 2003; Hickey, 2002; Jenkins, 1993).

In truth, the known statistics vary slightly but generally indicate that African American serial killers comprise anywhere from 13 to 20 percent of the serial killer population (Hickey, 2002; Jenkins, 1993; Kuhns & Coston, 2004). A recent examination by Kuhns & Coston (2004) also identified over 130 African American serial killers that operated and murdered in our country over the past century. Very few (if any), however, have been the subject of case studies or the focus of movies, books, or media attention. Jenkins (1993:47) opined that:

*"...it may be that African Americans are in fact less involved in serial murder activity than are Anglo Whites or Hispanics; but it must also be asked whether this is simply an impression gained from the ways in which serial murder is investigated. For a number of reasons, law enforcement agencies might be less likely to seek or find evidence of serial murder activity where the victims are Black. As homicide is primarily an intra-racial crime, this would mean that Black serial killers would be far more likely to escape detection."*

The fact that Henry Louis Wallace was African American male seeking and stalking African American female victims bears some significant attention. Linkage blindness, or the inability to connect serial crimes together, has been proposed as a



contributor to serial murders (Egger 1990), and it also might have allowed this case to escalate from one or two murders to an ongoing serial murder investigation.

### **City, County and Neighborhood Crime Statistics**

As with other cities of comparable size, Charlotte continues to deal with their share of crime and violence. In 1980, the Charlotte Police Department reported 9,579 violent crimes to the Federal Bureau of Investigation which included 60 murders. Meanwhile, Mecklenburg County reported an additional 2,874 violent crimes, of which only 8 were murders (FBI, 1980). Overall crime rates (including violent crimes) across the nation consistently dropped in the late 1990s and into the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, and Charlotte experienced crime drops as well. In 1995, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department reported 9,228 violent crimes to the FBI, including 89 murders, and by 2002, the agency had reported only 7,583 violent crimes reported (almost an 18% decrease from 1995 and a 21% decrease from 1980) including 67 murders (about a 25% decrease from 1995, but a 12% increase from 1980).

Meanwhile, local crime statistics indicated that within the one mile area surrounding Wallace's home, there were 223 violent crimes (including homicide, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) reported to police in 1992 out of a total of 8,943 crimes were reported for Charlotte that year. Violent crimes within this city sector increased to 285 in 1993 (out of a total of 9,234), but decreased to 207 of 8,541 in 1994 (Research, Planning & Services, 2003), the year after he was arrested which probably had nothing to do with his crime spree, specifically. In other words, violent crimes in Wallace's sector of the city comprised anywhere from 2.4% to 3.0% of the overall crime in the City. But,

these statistics represented the highest increase of any sector in the city and also represents the time period during which Wallace was killing serially.

### **Serial Murderers and Mobility**

Another common myth suggests that many serial killers often roam the country and the world in search of prey (e.g., Ted Bundy and Henry Lee Lucas). However, research has indicated that serial killers do not all travel across the country seeking victims and continually escaping detection. Serial killers operate locally more often than not, and they often prefer to stalk in areas where they can blend in and get lost among strangers (Hickey, 2002; Egger, 2001).

Again, Wallace was not an exception to this general rule. A rapidly growing city such as Charlotte provided an opportunistic environment where a meticulous serial murderer could operate in relative obscurity and continually escape detection. According to the Research, Planning and Analysis Section of CMPD, which has the responsibility for collecting departmental statistical data and mapping crime trends, Wallace committed five of his murders within one mile of his primary residence.\*\* Two additional murders were committed within three miles of his home. Wallace worked as a cook and manager at several Charlotte fast food restaurants within a half of a mile from home, and about half of his victims also worked within a mile from Wallace's home. In other words, Wallace was not interested in crossing the country in search of prey. His mobility was generally restricted to the surrounding area within his community and near his workplace.

### **Descriptions of the Victims and Murders\*\*\***

Wallace began his murders of nine, young adult African-American women on June 15, 1992, and he continued killing for 22 months, culminating with his last murder

on March 12, 1994. Literature often purports that most serial killers are strangers to their victims (Hickey 2002; Ressler et al., 1996). However, the relationship between Wallace and his victims ranged from close friends to passing acquaintances. Some of his victims were enrolled in college while others worked in the fast food industry or were employed as bank tellers, clothes merchants or grocery store managers. One of his victims was the roommate of his girlfriend of two years, and another was good friends with that same girlfriend. None of the victims knew one another personally, although their paths had indirectly crossed from time to time.

However, police investigators revealed that during the murder investigation friends and acquaintances of the victims always remembered and mentioned a neighborhood friend - Henry Louis Wallace. Wallace himself reported befriending his victims by acting as a big brother, lending a caring and listening ear, offering advice about boyfriend problems, helping with handyman duties, going out "clubbing", offering rides, organizing barbeques, and/or just making the women laugh. Once he had charmed his targets he turned and murder, rape, robbery, burglary, car thefts, and arson were the eventual results.

Most of the women were killed inside of their homes. Wallace reported that he would sometimes bring murder weapons with him (e.g., a pillowcase or a towel) although a few times he admitted using whatever was nearby. His primary method of homicide was double ligature strangulation, and he reported sometimes taking his victims in and out of consciousness while he repeatedly engaged in sexual relations with them. Some of the sexual acts included necrophilia. Two of his victims were stabbed a multitude of

times, and in one particularly horrifying case a 10 month old baby was also strangled and left for dead (although mercifully the infant survived).

### **Transition from an Organized Killer to a Disorganized Arrestee**

Henry Louis Wallace revealed characteristics that are associated with both organized and disorganized serial killers (Egger, 2001; Ressler et al., 1988). Initially Wallace made efforts to clean up his crime scenes by wiping off fingerprints, washing and re-dressing the bodies, and positioning the corpses in bed beneath the covers. He would occasionally pluck pubic hair from his victims and plant it in clothing that belonged to a boyfriend. Wallace reported dousing one of his victims with liquor and setting her house on fire in order to cover his tracks. Wallace also reported that after he meticulously cleaned up a crime scene, he would often go back to check to see if their bodies had been found, and while there he would often try to eliminate additional evidence, make phone calls, and even smoke crack cocaine if the opportunity presented itself.

Consistent with other serial killers, Wallace sometimes stole items and sold them to feed his drug habit. He also gave pieces of stolen jewelry to friends and to his girlfriend at the time, who later reported having seen the jewelry before but could not place it (Hickey, 2002; Egger, 2001). Wallace, like some other successful serial murderers, was simply hidden in plain sight (Douglass and Olshaker, 1998). He attended the funerals of some of his victims, conversed with family members after their deaths, conveyed compassion to friends, and even sent sympathy cards to a few.

During this timeframe, however, he continued to smoke crack cocaine. As his drug habit worsened, he became more careless and disorganized. He did not bathe or

redress later victims, and he carelessly left his fingerprints and other damaging evidence around. Interestingly, as his killing spree continued, his later victims were almost double the size of earlier victims. The larger women, according to Wallace, were more difficult to physically subdue, providing yet another indicator of his escalating carelessness or his growing confidence in his ability to escape detection. Toward the end of his killing days, Wallace killed three of his victims within a short but frantic 72 hour period, and two of the victims even lived in the same apartment complex. His increasing sloppiness obviously facilitated his identification and eventual capture.

### **THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM RESPONDS**

#### **Arrest and Confession**

Wallace was arrested within 48 hours after he murdered his last victim. The police had recovered an identifiable fingerprint on the car of one of his victims and they subsequently staked out his home. Wallace later claimed, consistent with the modus operandi of other serial killers (Douglass et al., 1998; Dietz et al., 1986), that he watched the news to find out if the police were onto him or not. Regardless, he was ultimately arrested without incident at the residence of a friend.

Over a ten-hour period Wallace described, in a tape-recorded confession, when and how he murdered nine Charlotte woman and two others before his Charlotte killing spree began; a known prostitute in Charlotte and another woman from South Carolina.<sup>2</sup> Wallace indicated that although he stole items from the women, sexual gratification, power, and domination were his primary motivations. After his taped confession and a

---

<sup>2</sup> The district attorney decided not to prosecute these two cases given jurisdictional and chronological challenges.

brief phone conversation with his girlfriend, he was placed on suicide watch at the jail. According to police investigators his girlfriend did not know that he was a serial killer, which again is not entirely unusual (Hickey, 2002). Serial killers often have girlfriends during their killing spree, and some have even had wives (e.g., Albert DeSalvo, also known as "The Boston Strangler", was married with two children).

According to city planners, to date this was the largest murder investigation in North Carolina history. Earlier in the investigation, the Federal Bureau of Investigation informed Charlotte homicide investigators that they did not appear to have a serial killer operating in Charlotte, apparently because the killer seemed to know his victims and the modus operandi was not "typical" of most serial offenders. In other words, serial murder profiling had apparently failed in this particular case.

Unfortunately, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department was later criticized as a result of their failure to link the murders together more quickly. Police were also accused of being less diligent about investigating the murders because the victims were African American and generally lived and worked in working class areas of the city.

Police denied these claims, suggesting that they lacked financial and manpower resources. At the time, CMPD had outdated computers and only six homicide officers who handled a heavy workload. During 1993, Charlotte also experienced their highest number of homicides in a year (122) and 94 of the homicide victims were black. Local homicide detectives further noted that his initial cleverness and meticulous attempts to remove and destroy evidence made Wallace particularly difficult to identify and apprehend. In other words, if Wallace had not become careless, the victim total could have probably been much higher.

### **Pre-Trial Challenges Raised (and Generally Ignored)**

Following Wallace's arrest, a number of pre-trial motions were presented by the defense, yet essentially every one of the motions was denied. The 11 hour taped confession was allowed even though the defense claimed it was a violation of the McNabb/Mallory Rule (McNabb v. U.S., 318 U.S. 332, 63 S. Ct (1943); Mallory v. U.S. 354 U.S. 449 77 S. Ct., 1356, 1957). The McNabb/Mallory rule states that the arrestee must be brought before a magistrate without undue delay (in a timely fashion) so that a judicial confirmation of probable cause can be determined or the case will be thrown out of court. The defense claimed that Wallace should have been brought before a magistrate more efficiently than the 19 hours that it actually took. The defense also claimed that Wallace was not read his Miranda rights until 3.5 hours had elapsed. To help ensure a fair trial process, a gag order was requested but the order was not imposed. The judge refused to provide police escorts for defense attorneys who visited the crime scenes, and he also refused a change of venue request. Further, the judge refused a request to deny the presence of uniformed sheriff's deputies in the courtroom (the defense thought that by allowing the tight security that it made their defendant appear more dangerous to the jury). The defense wanted the jury to be allowed to vote for second degree murder, based on a claim that Wallace had a mental illness which made it impossible for him to develop intent, an essential element required for first degree murder prosecutions. The judge, however, decided that the case was a capital offense that could result in the death penalty because the murders were committed during the course of other felonies (e.g., burglaries, robberies).

### **The Trial Phase**

Henry Louis Wallace, who was 180 pounds and 6'1" at the time of his arrest, weighed in excess of 300 pounds by the time the trial started eighteen months later. His attorneys suggested that his significant weight gain was due to inactivity, his use of anti-psychotic drugs, and exposure to unhealthy jail food. During the trial, Henry Louis Wallace wore glasses, a shirt, khakis, and a sweater. Some in attendance thought that he resembled a stereotypical victim that a schoolyard bully might pick on.

Wallace's trial lasted for four months, and there were more than 100 witnesses and about 400 exhibits presented. After deliberating, the jury found Henry Louis Wallace guilty of the first degree murders of nine women in Charlotte, North Carolina. He was also found guilty of a myriad of other felonies, including the attempted murder of the 10 month old son of one of the victims.

The subsequent sentencing hearing lasted for over a week. During the sentencing phase the jury listened to prosecutor and defense attorneys present evidence of aggravating factors (evidence in support of death sentences) versus mitigating circumstances (evidence that would strengthen an argument for a sentence of only life in prison). Henry Louis Wallace also read a written statement expressing remorse for his actions. He based his statement in a Bible verse citing Mark 11:25-26.

Nevertheless, after deliberating for 15 hours over four days, the jury found Wallace's crimes to be especially atrocious, heinous, and cruel. They recommended death for each of the nine first degree murder convictions. The judge upheld the jury recommendation and sentenced Wallace to nine death sentences, 10 life sentences, and another 322 years for the other felony convictions. Following sentencing, Wallace was immediately taken to death row at a North Carolina maximum security prison, which is



located in Raleigh. He was then sent directly to the prison hospital for medical and psychological screening.

### **Death Row in North Carolina**

Death sentences in North Carolina (and elsewhere) are automatically appealed, and so far the North Carolina courts have upheld Wallace's convictions and death sentences. There are currently 3,487 inmates awaiting execution in the United States, and 41.9% of them are African Americans (NAACP, 2004). Death row in North Carolina currently houses 190 inmates, 106 (56%) of whom are black and only one of the seven women is a black female (North Carolina Department of Correction, 2004). Wallace shares a double bunk in a 4x12 foot cell. Each cell has a metal cabinet welded to the wall, a stainless steel sink, and a topless commode. Most of Wallace's contact visits come from psychologists and attorneys. Other visitors are allowed to see Wallace once a week, but they must be cordoned by a partition. One of the visitors, for Wallace, is his long time supporter and current wife Rebecca Torrijas.

### **Marriage on Death Row**

Rebecca Torrijas was a nurse and administered medication to patients at the Charlotte/Mecklenburg County jail. Torrijas met Wallace while he was held at the jail and fell in love with him. Throughout his trial and incarceration she has been a staunch supporter and protector of Wallace, although once her relationship was discovered by jail administrators her employment was quickly terminated. During the trial phase, Rebecca was in court every day and made sure that Wallace had money and freshly laundered clothes.

On April 17, 1998 in a 15 minute service, Torrijas (by then in her mid 50's) married Wallace (32 years old at that time) in a hearing room next to the North Carolina death chamber. The ceremony was brief and without any significant fanfare. There were no flowers or invited guests in attendance. There was a corrections officer, a spokesperson, and one of Wallace's defense attorneys who served as the official witness and photographer. The bride and groom exchanged their vows, a passage from the book of Ruth was read, and the bride and groom were officially married at 11:15am. Given death row restrictions, their marriage was not consummated. Regardless, Wallace's ability to attract women apparently continued into his incarceration period.

#### **THE DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY OF HENRY LOUIS WALLACE**

Henry Louis Wallace was born on November 4, 1965 in Barnwell, South, Carolina, located about 60 miles south west of Columbia, South Carolina and about two hours south of Charlotte. Based on the social service and developmental histories of Wallace (Albarus, 1996) and information presented by defense attorneys during the sentencing phase of the trial, Wallace's mother rejected Henry because of the hate she had for men and because Henry's father abandoned her. Wallace and his older sister were raised in poverty in a fairly hostile environment which included a cinderblock dwelling without indoor plumbing. Records also indicated that Wallace was sometimes an object of ridicule in his family (Albarus, 1996), and pre-sentence reports suggested that, according to Wallace, his mother used to torment and humiliate him. Reportedly, according to Henry's pre-sentence investigation report, Wallace's mother used to have sexual relations with a variety of men in front of him. Wallace was beaten before he was two years old because he soiled himself and his mother wanted him potty-trained more

quickly so she could return to work. She often berated him by telling him that she wished that she had never had him, calling him names, and otherwise rejecting him through her actions and words.

Along with the physical and psychological abuse, his mother reportedly exposed him to true crime detective magazines and hardcore sexual pornography which, according to some psychiatrists, impacted Wallace's psychological and sexual development. As a young boy he sometimes served as a sex toy for young girls in the community, and his need for affection was reportedly so severe "that he mistook sexual exploitation for affection" (Albarus, 1996).

Stemming from a background filled with physical, psychological and perhaps sexual abuse (Albarus, 1996), Wallace was eventually overcome with violent urges. His psychiatrists, after many hours of intensive interviews, were able to diagnose Wallace with sexual disorders, depression and a personality disorder. Trial transcripts revealed that Wallace also confessed to his psychiatrist that he had committed between 35 and 100 rapes during his life. As such, his sexual aggression clearly escalated and contributed to his later violence and eventual murders. His distorted psychological development probably equipped Wallace with the rationale for his later rapes and killings, as he perceived his victims as having abused him, and he sometimes described himself as an avenger for other male victims who had suffered similar abuse.

Serial killer typologies are not mutually exclusive or exhaustive. However, generally most serial murderers have experienced some childhood trauma, whether it is abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, or other forms of trauma (Hickey, 2002; Holmes, 2002). As a result, they retaliate with anger, aggression, and violence. Norris (1988) claims that

homicidal rage and the temporary satisfaction achieved through killing is comparable to an addiction for the serial offender, and further compares this addiction to common drug addiction. In Wallace's case, it appears that he may have experienced both drug and homicidal addiction during the same timeframe.

Despite his childhood challenges, Wallace still managed to finish 80<sup>th</sup> in his class of 126 in high school. He participated in school activities as a cheerleader (the only male cheerleader on the team), a student council member, and a part-time deejay. Trial testimony indicated that Wallace had a history of developing easy friendships with women. He would charm and impress his dates and mothers referred to him as helpful, well-mannered and responsible.

Following high school, Wallace joined the Navy in 1984 and he served as a weapons technician aboard the U.S.S. Nimitz. Unfortunately, he found himself in trouble in 1987, when he was suspected of stealing and was given the choice of accepting an honorable discharge or facing criminal charges. Wallace took the honorable discharge.

Wallace later began having contact with civilian police in 1988. Another fairly common characteristic of serial killers is a history of property crimes and/or sexual assault violations (Hickey, 2002; Egger, 2002). Wallace started to develop a history of arrests for property crimes (mostly burglaries) and he even served four months in prison. In 1990, Wallace was arrested for an attempted rape (at gunpoint) of a 16 year old female and placed in an intervention program for non-violent offenders. This was obviously an important mistake for the criminal justice system and, in particular, for Wallace. After moving to Charlotte in 1991, Wallace was also caught shoplifting a rifle on another

occasion, although his motivation is unknown as he preferred to use other weapons during his killings.

In addition to his criminal involvement, Wallace also reported and court officials were able to verify that he had a child from a previous marriage, was currently estranged from a previous wife, and up until his final arrest he lived with a girlfriend (Albarus, 1996). Another woman was allegedly having his baby at the time of his arrest, and he claimed he was having consensual sexual relations with about 10 other women. Most of these relationships could be independently verified.

### **Lessons Learned**

Generally, communities should plan for and seriously consider crime prevention efforts while exploring the development of a rapidly growing area. Illegitimate as well as legitimate enterprises develop and thrive when an area is experiencing significant growth. As such, it is necessary for the police to be involved in the planning process.

Every time a serial killer is arrested, citizens always ask why he was not caught sooner. Charlotteans asked this question. The Charlotte/Mecklenburg Police Department had not encountered a serial killer before, and the department responded to this case by changing some of their practices, procedures and resource allocations. They simply had too few investigators investigating too many crimes. CMPD now has 25 homicide detectives and they have significantly increased training. They have also put together a cold case squad which focuses exclusively on stale and unsolved homicides. They have enhanced communication between the department and families of victims (e.g., keeping families posted about investigations and becoming more sensitive to victim families). CMPD created several task forces which probe for common clues among unsolved

murders nationwide. There is now more reliance on the Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (VICAP) which offers assistance to federal, state, local and foreign law enforcement in investigating unusual or repetitive violent crimes. The Wallace case also facilitated the development of a local forensic/DNA laboratory.

MOM-O (Mother's of Murdered Offspring) was created in 1993 by the mother of one of the victims of Henry Louis Wallace. This organization offers public support groups to families of murder victims. MOM-O is also a grass roots group that works in the community to help reduce the crime rate. They regularly hold meetings in churches, schools, and community centers and are supported by corporate and private sponsors.

## Bibliography

- Albarus, C. (1996). *Social and Developmental History of Mr. Henry Wallace*. New York: CVA Consulting.
- Arrigo, B., 2004. Personal communication, August.
- Clay, J.W.; Orr, D.M. and A. Stuart (1999). *North Carolina Atlas: Portrait of a Changing Southern State*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Bureau of Justice Statistics (2002). *Corrections Update*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office
- Dietz, P.E.; Harry, B.; and R. Hazelwood (1986). Detective Magazines: Pornography for the Sexual Sadist? *Journal of Forensic Sciences*. Vol. 31, No. 1, pp 197-211.
- Douglass, J. and M. Olshaker (1998). *Mindhunter: Inside the FBI's Elite Serial Crime Unit*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Egger, K. (1984). A Working Definition of Serial Murder and the Reduction of Linkage Blindness. *Journal of Police Science and Administration*, 12: 348-357.
- Egger, K. (2001). *The Killers Among Us: An Examination of Serial Murder and Its Investigation*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Federal Bureau of Investigations (1995). Crime in the United States – 1995. U.S. Department of Justice: <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/95cius.htm>.
- Federal Bureau of Investigations (2002). Crime in the United States – 2002. U.S. Department of Justice: [www.fbi.gov/ucr/02cius.htm](http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/02cius.htm).
- Godwin, G. (2000). *Hunting Serial Predators: A Multivariate Classification Approach to Profiling Violent Behavior*. Boca Raton, Florida: CRC Press LLC.
- Heyman, C. (1997). *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*. New York: Knopf.
- Hickey, E. (2002). *Serial Murderers and Their Victims*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth.
- Holmes, S. and R.M. Holmes (2002). *Sex Crimes—2<sup>nd</sup> edition*. Thousand Oaks, California, Sage.
- Jenkins, P. (1993). African Americans and Serial Homicide. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, Vol. 17, no.2, pp. 47-60.

- Kuhns, J. & Coston, C. T. M. (2004, unpublished). An Example of Majority Racial Profiling: Serial Murderers are White Males, Right..? A chapter submitted to Walker, J. & Bohm, R. (Eds.), Demystifying Crime and Criminal Justice. Roxbury Publishing: Los Angeles, CA.
- Lederer, L. and R. Delgado (1995). *The Price We Pay: The Case Against Racist Speech, Hate Propaganda and Pornography*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Lent, C. (2003). Unpublished Memoir. Federal Bureau of Investigation. Research Unit. Quantico, Virginia.
- McNabb v. U.S.* (1943). 318 U.S. 332, 63 S. Ct.
- Mallory v. U.S.* (1957). 354 U.S. 449 77 S. Ct., 1356.
- Merry, S. (1981). *Urban Danger: Life in a Neighborhood of Strangers*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Spring, 2004). *Death Row U.S.A.: A Quarterly Report by The Criminal Justice Project of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.* Accessed at [www.deathpenaltyinfo.org](http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org) in August.
- Norris, J. (1988). *Serial Killers*. New York: Doubleday.
- Ressler, R.K.; Burgess, A and J. Douglas (1988) *Sexual Homicide: Patterns and Motives*. New York: Free Press.
- Sanford, K. (1996). *Charlotte and UNC Charlotte: Growing up Together*. Charlotte: University of North Carolina at Charlotte Press.
- U.S. Census Bureau (2000). All Across the U.S.A.: Population Distribution and Composition, 2000. Population Profile of the United States: 2000 (Internet Release): [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov).
- Warren, J.T.; Hazelwood, R. and P Dietz (1996). The Sexually Sadistic Serial Killer. *Journal of Forensic Science*. Vol.4. No. 6, pp. 970-974.
- Winzer, I. (2002). *Growth in Charlotte*. Charlotte: National Association of Marketers.

#### Newspapers Used

The Charlotte Observer  
The New York Times



\*The authors would like dedicate this article to all victims of serial murder worldwide, and especially to the victims in this story: Sharon L. Nance, Carolina Love, Shawna D. Hawk, Audrey A. Spain, Valencia M. Jumper, Michelle Stinson, Vanessa L. Mack, Brandi J. Henderson, Betty Baucom, Debra A. Slaughter, Tashanda Bethea and Tarreese Woods.

\*\*The authors would like to acknowledge the assistance of Mr. Kevin Cozzolino of the Charlotte/Mecklenburg Police Department's Research, Planning, and Analysis Bureau for his assistance in the gathering of these data, and for his expertise in crime mapping. Special thanks to Captain Sean T. Mulhall for his assistance and for granting permission to use these data for this paper.

\*\*\*The information about Wallace's techniques of committing the crime and the criminal justice response to this case are derived from newspaper articles, autopsy reports, police investigations of the crime scenes, trial transcripts, personal discussions of the case with homicide investigators Lieutenants Gary O. McFadden and Bill Ward, and Wallace's 10 hour confession to the interrogators of the Homicide Unit of the Charlotte/Mecklenburg Police Department.

**Charisse T.M. Coston** earned her Ph.D. in Criminal Justice in 1988, from the School of Criminal Justice at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Currently, she is an Associate Professor and Graduate Coordinator in Department of Criminal Justice at The University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Current research interests include victimology and fear within and between especially vulnerable populations, serial murder, deviance, and critical theory in gender studies.

**Joseph B. Kuhns III** earned his Ph.D. in Criminal Justice in 2000 from the School of Criminal Justice, State University of New York at Albany. Currently, he is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at The University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Current research interests include drugs and violence, serial murder, community policing patterns across the country, and police integrity.