

# The Drug Bust Heard 'Round the World: A Fantasy Theme Analysis of *Tulia, Texas*

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**ABSTRACT:** *In 1999, a covert drug sting in Tulia, Texas, resulted in the arrest of 46 individuals, 39 of those African-American. This action sparked national media attention as claims were made that the incident was merely a target on the black community of Tulia, further segregating the town into conflicting factions. In 2008, the documentary Tulia, Texas was released. It documented both sides of the situation and gave a platform for the oppressed voices to share their narratives on the historical events. Through this critique, I analyze Tulia, Texas using Ernest Bormann's method of fantasy-theme criticism to identify the themes and overall rhetorical vision created. By doing so, an image of continuous battling groups is evident, showing two completely contrasting views on the same situation framed by racism and prejudice. These contradictions create an image of a town that is still torn by conflict, hindered by the past and unable to move on to the future.*

A tattered billboard on a desolate patch of Texas Highway 27 between Lubbock and Amarillo displays a message that attempts to convince drivers of prosperity amongst the barren landscape: "Tulia: The richest land and the finest people." Clearly constructed in times of agricultural successes, this roadside message seems to be at least half wrong. The land appears to be decaying, a product of neglect and economic hardships among the rural communities nationwide. When looking at the second claim, "the finest people," a clear contradiction of the view that was broadcast across America in the late 1990s arises. This west Texas town's reputation was shattered when issues of racism and classism began to plague the headlines of national media, targeting Tulia as one of the most racist towns in America. This issue, highly disputed to this day, was a direct result of the war that was happening at that time. This war was not being fought overseas, but in neighborhoods across America. Labeled as "the war on drugs," the United States vowed to eradicate the problem of narcotics that was posing threats to the domestic security of the nation (Check, 1995).

Originated in 1989 by President George H. W. Bush, this "war," consisted of \$7.9 billion that would be split up between law enforcement, jails, education, reinforcement, and prevention. However, the majority of the funds (70%) would directly be funneled to those catching the criminals instead of those helping prevent further spread (Check, 1995). The federal government, in turn, began to threaten federal funding if states did not comply, step up, and fight on the front lines of this disastrous war. How-

ever, the problem lay in the fact that the Commander in Chief didn't target the drug kingpins, but merely focused on the smaller players in this game—often leading the authorities into minority-heavy neighborhoods. Bobo and Thompson (2006) unveiled one of the resulting pitfalls of the war on drugs:

In our second round of surveys we asked a national sample of blacks and whites a series of three paired statements about the War on Drugs. The first asked whether drug laws are enforced fairly on all would-be drug users or are enforced unfairly against black communities. Sixty-six percent of blacks said "unfairly against black communities" as compared to just 21 percent of whites. In the second set of paired statements, 51 percent of blacks said that "drug use would not be such a problem if government officials did not somehow benefit from it," as compared to only 29 percent of whites. Most whites (71 percent), however, endorsed the view that "drug use would be a much worse problem without current government antidrug policies," a view shared by 49 percent of blacks. And in the third set of paired statements, 1 in 4 blacks endorsed the statement that "the war on drugs is just an excuse for the police to harass and imprison inner-city youth," a view accepted by only 5 percent of whites. (p. 461)

This research makes clear that the tactics and motives behind the declaration of war had results that were far from the original intentions. This article analyzes the documentation of one pitfall of the war on drugs in a small

west Texas town. By analyzing the documentary *Tulia, Texas* using fantasy theme criticism, I strive to identify the contrasting shared views of two opposing groups within the town to ultimately identify the rhetorical vision created by the documentary.

## Historical Background

In light of the Bush administration's declaration of the war on the drugs, many small communities began to seek help to fight the battle. Accepting grant money to help offset the costs, Tulia sheriff, Larry Stewart, was no different than many surrounding area officials. However, Stewart sought out the criminals in an unusual manner (Herbert, 2002). Stewart hired Tom Coleman, a former law enforcement officer, to go undercover and seek out those who were catalysts for Tulia's alleged narcotics problems. In 1998, Coleman began his role posing as an ex-convict with an addiction to cocaine (Leung, 2004). He was issued a birth certificate, social security number, background history, and disguise to submerge himself fully as T. J. Dawson (Herman & Whalen, 2008). His 18-month investigation was complete with an early-morning raid that arrested 46 individuals who Coleman claimed sold him powder cocaine (Gewertz, 2006). Of those 46 individuals, 39 were African Americans, imprisoning 13% of Tulia's adult black population (Leung, 2004). The local media was tipped off in advance to this early-morning spectacle and was quick to document the 46 individuals in their bewildered state, many of them pulled out of their beds and paraded one-by-one to police cars (Herbert, 2002). In the days following, local media praised Coleman's actions; the town's newspaper sported the front-page headline "Tulia's streets cleared of garbage" (Leung, 2004). Residents rested in peace knowing that their town was drug free due to the noble actions of undercover agent Coleman. Soon after, the Attorney General of Texas named Coleman the outstanding officer of the year, applauding his actions in Tulia as being moral and just (Leung, 2004). However noble this act may have seemed, the facts, when viewed closely, showed this operation as anything but.

Slowly, speculation of the events in Tulia arose as defendant after defendant denied any association or knowledge as to who T. J. Dawson was. When the defendants' identities began to come into light, though, many doubted their drug dealing status bestowed on them by Coleman.

The case grew more disturbing as the identities of the defendants became clear. Most were poor, either unemployed or semi-employed. None of them owned their own house or even their own car. A man named Joe Moore, identified as a "drug kingpin," turned out to be a 57-year-old African-American pig farmer living in a shack. None of these facts seemed to jibe with what had been alleged by the narcotics agent. (Gewertz, 2006, p. 2)

The white residents of Tulia, though, kept strong convictions about Coleman, believing that he did the right thing for the right reasons—pledging full faith in their sheriff for hiring the most qualified man for the job. Coleman's word was accepted as truth even though he never once used a wire or had witnesses to these drug sales; however, according to Texas law, the uncorroborated word of a cop is all one needs to be locked away (Gewertz, 2006). As the trials began, the convictions became quick and harsh, pinning defendants with sentences from 60 to 300 years of prison (Herbert, 2002). Those awaiting trial watched in horror as Coleman's word was taken as the absolute truth. Many chose to take plea bargains in order to avoid these ruthless sentences, knowing that other options would land them behind bars for much longer.

As this event began to divide the already racially segregated town of Tuila, more inconsistencies began to surface. Above all, individuals wanted to know what this town of 5,000 individuals was doing with 46 alleged drug dealers—to whom exactly were they dealing (Gewertz, 2006)? Furthermore, was the drug problem in Tulia really confined strictly to one sector of their populous—the lower-class minorities? These initial questions sparked a defense team, headed by criminal defense attorney Jeff Blackburn, to analyze the facts and find the truth behind this operation (Herman & Whalen, 2008).

Among the inconsistencies, Blackburn and his team discovered multiple contradictions in the documentation of the crimes. Among those inconsistencies was Tonya White, an African-American woman who was charged with selling Coleman \$190 worth of cocaine on October 9, 1999 (Leung, 2004). White claimed "that's not possible because I was at the bank in Oklahoma City at 9:45 a.m. withdrawing \$8. And they got my signature on my withdrawal slip" (Leung, 2004, p. 2). In another case, Coleman claimed he bought the narcotics from individuals on days that his timesheets say he was not working. Although inconsistencies began to pile up, the defendants continued to be convicted with few dismissals due to inexcusable alibis. However, as Blackburn and his team

began to pull out the facts of Coleman's flawed past, justice finally turned an ear in their direction.

Months later, in a court hearing of the appellate court of Texas, Coleman's testimonies were reviewed. They were labeled as "absolutely riddled with perjury," pinning him as "the most devious, non-responsive law enforcement witness this court has witnessed in 25 years on the bench in Texas" (Leung, 2004). Sentenced with merely probation and a ban in the field of law enforcement, Coleman got off much easier than his prey. Still today, though, the issues of the drug sting of 1999 are a hidden subject on the streets of Tulia. These events further divide the town into those who see Coleman's action as justified and those who see injustice. Regardless of the lens through which you view the situation, a clear contrast in opinions can be seen.

### *Description of Artifact*

The artifact I analyze through this critique is *Tulia, Texas*. This 56-minute documentary was directed and produced by Cassandra Herrman and Kelly Whalen. Beginning in 2002, Herrman and Whalen worked for five years on the documentary with 14 taping sessions with those directly involved with the Tulia incident (Phillips, 2008). Premiering in March of 2008 at the South by Southwest film festival in Austin, *Tulia, Texas* began its tour across the country in order to spread the message of this hidden story. The film aired on PBS's "Independent Lens" series in the 2008–2009 season (Phillips, 2008). In September of 2008, *Tulia, Texas* had its closest geographical screening to Tulia on the Canyon, Texas campus of West Texas A&M University. Many viewers present at this premiere were shown in the film, and their opinions were strongly felt on and off the screen. Herrman and Whalen's intentions were not to give a black eye to the town of Tulia by rehashing old issues, but to show that an event of this magnitude can happen anywhere in America.

The noble element of this documentary lies in the fact that the narration is given by individuals who were directly involved with the events in Tulia. Unlike many documentaries, Herrman and Whalen chose not to interject their opinions beyond the editing process. The documentary ultimately serves as a semi-balanced portrayal of the emotions and opinions of Tulia's interpretation of the events surrounding the famous drug bust.

Through this analysis, I limit my critique to only the testimonies presented by the residents of Tulia. Although there were many key players involved in the famous Tulia drug bust that aren't residents of Tulia, it is ultimately the Tulians that are formulating the rhetorical views on this

situations and, in turn, the only ones still living with the consequences and results of this historic event. Although this documentary does a successful job at including adequate narratives from all sides, inside and outside of the Tulia city limits, it is ultimately those Tulia residents that are the central focus of this analysis.

### **Methodology**

The method of criticism I use to analyze the documentary *Tulia, Texas* is that of fantasy theme criticism. Fantasy theme criticism seeks to "provide insights into the shared worldviews of groups" (Foss, 2009, p. 97). Ernest G. Bormann created this method of criticism by generating off of the small group study conducted by Robert Bales (Foss, 2009). Bales realized a group's tendency to fantasize or dramatize perceived situations as a primary communication medium (Foss, 2009). Through Bales' work, Bormann and Bormann (1972) characterized individuals' tendency to alter both their verbal and nonverbal patterns as the fantasy unfolded.

The tempo of the conversation would pick up. Members grew excited, interrupted one another, laughed, showed some emotion, forget their self-consciousness. The members participated in the story with the sorts or responses that were appropriate. If the person telling the story was trying to be funny, the others laughed; if the person was serious, the others' verbal comments and nonverbal responses would be of the suitable tone. The group obviously tuned in to the fantasy. (p. 307)

Bormann took this behavior discovered by Bales and extended it through his symbolic convergence theory (Foss, 2009). Symbolic convergence theory is rooted in the assumptions that communication creates reality and that an individual's symbolic meanings converge to form a cohesive view of reality (Foss, 2009). Through further works, Bormann began to expand on this theory to create an overall sense of fantasy themes through his theory and related terminology.

The occurrence of one fantasy spawning from another presented within Bales' work creates a fantasy chain. After a group participates in multiple fantasy chains, they begin to form their own group culture, creating a similar mindset and belief of their surroundings (Bormann & Bormann, 1972). These chains consist of dramatized accounts of events that are apart from the present setting. Often, the participants are reflecting on the past or specu-

lating about the future, envisioning characters, locations, and events that can be separated from the moment of shared fantasy chains (Bormann, 1972).

The concept of fantasy chains conceptually make up the idea of a fantasy theme. A fantasy theme, therefore, is created by a cluster of chains that reoccur within a given group's communication (Bormann, 1972). Furthermore, it is the critic that formulates what fantasy themes develop due to the clustering of chains. Once a critic recognizes apparent chains within a group, the fantasy themes can evolve. Bormann (1972) further explains this process of discovering fantasy themes:

When a critic has gathered a number of dramatic incidents he can look for patterns of characteristics (do the same people keep cropping up as villains?) or dramatic situations and actions (are the same stories repeated?) and of setting (where is the sacred ground and where the profane?). (p. 401)

From this investigation, the concept of character themes, action themes, and setting themes arise. By interpreting the fantasy themes present within the given artifact, the critic can begin to formulate the overarching rhetorical vision the rhetor is attempting to present. It is within this rhetorical vision that outsiders (not linked into the shared fantasy chains) can begin to study the given group's point of view more clearly.

Sonja Foss (2009) suggests that fantasy-theme criticism may be accomplished in two steps: coding the artifact, and construction of the rhetorical vision. Through the first step, the critic must analyze the artifact and identify key words or phrases that pertain to the three major genres of themes (Foss, 2009). Through coding, the critic seeks to find recurring themes that play a significant role in the artifact. The second step is for the critic to construct the rhetorical vision (Foss, 2009). Through this step, the critic groups the coded words or phrases into themes to better understand the rhetor's shared fantasy-themes (Foss, 2009). It is the critic's job to link the action, setting, and character themes to create a cohesive understanding of the artifact's world views (Foss, 2009). It is through this method of criticism that a particular societal view that outsiders may observe as absurd, giving clarity to the unknown.

## Analysis

Using Bormann's method of fantasy theme criticism, I follow the two steps Foss lays out to successfully analyze the artifact. Initially, I identify the prevalent themes present in the testimonies of the Tulia residents to finally construct the rhetorical vision the rhetors wish to create. When looking at these testimonies, an evident contradiction of themes among the two battling groups is apparent.

This critique does not intend to draw lines between the testimonies of blacks and whites in Tulia, for the coding process does not include *who* said what, but rather only *what* was said. Although the town has been divided because of this issue, a clear line between races has not been drawn for there are individuals of every race that have taken positions on either side. Through this analysis, however, I wish to distinguish the concept of competing narratives. There were ultimately two groups in Tulia, those who supported the drug bust and those who were against it. Through the primary events, the dominant voice present was that of those individuals who rejoiced in the actions taken by Jeff Blackburn, suppressing the competing narratives that saw the negative implications of this event. This dominant narrative was prevalent partially because of the marginalization of those being punished as well as the backing of law enforcement officials on the subject. This created a distinct power struggle between the competing voices, hoping to have their narrative heard by outsiders. As the events progressed and the competing narratives gained momentum from outside media and legal help, the battle between two opinionated sectors of the Tulia community began. There were six prominent themes the rhetors focused on through their interviews.

### *Dominant Narratives*

*Integration.* The major mindset held by the dominant group prior to the 1999 drug bust in Tulia saw the town as integrated and possessing limitless opportunity for those who desired to succeed. During continuous instances in the documentary, the dominant group attempted to convince the audience and themselves that the setting for this incident was not one of prejudice or inequality, attempting to remove the black eye of racism with which the South is branded. Numerous statements of Larry Stewart, Tulia's sheriff, attempted to neutralize the stigma around his community.



We care for, very deeply, about the whole community, not just a segment of it. Tulia was integrated well over 40 years ago. We have people of all races living in every part of town. This community is open to anyone who wants to make something of themselves.

(Herman & Whalen, 2008)

This idea of a limitless possibility is one that Stewart firmly hangs onto throughout the course of the film, never straying from the notion that Tulia is far from an oppressing community. Through his statements, “we” becomes the active character theme, assuming the role of representing the town of Tulia as a whole. Through this representation, Stewart assumes the identity of both blacks and whites, rich and poor within the setting themes, “community” and “Tulia.” In turn, the setting and character themes reference the same concept, becoming a reinforcement of the ideal that the town itself is merely comprised of the people it is made up of. The action themes within Stewart’s fantasy are “care for,” “have people of all races,” and “is open to anyone.” This sense of a liberated, free land creates an air of integration far from the stereotypical view of an oppressive west Texas. The uniqueness to this particular fantasy theme in itself is the fact that the individual who is speaking on behalf of the community is a strong player in helping create the initial conflict to begin with. It is this sense of blind representation that lacks the acknowledgement of the possibility of bias within the community, ultimately creating a false sense of reality as a lens to view the world.

*Justice.* The theme of justice is prevalent throughout the narratives of the Tulia residents. This idea of justice revolves around the idea that Tom Coleman’s actions were completely motivated out of unwavering confidence that he was sold drugs by these 46 individuals on the reported dates. Sheriff Larry Stewart states, “I think this story is simply about a community doing its best to do what they believe is right” (Herman & Whalen, 2008). Stewart goes on to say, “We felt like we did a good job. We felt like we did what the citizens here wanted us to do” (Herman & Whalen, 2008). These two statements from the sheriff create a mindset that the citizens had preconceived notions and expectations of the results of the drug sting, claiming this action to be not only legally just but also to be justified in happening under the contexts it did. Tulia resident Charles Kiker explains one man’s actions on the matter saying, “One of the men in that Sunday school class, who would later be the jury foreman for one of the trials, said they’re all guilty and they’re scumbags and we need to get them off the street” (Herman & Whalen,

2008). This feeling of a justified action encompassed the dominant group, communicating the idea that this action was the only resolution to the drug problem in Tulia. The character themes all revolve around key players in the arrest and conviction of the defendants: “community,” “we” (law enforcement), and “the jury foreman.” All three played crucial parts in the legality of this situation. The setting themes all lie within the confines of the town: “here” (Tulia) and “Sunday school.” The latter represents the importance of the opinions on this situation. Discussions of the matter began to crop up in religious venues across the community, showing one fantasy chain shared by the men within that conversation. The action themes revolve around the idea of doing the right thing: “do what they believe is right,” “did what citizens here wanted us to do,” and “said they’re all guilty and they’re scumbags.” This notion of a justified action feeds off the idea of the three relatable themes—the characters in the setting were just in action.

*Defensiveness.* The power of the dominant group greatly shifted throughout the course of the procedure. Because the competing narratives began to generate a voice and outweigh the opinions and actions of the dominant group, there had to be a defense as to how they would justify actions that now seemed unjust. The route the dominant group decided to take did not accept the argument that the actions of the legal system were flawed and unjust, however, they defended the actions of Coleman and his teammates in the situation. As two unnamed men reflect on the events surrounding the pardoning of the conviction over a cup of coffee, an evident sense of anger is intertwined with their rhetoric.

MAN 1: I thought it looked like a Barnum and Bailey’s circus down there myself. Those lawyers, I don’t think that they cared about the people they helped get out of prison and stuff. They wanted to embarrass the county, embarrass the drug enforcement people.

MAN 2: I have known our county sheriff for 25 years or longer. He’s not a racist. He made a mistake—we all make mistakes. If he runs for sheriff tomorrow, I’d vote for him again. We never got rid of the drugs. I think they’ll be back in jail for another crime within the year.

(Herman & Whalen, 2008)

The character themes view “those lawyers” as the enemy, claiming that their work had no “[care] about the people they helped get out of prison” (Herman & Whalen, 2008). Likewise, they viewed the sheriff as the hero, be-

ing the noble foreman of this endeavor who went astray. Through these quotations alone, the defensive quality resonates clearly in this conversation. This notion of defending an action that one supports even after it has been deemed wrong remained prevalent through many Tulians' mindsets. Throughout the documentary, Sheriff Stewart continues to justify the actions of Coleman even with the obvious flaws in the documentation.

As far as Ms. White, the only thing that I can tell you about that is that, I assume that there was a mix-up on dates on reports or something of that nature. I don't believe that's enough to bring his credibility into question.

(Herman & Whalen, 2008)

The character themes point to Ms. White and her actions to merely be a "mix-up" on the reports. This character, action and setting, as stated by the sheriff, encompasses the idea of protecting the actions of the community by giving a reasonable explanation of the inconsistencies in the paperwork. Furthermore, one Tulia resident attempted to play the victim after being involved in one of the pardoned cases as a jury member, "For the first time, I would go into a store and a black would see me and, instead of smiling and saying hi, would glare at me like they hated me" (Herman & Whalen, 2008). This notion of turning the victimization from the apparent victims onto oneself became a prominent theme in the once dominant narratives. "A black" becomes the character theme through this account as "glare at me like they hated me" becomes the action in the setting of "a store" (Herman & Whalen, 2008). This defense takes the voice of a dominant group member and alters it into the role of the victim, viewing the situation as being one where she is suffering, not those who are being marginalized. This defense stems from the root of defeat, proving their ideas of integration and justice to be inherently flawed.

### **Competing Narratives**

*Segregation.* The contrasting fantasy theme to the dominant group's notion of integration is the competing narrative's claim of segregation within Tulia, stretching back before the drug bust occurred. Many residents reflect on their initial impressions of the drug sting to ultimately show the preconceived notions of particular segments of the Tulia community. Charles Kiker said, "We looked at the addresses and it was all from 'Blacktown,' so we knew that there had been a raid on 'Blacktown'" (Herman & Whalen, 2008). This idea of a "Blacktown" screams segregation on its own, giving the setting theme true power

through the statement. The character "we" and action "looked at the addresses" merely play a supporting role to the term used to describe the setting. Furthermore, Kiker continues to expand on the idea of the social lines drawn within the community.

To say that blacks are integrated into Swisher County . . . is simply not the truth. I would say to go visit the banks and see how many black tellers there are, visit the county offices and see how many black employees there are other than custodial help, and then draw a conclusion.

(Herman & Whalen, 2008)

Ultimately, Kiker states that the characters (blacks) in the setting (Swisher County) are not integrated, creating the shared themed of a segregated society. Through the elaboration on his first sentence, Kiker continues to reiterate this idea of separation. Likewise, Freddie Brookins Sr., the father of one of the defendants, adds to this notion of segregation.

Before the sting, Freddy was an employee, just like many of the young blacks here. When my children were in high school, they would seek employment, and they would constantly tell us "Dad, they won't hire us."

(Herman & Whalen, 2008)

This narrative ultimately supports Kiker's earlier quotation. "My children" become the character and their information of rejection serves as the action within the setting of Tulia. This narrative gives a personal account to contradict the claims of the dominant voice. Within the opening scene, Brookins summarizes his standpoint through a sentence explanation of the events that unfolded. "This is a story about a town who wants to send a message to the black community" (Herman & Whalen, 2008). The character and the setting lay in the "town" where the action was "to send a message to the black community," a community that was apparently separate from the rest.

*Injustice.* The notion of justice that was formed in the narratives of the dominant group is highly disputed through the testimonies of the competing narratives. This form of injustice lies in the initial action of the drug sting, not the end result of the release of the defendants. As noted earlier, those who quickly crossed the racial barriers that were evident before helped play a pertinent role in the amplification of the competing narratives. Gary Gardner reflects on his initial response during the unfolding events in Tulia.

I was the first white guy that said, in public, this is wrong. There was so much animosity against the blacks that had been arrested. And what I took offense at was that the district attorney and the sheriff, they was walking around, beating themselves on the chest like Tarzan. They were basically trying everybody in public.

(Herman & Whalen, 2008)

There are many notions of injustice portrayed in this narrative. Initially, Gardner sets himself as the first character under the setting of “in public” and the action of saying “this is wrong.” The added fact that Gardner was a white man crossed the boundary lines of a marginalized group unreasonably claiming injustice. Secondly, Gardner portrays the characters of the “district attorney and the sheriff” as “walking around . . . like Tarzan” in the public setting. He goes on to say that these same characters are “trying everybody” in the same setting. This shows the unjust actions of those who claim to be working for a just society, contradicting not only their stance but also the notion of innocence until proven guilty. These narrations of injustice slowly began to lever the competing narratives into the spotlight of media attention to gain them the results and attention they desired.

*Endurance.* The final fantasy theme the competing narratives formulate is the overall feeling of endurance in the face of adversity. Through each testimony within the documentary, regardless of the trials the given character faced, a desire to move on and continue life normally was prevalent. Freddie Brookins Jr., one of the imprisoned defendants, reflects on life after incarceration and release.

What gets me up every morning is knowing that I have to get out and provide for my family. I've been working at the meat market in the grocery store. This is where I'm at and I've got to try to make the best of it.

(Herman & Whalen, 2008)

This overarching idea that the character (“I”) must fulfill the action (“try to make the best of it”) in order to truly move on develops an enduring quality that gives Brookins the desire to leave the discrimination and hatred behind for a better future. Brookins further explains his state of mind within the situation.

When I was first released, my dad told me that there is no way in the world to move around in this world if you can't look deep in your heart and forgive these people for what they have done. Even if they haven't come and asked you for their forgiveness. (Herman & Whalen, 2008)

Simply, Brookins represents the character within his father's advice to fulfill the action to “forgive these people for what they have done.” Through this advice, Brookins shows his reasoning to not reflect the dominant group's abrasive, defensive attitude, but that of returning back to normalcy. Similarly, another released defendant, Michelle White, resounds the enduring notion as she says, “Life goes on. We're still trying to make it and survive and do what we have been doing” (Herman & Whalen, 2008). The characters are encompassed through “we” while the actions reflect their desire to continue with an ordinary life, unaffected by the unjust actions of the past. This notion of endurance uplifts this competing narrative to ultimately formulate a positive outcome from the negative, vastly contradicting the opposition's desire to continue defending mistakes of the past.

### *Rhetorical Vision*

In order to observe fully the rhetorical vision presented within the documentary, it is crucial first to acknowledge the given rhetors within this artifact. Although the main focus of this analysis is on the words spoken by the residents of Tulia, the overarching rhetors are the directors and producers of the documentary, Cassandra Herman and Kelly Whalen. It is through their process of editing and decision making that ultimately created this platform for these narratives to be heard. Through this, we can see a clear strategy and rhetorical vision created by the rhetors.

The concept of two differing opinions presented within a group of people display the notion of battling narratives—an apparent vision the rhetors wished to create. This documentary could easily present only one side of the story, but through Herman and Whalen's decisions to include both support and opposition to Coleman's actions, a more realistic vision of the situation is given. Furthermore, this rhetorical vision polarized members of the community to support either one side or the other. By presenting the two extremities, the rhetors gave the audience the most conflicting narratives on which to base their vision of Tulia. This method creates a sense of how much impact this event had in this small community is created.

When viewing the concept of the dominant and competing narratives, the rhetors ultimately help amplify the oppressed voices by presenting their story that often goes unheard. From the beginning, the dominant group gained its power through the media's attention, reporting a drug bust that would put Tulia, Texas on the map. The footage of the defendants being handcuffed

and walked to the police cars amplified the dominant narrations because it presented the stereotypical drug user being locked away, the goal of President Bush's war on drugs. However, it was also the media who began to broadcast the inconsistency in the evidence—creating a platform for multiple views of the issues on a local and national level. Through the artifact, the rhetors clearly acknowledged the media's role in this situation, giving the rhetorical vision of the media's power to reveal the inconsistencies of the judicial system that caused this controversy in the first place.

## Conclusion

The war on drugs, regardless of numbers that might prove otherwise, was ultimately a policy bomb that negatively affected more people than it intended. This policy that was intended to make America a safer place only left deeper scars than the drugs could create. Tulia, Texas is merely one example of the flaws of this policy. It is apparent that these implications are irreversible, polarizing many communities and causing them to return to the prejudicial mindsets of the past.

Through the documentary *Tulia, Texas*, these issues are adequately brought into light. In west Texas communities the story of Tulia is one that has long faded and often forgotten, intentionally or unintentionally, by individuals who were closely impacted by it. Although the situation is no longer commonly discussed, the results are still evident, and through this documentary, those results and reasoning are brought back into light. By analyzing *Tulia, Texas* using fantasy-theme criticism, apparent contradictory views of two opposing groups are easily identifiable to create an overall rhetorical vision of continuous conflict even after the verdict has been read. It is this conflict that marks Tulia as still being a community where prejudice and segregation thrive long after the days where those qualities were banished from the American way of life. Perhaps the sign welcoming individuals into Tulia shouldn't read "the richest land and the finest people," but rather acknowledge the hardships this town has endured and pledge that travesties like this will never

happen again. It is not until Tulia attempts to correct the actions of the past that a "rich" and "fine" future can truly happen.

## Implications for Further Research

When looking at the possibilities of the expansion of this research, many options are available. By using the documentary as a catalyst for the subject matter, extended research could seek to view the Tulia communities' opinion of the rhetorical strategies presented within the film. Because this documentary seeks to present Tulia in a light that does not stray from the facts, I would like to talk to both sides of the situation in order to fully view their reaction to the facts and testimonies that were presented. Through focus groups, a better understanding of the rhetors' rhetorical vision, as compared to the actual reality vision, can be understood. Furthermore, an expanded research of the legal documents presented within the trials could help understand the background knowledge and credibility of the situation. Also, by examining this film as a rehashing of past events, a study on the revival of conflict due to the media attention would garner analysis on the effects of the film more so than the content within.

Moving away from a rhetorical analysis of film, another route would be to analyze the communication tendencies of those living in Tulia now to see how much the events of the drug conflict truly impact their day-to-day lives. By seeing if this conflict still creates tension between races, it would become a broader study that would not be limited to the confines of the narration presented within the documentary. This could be established through focus groups with members of the Tulia community from various areas of the town to ensure that a variety of ideas and opinions are represented.

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