

caption "The Schoolyard Killers: Behind the Jonesboro Tragedy." It ran a cropped version of the *Time* cover photo on the first page of its main story, adjacent to a full-page image of downcast pallbearers carrying the coffin of one of the shooting victims. Photos of grief-stricken friends and relatives of both the victims and their alleged killers were prominent in two of the three magazines. *U.S. News* ran only one such photo — a surprisingly intimate shot of Andrew Golden's distraught grandparents at their kitchen table.

The question of "why" was addressed by all three newsweeklies, with mixed results. While *Time* and *Newsweek* raised the same social issues that were raised by newspapers (media violence, absent parents and unsecured firearms), both did a creditable job of characterizing these factors as contributors to today's generally more threatening social climate rather than as potential causes of these particular shootings.

Both those magazines also did a good job of focusing on the specifics of recent schoolyard shootings that preceded the Westside tragedy in trying to understand what statistics have suggested are aberrational acts. Their coverage would

have been even more responsible had both magazines abstained from using the phrase, "Why do kids kill?" in subheads. A better choice would have been, "Why did these kids kill?"

U.S. News' analysis focused, more daringly, on whether there was "a virulent culture of violence in the rural South." But having raised this question explicitly in a subhead, it failed to provide any meaningful sociological evidence in the lives of the suspects that could have begun to answer it. In fact, the final six paragraphs of the article did far more to subvert the "Southern culture of violence" hypothesis than the rest of the article did to support it. But the impression one would get at a glance is that such a culture of violence exists and that readers should be worried about it.

If there was a subtext to the coverage in all three magazines, it was that, in some form, gun control was a key issue to be addressed in preventing future incidents like these. Both *Time* and *Newsweek* published a list of grades given to states by the lobbying group, Handgun Control, Inc., based on what each state has done, in *Time's* words, to "protect children from gun violence and accidents."

Where were the cows?

Grazing cows are not visible from the administration building on the campus of Arkansas State University — contrary to a report that began on Page One of *The New York Times* on March 29.

ASU journalism professor Joel T. Gambill says that such an error "doesn't mean *The New York Times* blew it on coverage" of the shootings at Westside Middle School. "But I was concerned about some of the inaccuracies" made by a range of media. "To me, when you make those kinds of mistakes ... you leave a definite feeling among some people about your total content."

New York Times national correspondent Rick Bragg, based in the *Times'* Atlanta news bureau, said he "drove by the college, through one of the gates ... and from one of the gates you can see a farm." He said the item was used in the story, compiled by another *Times'* writer, to show "that the college and the town are in a pastoral setting." It "was not intended to make fun of anyone or to cast people

who live there in a bad light," he said.

The cow controversy was raised at a public forum in Jonesboro on April 13 and repeated later on an ABC "Nightline" program. It surfaced in connection with other reporting errors, some of which left residents fearful that their community of 51,000 was being portrayed inaccurately to the rest of the nation by the media.

For the record, the views from all four sides and the four corners of the ASU administration building don't afford the possibility of sighting bovines. One view, between buildings to the south, includes a swatch of a field used for test crops — definitely not pastureland. Other perspectives offer views of buildings, streets or a campus green.

Nearly a mile to the north is an ASU-owned farm, where in the spring there are horses and cows in the fields. From the farm one can see the tower of the university's new library, but not the administration building.

— Gene Policinski