

Zombies, Drugs, and Florida Weirdness

“Imaginative power” and resonance in coverage of Miami's “Causeway Cannibal”

DOI:10.1080/1461670X.2013.779106

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12 Mar 2013, *Journalism Studies*

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1461670X.2013.779106>

Abstract

On a steamy May 26, 2012 in Miami, Florida, police officers found Rudy Eugene viciously eating another man's face. Police shot Eugene at least four times, killing him, to stop the attack. Over the next month, the story of the “Causeway Cannibal” (a.k.a. the “Miami Zombie”) fueled debate about what spawned the attack. News explanations included synthetic drugs, cannibalism, Voodoo, and zombies. This textual analysis of immediate news explanations to the attack explores and speculates on why some explanations, such as mental illness, were ignored. By distinguishing between journalistic sensationalism and Ettema's journalistic “imaginative power,” this paper presents possible cultural reasons to explain why news media all but excluded mental illness as a dominant explanation for Eugene's actions.