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Mock slave auction at Chatham school hits close to home for anti-racism advocate

Amanda Rose : 3-4 minutes

CHATHAM COUNTY, N.C. — Ronda Taylor Bullock grew up in Goldston, North Carolina, a town once segregated by skin color where Bullock says racism still rears its ugly head.

"What white supremacy does is it dehumanizes us and it hardens our hearts and it prevents us from empathizing from other people from whom we are different," Bullock said.

What You Need To Know

- **A North Carolina county made national headlines after students held a mock slave auction on school grounds**
- **Dozens of families, students and activists voiced their concerns at a recent Chatham County school board meeting**
- **The school board apologized and unanimously voted to make changes to school policies dealing with acts of racism**
- **The school district also announced that "no adults were involved and no adults witnessed what happened"**

Bullock went to J.S. Waters Elementary School, where students recently held a mock slave auction.

"It's unfortunate that this is what [the school] is making national headlines for, but it needs to happen because this is how change happens," she said.

Related: [Chatham County families speak out, school board responds after reports of mock 'slave auction'](#)

What happened, Bullock says, brought back memories of her own. In her high school yearbook from 1999, she remember students who wore nooses around their necks for several pictures.

"I remember having one white male educator say that it was a joke, they were just joking around. And to that now, at this point in my life, I have the language to say, a joke to whom? Who is supposed to laugh at this?" she said.

Bullock says she's now using her access to power and privilege to provide anti-racist training for children, families and educators.

"With young children, if we start earlier on, we can disrupt the formation of those bias beliefs," she said. "We can intentionally help children develop racial identities, we can intentionally provide learning spaces where they appreciate differences, where they stay connected to their humanity."

Her organization is called [We Are](#). It has summer camps and workshops about race, racism, its impact on communities and how to resist it.

"A lot of kids think that racism is back in the day. I'm helping them understand that activism is ongoing," she said. "A lot of kids think that racism is back in the day. I'm helping them understand that activism is ongoing," she said.

Bullock believes the future is rooted in activism and children play a crucial role.

"If a white child can use a slave auction in a flippant way or even in a hurtful way or saying the 'n' word in a joking manner, something is off with their racial identity. Something

unhealthy is happening inside that child or those children, and we need to address it," Bullock said.

Her nonprofit has been offering anti-racist summer camps for first through fifth grade since 2016. She says there are 40 students on the waitlist for this summer.

Bullock also met with Chatham County district administrators to discuss bringing one of the summer camps to that county. They were pleased with the idea.