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Durham Nonprofit Leader Fights Fascism Through Education

Ronda Taylor Bullock is the cofounder of the Durham-based nonprofit Working to Extend Anti-Racist Education.

BY THOMASI MCDONALD MAY 25, 2022 6:00 A.M.

Last Thursday on Malcolm X's birthday—days after a heavily armed teenaged white supremacist outfitted in tactical gear shot dead 10 Black people in Buffalo—the cofounder of an antiracist education nonprofit in Durham quoted the fiery human rights leader during a press conference.

“I’ve had enough of someone else’s propaganda. I’m for truth, no matter who tells it,” said Ronda Taylor Bullock. Bullock cofounded the Durham-based nonprofit Working to Extend Anti-Racist Education (we are) with her husband, Daniel Kelvin Bullock, in 2015. (Daniel Bullock is the executive director for equity affairs with Durham Public Schools.)



Ronda Taylor Bullock | Photo courtesy of We Are

“I’m for justice, no matter who it is for, or against. I’m a human being, first and foremost, and as such I will work for whatever and whoever benefits humanity as a whole,” Ronda Taylor Bullock said before wishing Malcolm X a happy 97th birthday as she stood behind a podium on the campus of the former W.G. Pearson School in the heart of the Hayti District.

Bullock, a former Hillside High School teacher, told the crowd that had gathered for the press conference that her nonprofit’s work has been recently targeted “by people who don’t share our values,” including NC House speaker Tim Moore and state senator Phil Berger.

The scholar, who left the classroom in 2014 and earned a PhD in education from UNC-Chapel Hill, did not mince words about the growing right-wing backlash following the election of Barack Obama: the miserable ongoing reality of Donald Trump, voter suppression, book bannings, the threat to end legal abortions, and a loud, potentially violent minority of the American population so thoroughly ashamed



of this nation's racial history that state houses across the country are criminalizing the teaching of it in public school classrooms.

"I know during this time we must come together and stand together against white supremacy, against racism, each and every time it rears its ugly head," Bullock said. "We cannot let one comment, one moment, one slight pass as if it will go away. They are not going away. They are mobilizing. They are organizing, and if we don't do our part, it's going to be trouble for us."

Since its founding seven years ago, we are has made impressive inroads here in the Triangle, statewide, nationally, and internationally by relying on the framework of critical race theory to teach the pernicious legacy of systemic racism. Part of we are's work includes summer camps for children, workshops for parents and families, and microgrants from \$500 to \$1,500 for teachers and educators.

The funds are used to start racial equity teams at schools or create projects through the use of educational materials and events that "disrupt racial discipline disparities that all too often shunt Black and brown students into the school-to-prison pipeline," Bullock told the *INDY* this week.

Bullock says the nonprofit's work "caught the attention of white supremacists, conservatives, and 'anti-truth tellers'" in March at the start of the grant cycle when an educator at Millbrook High School applied for a grant.

"We were already on their radar," says Bullock. She adds that the educator had to appeal to the Wake County school board for the funding, and the nonprofit's name appeared on the board's consent agenda last month.

Moore, the state house Speaker, took to Twitter on April 18 to criticize the Millbrook High educator's grant request.

"This is wholly unacceptable," Moore wrote. "No North Carolina school should be teaching anti-American Critical Race Theory in our classrooms, much less competing for a grant from an organization focused on promoting CRT."

Amy Marshall, a former Wake County public schools teacher and founder of the Carolina Teachers Alliance, also weighed in to voice her disapproval.

"Wake Co NC Schoolboard forcing CRT on students & staff again with 'Dear White Parents' 'We Are' anti-racist grant to 'train' teachers & students," Marshall huffed in a tweet. "The only thing this school board is disrupting & dismantling is education."

Months before, in early August, Berger took a photo of multiracial, elementary-aged children and their teachers at the nonprofit's annual summer camp from a WRAL newscast. The state senator posted the images on social media along with a lengthy statement condemning the nonprofit and critical race theory.

"Democratic politicians in North Carolina claim that Critical Race Theory-inspired doctrines in public schools 'doesn't exist,'" Berger wrote. "They claim this even as an organization partnered with Durham Public Schools hosts antiracism summer camps and teacher workshops to 'facilitate K-5 lessons with an antiracist lens.'"

Berger identified the nonprofit as "WEARE," and wrote that "an organizer for WEARE told WRAL their work is critical right now 'with there being so much pushback of this critical race theory.'"



Berger sarcastically added that “antiracism sounds nice—who wouldn’t want to be an antiracist? But the doctrine of antiracism, an outgrowth of Critical Race Theory, teaches adherents to view everything in the world through the lens of race.”

Bullock says she was livid after hearing about Berger’s post and frightened for the summer camp children after reading the comments, some that sounded appropriate for a 1940s KKK meeting.

“They are all brown and probably not from this country,” wrote one commenter despite the fact that most of the children were white.

“Indoctrination at its worst,” wrote another, whose commentary would have been in concert with public school segregation supporters before the US Supreme Court’s *Brown* decision outlawing public school segregation in 1954. “Get our kids out of school. No school is better than brainwashing.”

“Now they are teaching racism in public schools,” read a third. “CRT sucks and so do the people who teach it.”

Bullock says Berger’s use of the photograph is immoral and, given the rise of white supremacy across America, potentially dangerous.

“To use their images to stir up your base is dangerous, reckless, and part of a win-at-all-costs mentality,” she says. “What he did was evil and unacceptable.”

Bullock also likens Berger’s and Moore’s attacks to similar attacks that powerful, white male politicians have made against Black people’s advances throughout America’s history, including the violent racial overthrow of Wilmington’s duly elected, multi-racial government in 1898.

“They are stirring their base against a Black and brown, women-led organization of social justice advocates,” Bullock says. “Any time there’s racial progress, white men in power use their power to harm Moore and Berger know exactly what they’re doing. And after Buffalo, we know [racial violence] can happen anytime, in any place. This isn’t happening in isolation. It’s part of a national fascist movement.”

Bullock says what’s needed is an uplifting counternarrative to fight back the fascist tide.

“They look like the majority because of all the space they are taking up,” she adds. “But they’re not.”

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