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## Controversial Instagram post roils town, school

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What began as a news conference quickly dissolved into a shouting match outside the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools central offices Wednesday as tensions rose regarding a recent social media post from a high school student that has been called racist by many in the community.

The news conference outside the Lincoln Center, 750 S. Merritt Mill Road, Chapel Hill, was called to discuss a photo posted by a senior at East Chapel Hill High School. The photo, posted on the photo-sharing app Instagram, showed two girls holding Confederate flags with the caption "South will rise."

The photo was taken in Gettysburg during a school trip last month focusing on the Civil War.



Within 12 minutes of the post, the photo had received 60 'likes' from other Instagram users, said Jolanda Johnson, an African-American mother of three high schoolers who spoke on behalf of all parents who were concerned by the photo. One of the comments underneath the photo read: "Already bought my first slave."

Parents, students, community members and leaders of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro branch of the NAACP and the statewide NAACP criticized both the post and the district's reaction to it.

Johnson said she feels the incident has been swept under the rug, and Robert Campbell, president of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro branch of the NAACP, said that hatred was being hidden behind supposed First Amendment rights.

Campbell said many questions that have surfaced in the community have been left unanswered by Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, such as the students' intentions in posting the photo and how much the trip chaperones knew about the incident.

Eugene Farrar, former president of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro branch of the NAACP, said that no one should feel threatened and afraid to go to school.

"I hold the top administration responsible for this act," Farrar said.

Michelle Laws, executive director of the North Carolina NAACP, said she is offended by CHCCS Superintendent Tom Forcella's "whitewashing of this incident."

Forcella released a letter to staff this month discussing racism, mentioning recent events across the nation and encouraging staff to address similar incidents that occur within the school system.

The letter also said: "It is also important to know that specific student issues cannot be discussed in a public forum as confidentiality is required by law. Second-hand information obtained from a series of social media posts should not be the sole source of information. A more full investigation is often required."

But many called for full disclosure of how the district is handling the situation.

White community members also were on hand to stand in solidarity with the other civil rights advocates.

Wanda Hunter, core organizer at the Racial Equality Institute, called the post a "lighthearted celebration of one of our nation's greatest shames."

Many who spoke pointed out this is not an isolated incident.

“(This incident) is simply one of many patterns we are seeing across the state,” Laws said. She referenced an incident in which students in Nash County dressed up as Klan members and posed for an Instagram photo.

Laws said these students are the world’s future leaders and that they need to be taught better.

“We know that racism is learned,” she said. “No child is born hating another race or ethnic group.”

Ronald Creatore, the father of the senior who posted the photo, spoke up from the crowd.



“I can tell you that my daughter was not raised in an environment of hate,” he said. “That posting was not intended to offend...I understand that her posting provided a platform for that comment (about slavery).”

Creatore said the photo was taken after a recreation of Pickett’s Charge, which was part of the curriculum for the trip. He also said his daughter and the other girl in the photo were holding North Carolina regimental flags.

“I don’t think (the community has) all their facts straight,” he said. “And I think that’s leading to part of the problem.”

Creator also said his daughter has been called vulgar names and has received death threats.

“She’s dealing with the fallout from that,” he said. “The girls have apologized, and no one has accepted that apology.”

An apology issued by Creator’s daughter read, in part: “I’m currently on the Civil War trip learning about the history of our country and this just so happens to be a pretty damn important part of it...I’m proud to be a part of my state and I’m sorry my photo was so offensive but I find it appropriate in that I’m honoring heroes that fought to protect their home and families. Thanks though.”

Some present at the press conference shouted questions at Creator, demanding that his daughter be held accountable for her actions. Others tried to break up the argument, telling their friends not to let Creator “hijack our press conference.”

Creator said that the incident has spurred discussions with his daughter and that they’ve treated it as a “learning experience.”

Campbell of the NAACP also said the incident should act as a learning experience – but on a much larger scale.

“What will we do after we leave here today?” he asked the crowd. “We need to sit down and find a way to have a dialogue.”



