



GUILFORD EDUCATION ALLIANCE



Lift Every Voice: Tammy White

This is the 2nd in our "Lift Every Voice" series in which we're bringing you voices from our alliance who can speak to us all with wisdom and valuable perspective at this profound moment in our nation sparked by the Black Lives Matter movement. **Tammy White** is the long-time band teacher at Kiser Middle School. She is **beloved** by teachers, parents and students, including my own burly trombone player of a son in the photo above taken this spring at his last high school band concert. Mrs. White is also the **GCS Teacher of the Year**. Excerpts below are from a longer piece she shared on social media about her cousin.

Bill was shot and killed by a highway patrolman on a road seldom traveled.

Please honor Tammy White and her cousin Bill by reading her words. A link to the full piece is also provided. We hope she inspires you to continue to learn and to act. For as Tammy writes: ***"we must work together to tackle the injustices that stem from systemic institutionally discriminatory policies in the society in which our students exist."***

-- *Winston*

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Personal and Professional: The Black Lives Matter Movement By: Tammy White

What does the Black Lives Matter movement mean to me personally? To me, it is more than an anthem, a slogan, or a hashtag. It causes me to think about the death of my cousin, Bill Murphy, who was shot and killed by a N.C. Highway patrolman named William 'Billy' Day on a country road near Ayden, N.C. on August 6, 1971. My cousin Bill would not live to tell his side of the story.

Bill was carried to Pitt Memorial Hospital, dead on arrival, with his hands still behind his back in handcuffs. One could contend it would have been very difficult for my cousin to fight with the officer. My Aunt Lossie and Uncle Jarvis, Bill's parents, were not notified until the next day. According to newspaper sources, the N.C. Patrol would not permit media to look inside the squad car for evidence. Investigative journalists did find evidence that indicated the gunfire happened outside the car. To add insult, Pitt County authorities wanted a \$200 fee, comparable to about \$1,291 in 2020, to perform an autopsy, which my farm worker aunt and uncle simply did not have. Instead of paying Pitt County authorities to supervise a conceivably partial autopsy, the black community gathered monies, and arranged for an autopsy to be done at the training hospital of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Officer Day said he shot Bill once, though the autopsy showed that he was shot twice.

The county sheriff picked a jury that consisted of only four black jurors out of seventeen. The Pitt County grand jury overwhelmingly found no reasons to hold Patrolman Day responsible for the death of Bill. Many of all races strongly disagreed with the findings. Protests over the death of my cousin began after the shooting, which included a bombing set by students at Ayden-Grifton High School, one of the first high schools in the area to desegregate.

I and many of my black family and black friends have been negatively affected by the color of our skin. Our skin has so many connotations, and it is seen. We love the skin we're in, even though **life as a black American is complex**, it's difficult! To be black in America, you must be built to endure white supremacy. To be black in America, you are built to distrust and to fear the police! To be a privileged American, you have the indulgence of saying, "they should have complied..." or "only if they had..." **Indulgence for the privileged is survival for the oppressed!**

Do we believe everyone in law enforcement is "bad?" Of course not, we want accountability and justice! **We are pleading for our lives to have the same meaning**, that the same care is taken when our citizens are dealing with law enforcement. Black Americans have a place in this country too. There are countless stories of our uneven experiences. Even with our

complex relationship with America, we still value our lives and have hopes of trying to grasp the American dream. **We want to be part of an America that is void of racism** and police brutality. **We're frustrated, fearful, and weary...so very weary.**

So, what are the professional implications for educators? **W.E.B. DuBois was right about the color line still dividing us.** Evidence of this in the public policy arena has been the relentless attack on public education. The U.S. educational system is one of the most imbalanced in modern society, and **students routinely receive significantly different learning opportunities based on their social status.**

Educators, the community, and supporters must work together to tackle the injustices that stem from systemic institutionally discriminatory policies in the society in which our students exist.

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