

LOCAL



Ardell Harrison, the current Sacramento NAACP president, detailed how the organization tries to act upon racial discrimination in a manner that educates those in the wrong, especially when dealing with children. Louis Bryant III, OBSERVER

How The Sacramento NAACP Battles School Racism

Branch Increased Efforts To Reduce Discrimination After Yuba City ‘Slave Auction’

By Sterling Davies
OBSERVER Staff Writer

The number of hate crimes directed at African Americans has risen nationwide over the years. The U.S. Bureau of Justice reported that between 2005 and 2019, roughly 250,000 hate crimes occurred annually with nearly 60% motivated by race. Many of the nation's largest cities faced alarming surges of hate crimes between 2020 and 2023 as well, especially targeting African Americans.

One larger concern that comes with a rise in racial abuse is that many such incidents go unreported. Between 2015 and 2019, only a quarter of hate crimes involving African Americans were reported to the po-

lice, with the rest staying virtually unknown, largely because of the belief that the authorities cannot help or a fear of retaliation from the offender.

To help solve this issue in Sacramento, the Sacramento NAACP has created a survey to report discrimination and racism within Sacramento area schools.

The NAACP introduced the survey in October 2022 as a response to River Valley High School's mock "slave auction." Betty Williams, who helped create the survey during her time as president of the Sacramento NAACP, noted that students often don't feel comfortable sharing incidents directly with the school. The new reporting option serves as a way for students or parents to report racial incidents safely and confidentially. This ensures that someone will listen and that a team of advocates will work to resolve the situation.

The survey's purpose isn't necessarily to punish and reprimand the offenders, but rather to shed light on hate crimes and prevent future occurrences. Ardell Harrison, the current Sacramento NAACP president, detailed how the organization tries to act upon racial discrimination in a manner that ed-



HATE CRIME SURVEY
Scan this QR code to take the Sacramento NAACP survey for students to report discrimination and racism within local schools.

ucates those in the wrong, especially when dealing with children. "They're still kids. They don't understand the severity of their actions," Harrison said, "so once you start bringing stuff to their attention, they have a tendency to be more conscious."

The survey consists of a thorough questionnaire that allows an individual to detail in length the situation at hand. It covers a variety of questions, including who committed the discriminatory act, what it consisted of, how often it occurred, and whether it has happened to other students. The survey also allows former students to report incidents.

Once a complaint is filed through the form, the NAACP does a "deep dive," as Harrison put it. This consists of a detailed and complex investigation that allows the organization to understand the situation from various angles. This can include hearing from different individuals involved, gathering evidence, and speaking to attorneys or law enforcement.

From there, next steps can take countless forms depending on the situation. In many cases, the NAACP provides support and helps guide the par-

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Unresolved Problems: Sacramento Area School Fails To Properly Address Hate Crime

By Sterling Davies
OBSERVER Staff Writer

In October 2022, video surfaced across multiple platforms showing 12 members of River Valley High School's varsity football team participating in a mock "slave auction." The video attracted national attention as various news outlets reported on the issue and racism within schools as a whole.

In response to the incident at the Yuba City school, the Sacramento branch of the NAACP met to address the matter and develop potential solutions. Several participants in the video shared their stories, with many Black students detailing how they felt pressured to take part. "I had made it clear that I didn't want to do it and tried to leave but wasn't able to," one student shared at the meeting.

In the aftermath, the school agreed to work with the NAACP to provide proper next steps and education for the students involved and the school district. A Yuba City Unified School District press release addressed the incident, claiming "it is unacceptable and requires us to look honestly and deeply at issues of systemic racism." The NAACP

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Betty Williams speaks at an NAACP meeting to address the River Valley High School mock slave auction. Credit: ABC10

Urban Living

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ents and students involved. NAACP members will advise the family on who to reach out to, what information to ask for, and how to best support the student. Oftentimes, the parents are advised to meet with the school district and discuss what has occurred to procure an adequate and fair resolution. This scenario typically happens when the student has reported a more obvious form of racial discrimination, which is not always the case.

It's not obvious in many situations that racial discrimination is at play. In such cases, the NAACP more directly involves itself. Harrison said that when the organization does get involved with cases, school districts become more alert and better understand the severity of the matter at hand. The NAACP will help the students and parents involved by hosting a press conference if necessary, speaking with members of the school district, and developing a plan that properly addresses the incident.

In more severe cases involving harm or segregation, the NAACP will involve attorneys and law enforcement. In these scenarios, the NAACP works heavily to ensure substantial evidence has been supplied that can then be provided to showcase the incident in full detail.

Regardless of the NAACP's actions, its objective is to educate members of the Sacramento community to prevent future incidents. "When [students] don't get called out on [their actions], then they will continue to do it," Harrison said. "So that's why we have to be stronger in our education."

The Sacramento NAACP has other surveys for reporting a civil rights complaint or an education complaint.



Sacramento NAACP president Ardell Harrison said when the organization gets involved with cases, school districts become more alert and better understand the severity of the matter at hand. **Louis Bryant III, OBSERVER**

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believed this process would result in "a thorough, independent, fair investigation where every voice involved is heard and all context is considered before publicity and public accountability narratives are created."

While River Valley did suspend the students involved in the mock slave auction, the school's actions were far from fair or adequate, advocates for the students said. While the African American students were given three- to five-day suspensions for participating, the rest were given single-day suspensions. Additionally, all students were suspended from the varsity football team, but non-seniors were given a chance to play for the junior varsity. However, this loophole didn't apply to the African American students involved in the incident because they were directly in the video.

Betty Williams, Sacramento NAACP's former president who was deeply involved in this case, said the school's reasoning for the unequal punishments was that the students captured in the

video were subject to larger punishments. "But the white students were taking the video. They couldn't be in the video," said Williams, explaining why this skewed punishment wasn't fair. While the video has since been deleted, a short clip can be seen that shows three Black students in their underwear with belts around their necks as a dozen other students point and yell prices at them.

When approached by the NAACP for further investigation into the incident, River Valley officials were quick to close the conversation and referred the branch to their legal counsel. For Williams, this response was a missed opportunity for the school to better understand the effects diversity and racism can have on its student body. "They hid [the incident] under a rock with lawyers, with an attorney, and they created an atmosphere for the young Black boys that were left to still feel humiliated and discouraged."

School and district officials declined comment when contacted by The OBSERVER.

Williams said the video took a heavy toll on the Black students involved as they faced back-

lash online and in their community. Even after expressing their unwillingness to participate in the video, many felt unsupported by those around them. Several students transferred schools, with one family moving to Texas. "I am hurt that the school moved so quickly to punish us instead of taking their time to understand the situation better," one student said at the NAACP meeting.

At the time, Williams and the parents of the Black students refrained from pursuing legal action, hoping the students would find some closure and move on from the incident. Looking back, Williams wishes she had pursued legal action as a means to bring more attention to discrimination within schools.


"In the [Yuba City] area, what they're not used to is the browning of the Yuba School District," Williams said. As the district fails to educate its coaches, teachers and administrators, "this will happen again," she said. "Browning" refers to the integration of greater numbers of people of color into different regions of the United States, diversifying the population as a whole.

Nationally, similar cases continue to occur. In January 2022, students at a North Carolina high school held a mock slave auction, with a similar case occurring in February 2024 at a Massachusetts high school.

Hate crimes within Sacramento area schools continue to rise as well. In 2021, students at West Campus High School spray-painted the n-word several times next to the school's African American vice principal's designated parking spot. The school district, however, was unable to identify the individuals responsible. In 2022, a student labeled water fountains at McClatchy High School as "colored" or "white" and was "held accountable," the Sacramento City Unified School District said. A similar incident occurred at Rosemont High School in 2022 after two students graffitied the n-word in a hallway, which prompted a police investigation to decide if charges were warranted. None, however, were made.

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