

Use of slavery booklet in N.C. criticized by civil rights group

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“Southern Slavery, As it Was,” a 50-page pamphlet that had been used in a private, North Carolina Christian school gives students a distorted view of the history of slavery and of black people, according to critics.

The Cary Christian School, nestled among the tall pines of North Carolina, has defended its use of the pamphlet written by two right-wing preachers associated with the League of the South. The Southern Poverty Law Center refers to the League of the South as a neo-Confederate hate group.

Authors of “Southern Slavery, As it Was” say that they pulled the pamphlet from publication because of an error in the footnotes.

However, Mark Potok of the Alabama-based Southern Poverty Law Center told **BlackAmericaWeb.com** the footnotes are not the only problem.

“This teaches children that slavery is a benign and God-ordained institution,” said Potok “It seeks to convince them that black people are constant complainers.”

“It criticizes slave trading, but says that good Christians could hold slaves,” Potok said. “It attempts to give Biblical justification to the institution of slavery and describes it as something that it was not.”

Potok has followed the controversy over the pamphlet closely because he said its teachings can instill hostility in students.

The pamphlet was the subject of widespread criticism leading up to a 2003 conference in Moscow, Idaho, where authors Steve Wilkins and Douglas Wilson were to speak. They also faced criticism over the footnotes because parts of the pamphlet included direct quotes from another author without giving attribution.

Wilkins said the pamphlet is not intended to whitewash slavery, but to present another view.

“We were not suggesting that everything with slavery was fine. We wrote our pamphlet based on the slave narratives,” he told BlackAmericaWeb.com. “It was not all horrible, but there were some good relationships,” he said. “I think you would find some black historians who would agree with that.

“I can accept the fact that people may not agree with the pamphlet, but the accusations of this being racist are untrue,” Wilkins said.

Wilkins, who pastors a Presbyterian church in Monroe, La., said he has worked to promote civil rights and has an integrated congregation.

He does not know how many, if any schools still are using "Southern Slavery, As it Was," in their curriculum.

At Cary Christian School, it was used along with the 1852 anti-slavery classic "Uncle Tom's Cabin," to give students an introduction to slave life in America. Efforts by BlackAmericaWeb.com to reach officials at the school for comment were unsuccessful.

The school's Web site describes it as a school that provides a "classical education with a Biblical world view." The boys on the Web site wear white shirts, dark trousers and older boys wear jackets. Girls all wear either plaid colored shirts or dresses. There are no black faces on the Web site pictured in classrooms or extracurricular activities.

"As a classical Christian school, we think it's important for our students to be able to think and not be slanted to a particular position," Cary Principal Larry Stephenson told the Raleigh News & Observer. "We want them to think for themselves."

Horace Huntley, a Birmingham, Ala. author and black historian, said too often, schoolchildren do not get an accurate view of slavery because of the way much of the literature was written.

"Much of the history was written from the perspective of the slave owner and not the slave," Huntley said. He was not familiar with the controversial pamphlet, but said it is important for students to learn correct information. "They need to read the writing of Frederick Douglass, 'Up From Slavery' or works from John Hartford to get a true historical perspective."