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Annual 'Mass Moral March' brings thousands to Raleigh

By Gary D. Robertson
RALEIGH (AP) - Still working toward substantial victories at the ballot box and the legislature, demonstrators opposed Republican policies within North Carolina demanded again on Feb. 14 that laws be repealed that they say harm the sick, the elderly and minorities. Thousands of people joined the state NAACP and other advocacy groups that helped stage the annual "Moral March on Raleigh," which led through downtown streets before ending in front of the old Capitol building. The terminus is deliberate, since their unhappiness rests with the laws passed by the GOP-led legislature and Republican Gov. Pat McCrory since 2013.

"We need to keep marching for so many other people in our state who are still denied justice," Turner said as she and Alderman marched. "Marriage equality is not the promised land." Event organizers predicted 30,000 people in their march application with Raleigh city officials. As in 2014, Raleigh police didn't provide a crowd estimate. But the number of people at Saturday's (Feb. 14) event was certainly smaller than last year's march, when changes under GOP rule were fresh and an election year added urgency. While 2014 participants took up three blocks of Fayetteville Street, they filled barely a block and a half of the same street on Saturday, Feb. 14. Barber disagreed with the crowd assessment, but wrote by email. "we never judge the power of the movement by sheer numbers but by the depth of the crowd" in their resolve. The event also included a call to unity after the slayings of three young Muslims in Chapel Hill last week. Farris Barakat, the brother of the slain Deah Shaddy Barakat, told a pre-march rally good has come from the tragic deaths, but the public must speak out against anti-Muslim bias. "Maybe we haven't collectively stood up yet to say that Muslims are Americans, too," Barakat said. Then an imam delivered a call to prayer before the march began.

Those policies spawned the "Moral Monday" movement, in which about 1,000 people were arrested in non-violent protests at the legislative building and the old Capitol. But the policies haven't changed - lawmakers have refused to expand Medicaid to cover more of the working poor, a series of election law changes remain on the books and the minimum wage remains at \$7.25 an hour. And the Republicans remain in firm control of the General Assembly following the 2014 elections, losing only two seats overall.

The Rev. William Barber, the movement's founder, said civil disobedience would resume in Raleigh after Easter if the legislature failed to change their ways and reverse course. "I've come to announce today we can't be quiet - not now, not ever," Barber, the state NAACP president, told the crowd in an impassioned speech. "We want our leaders to put away your partisan arguments - do what is right for the people."

Demonstrators from across the state came with a long list of grievances and demands, ranging from restoring a state earned income tax credit to stopping rules from taking effect for fracking. Abortion rights and labor groups also were represented. Groups making up the movement have had partial success in the courts, where judges have struck down portions of an abortion law and last October upheld North Carolina's constitutional amendment prohibiting same-sex marriage.

The state Supreme Court has oral arguments this week on a law giving taxpayer-funded grants for children to attend private school, while lawsuits challenging the 2013 election law calling back early-voting and ending same-day registration go to trial this summer.

The Rev. Robin Tanner, a Unitarian Universalist church pastor in Charlotte, plans a state-sanctioned wedding March 15 with her partner, the Rev. Ann Marie Alderman. Turner said overturning of the gay marriage amendment was just one, important step.

House votes to honor 1965's Selma marchers with gold medal
WASHINGTON (AP) - The House has voted unanimously to create a Congressional Gold Medal to honor those who endured police violence as they marched for civil rights 50 years ago in Selma, Alabama. The gold medal is the nation's highest civilian award. The bill now goes to the Senate.



President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama interact with Hilton banquet server Kitty Casey during the National Prayer Breakfast at the Washington Hilton in Washington, D.C., Feb. 5. (Official White House Photo by Pete

Shooting suspect slams religion while defending liberty

By Allen G. Breed and Michael Biesecker
CHAPEL HILL (AP) - If his Facebook page is any indication, Craig Hicks doesn't hate Muslims. An avowed atheist, his online posts instead depict a man who despises religion itself, but nevertheless seems to support an individual's right to his own beliefs.

"I hate Islam just as much as christianity, but they have the right to worship in this country just as much as any others do," the man now accused of killing three Muslim college students stated in one 2012 post over the proposed construction of a mosque near the World Trade Center site in New York.

Days after the shooting deaths of Deah Shaddy Barakat, 23; his wife, Yusor Mohammad Abu-Salha, 21; and her sister, Razan Mohammad Abu-Salha, 19, a nuanced and sometimes contradictory portrait is emerging of the man charged in their slayings.

Police in Chapel Hill said they have yet to uncover any evidence that Hicks, 46, allegedly acted out of religious animus, though they are investigating the possibility. As a potential motive, they cited a dispute over parking spaces at the condo community where Hicks and two of the victims lived.

Hicks' court-appointed lawyer, Stephen Freedman, said he could not comment on the case. Hicks was being held without bond.

In often publicly posted Facebook rants, Hicks was brazen about his disdain for all faiths. In one post regarding specific texts from the Quran, the Jewish Talmud and the Bible about battling nonbelievers, he wrote: "I wish they would exterminate each other!"

But he was just as passionate about personal freedom and liberty - championing an individual's right to worship or not worship, legal abortion and gay marriage and, perhaps most fervently, the right to own and bear arms. If he has a creed, it's the Second Amendment.

"I guess after the horrible tragedy early this week in Arizona, all Glock pistols will officially be labeled 'assault weapons,'" he wrote following the January 2011 assassination attempt on U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords. "While I never cared for Glocks personally, it stinks that anyone would blame a firearm rather than the operator of such firearm for such a terrible act. I think I'll start blaming McDonalds for my weight problem, Christianity for the Ku Klux Klan, and Islam for terrorism."

One post included a photo of a revolver and the warning: "If you are anti-gun, defriend me NOW!!!" Search warrants filed in court Friday listed a dozen firearms taken from Hicks' condo unit, including four handguns, two shotguns and six rifles - one a military-style AR-15 carbine - and a large cache of ammunition. That's in addition to a pistol the suspect had with him when he turned himself in.

Hicks' 20-year-old daughter from a previous marriage, Sarah Hurlley, told The Associated Press that she shut him out of her life permanently years ago "for not only disrespecting the religious beliefs of others but bashing them on social media." She verified that the Facebook page the AP reviewed was Hicks', whom she refuses to even call "father."

He and Cynthia Hurlley, who lives outside of Raleigh, were divorced about 17 years ago. She told the AP that back then, Hicks' favorite movie was "Falling Down," the 1993 Michael Douglas film about a laid-off engineer who goes on a shooting rampage.

She described a man who showed her no compassion, but didn't recall him having any particular animosity toward Islam or other religions. Of Christianity, she said, "He went there and did that and chose not to."

"Even after we divorced, we prayed for him every day," said Hurlley.

An Illinois native, Hicks moved to North Carolina in 2005. He married again several years later, and he and new wife Karen set up house in her two-bedroom condo in the quiet Finley Forest neighborhood of Chapel Hill. Online, he called Karen "my better half" and "the most wonderful woman in the world, she puts up with me."

"I am very lucky," he told one Facebook friend. "She's incredibly smart also, but she must have a couple wires crossed somewhere to be with me!"

In a news conference after her husband's arrest, Karen Hicks claimed to be as baffled as anyone about how a man who loves the Pittsburgh Steelers, the United States Constitution and dogs - especially his own black and brown mutt, Rocky - could have done something so vicious. She was adamant that the shootings stemmed from a long-simmering dispute over parking at their condo complex, not the victims' faith.



SAM JONES

NCCU to Retire Sam Jones' Jersey March 5

North Carolina Central University will retire the jersey of alumnus and Boston Celtics legend Sam Jones during a ceremony between the NCCU women's and men's basketball games against rival North Carolina A&T on March 5 inside McDougald-McLendon Gymnasium.

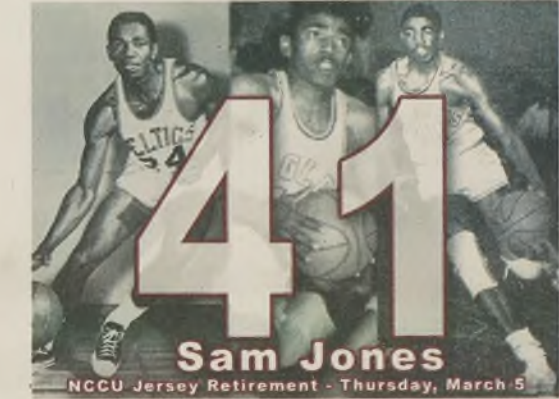
One of the greatest NBA players of all-time, Jones played at NCCU from 1951-54 and 1956-57, and remains the school's second-leading career scorer with 1,745 points in four seasons under head coaches John McLendon and Floyd Brown.

Born in Wilmington, North Carolina and a high school graduate of Laurinburg (N.C.) Institute, Jones was chosen by the Boston Celtics with the eighth overall pick in the first round of the 1957 NBA Draft.

His 12-year career with the Celtics included 10 NBA Championships, five All-Star Game appearances and three selections to the All-NBA Second Team. Nicknamed "Mr. Clutch," Jones amassed 15,411 points, an average of 17.7 points per game, 4,305 rebounds and 2,209 assists in 871 contests.

Jones was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame and the NCCU Athletics Hall of Fame in 1984, as well as the North Carolina Sports Hall of Fame in 1969. He was selected to the NBA 25th Anniversary All-Time Team in 1970, and was later named among the top 50 players in NBA history as a member of the 50th Anniversary All-Time Team in 1996.

For tickets to the March 5 ceremony and NCCU vs. NC A&T basketball doubleheader, visit NCCUEaglePride.com or call the NCCU Ticket Office at 919-530-5170.



Sam Jones
NCCU Jersey Retirement - Thursday, March 5