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Nooses showing up more in hate incidents around country

By Jesse J. Holland
WASHINGTON (AP) - Nooses have appeared recently around the nation's capital - including the Smithsonian's new African-American history museum - in a rash of incidents that experts say shows the growing use of hate symbols in the U.S. to try to intimidate minorities.

"We've seen a spike in the use of symbols of hate lately, and the noose is one more example," said Denison University professor Jack Shuler, who has studied lynching and noose imagery in the U.S.

Two nooses were found at Smithsonian museums in the past week, one outside the Hirshhorn Museum last Friday (May 26) and one inside the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture on May 31.

Bananas tied to nooses were discovered at American University in Washington last month, while a noose was found at the nearby University of Maryland and a suburban middle school in Crofton, Maryland.

Two 19-year-old white men were arrested and charged with hate crimes for allegedly hanging the noose at the Crofton school. No arrests have been made in the other cases.

This comes as other episodes of bigotry have shaken the country, including the spray-painting of a racial slur on the gate of basketball superstar LeBron James' mansion in Los Angeles on May 31.

In Portland, Oregon, two white people were stabbed to death last Friday 9May 260 after they tried to stop a white man from shouting anti-Muslim slurs at two young women. One of the women was wearing a Muslim head covering, and both were black.

The Southern Poverty Law Center, which tracks bigotry, said it has seen an increase in hate incidents in the U.S. since the election of President Donald Trump. Between Election Day and Feb. 1, the SPLC said, it collected information on about 1,800 hate-related episodes from almost every state.

"In the past, it would be a couple hundred at most, and that would be high," said Heidi Beirich, director of the Intelligence Project at the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Loops of rope have long been used to intimidate African-Americans because they evoke lynchings. The nonprofit Equal Justice Initiative said there were 4,075 lynchings of blacks in the South to spread racial terror between 1877 and 1950.

For blacks, the noose is "comparable in the emotions that it evokes to that of the swastika for Jews," the Anti-Defamation League said.

"I've seen in the last couple of months more instances of nooses being used to intimidate people," said Shuler, author of "The Thirteenth Turn: A History of the Noose." "I think we're in a situation right now where people who express hateful opinions

Judge upholds \$1.5M award in whistleblower lawsuit

CHARLOTTE (AP) - A federal judge has upheld a jury's \$1.5 million award to a North Carolina fire investigator who said she was fired after complaining about the safety of construction work at an office building.

The Charlotte Observer reports that Friday's (decision by Chief U.S. District Judge Frank Whitney is a further setback for the city of Charlotte.

are being allowed to speak freely and it's become OK again."

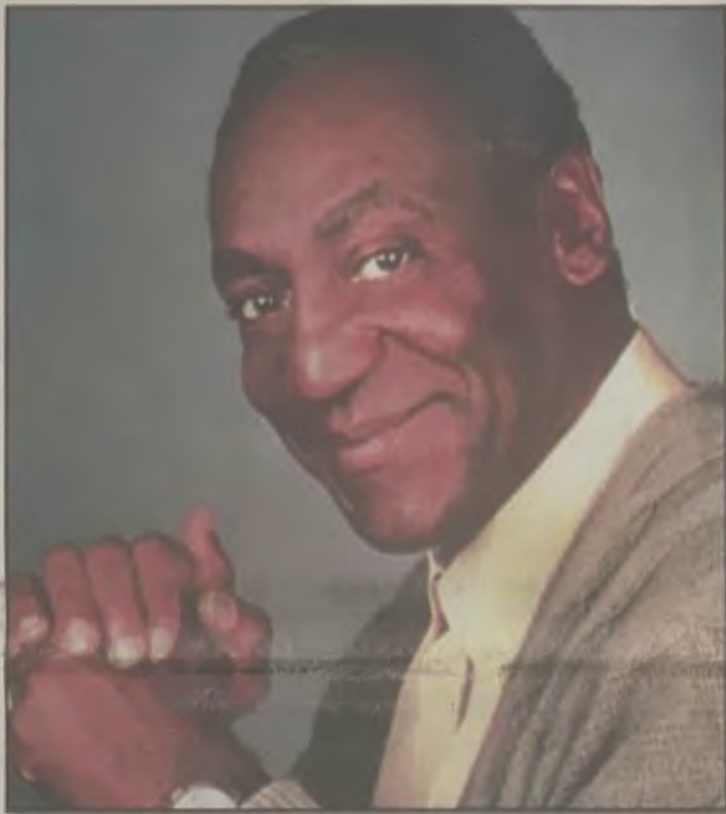
Beirich blames the rhetoric from Trump's presidential campaign, during which he pledged to build a wall on the Mexican border and ban Muslim immigrants. Trump also claimed for a long time that President Barack Obama was not born in the United States.

"Putting those sentiments in public from a presidential campaign has sanctioned a lot of people," Beirich said. "Things t

hey might have kept inside themselves, that they have kept quiet about, have burst out."

The noose didn't stop some visitors to the black history museum.

Stephen Middleton, who brought his extended family to the museum from Georgia and Maryland, said he wasn't surprised someone targeted the museum. But "we're not going to be deterred, we're not going to be wavered and not going to be intimidated," he said.



Bill Cosby

Bill Cosby goes on trial, his legacy and freedom at stake

By Maryclaire Dale and Michael R. Sisak
NORRISTOWN, Pa. (AP) - Bill Cosby went on trial June 5 on charges he drugged and sexually assaulted a woman more than a decade ago, with a prosecutor warning the jury not to fall into the trap of confusing the 79-year-old comedian with the beloved family man he played on TV.

Cosby used his power and fame to violate an employee of Temple University's basketball program, Assistant District Attorney Kristen Feden said in her opening statement. The TV star previously admitted under oath that he gave Andrea Constand pills and touched her genitals as she lay on his couch at his suburban Philadelphia mansion, the prosecutor said.

"She couldn't say no," Feden said. "She can't move, she can't talk. Completely paralyzed. Frozen. Lifeless."

Defense lawyer Brian McMonagle immediately attacked what he said were inconsistencies in Constand's story, disputed that Constand was incapacitated, and made the case that she and Cosby, who was married, had a romantic relationship. McMonagle said Cosby gave her the cold and allergy medicine Benadryl only after she complained she couldn't sleep.

McMonagle said Constand changed the date of the encounter from mid-March to mid-January of 2004. And he said Constand initially told police that she and Cosby had never spoken afterward, when, in fact, phone records show the two talked 72 times after mid-January - with 53 of those calls initiated by Constand.

Cosby is charged with three counts of aggravated indecent assault. He could get 10 years in prison if convicted.

The TV star carried a wooden cane and grabbed his spokes

man's arm for support as he walked past dozens of cameras into the courthouse. Cosby's wife, Camille, was not in court. But actress Keshia Knight Pulliam, who played his daughter Rudy on the top-rated "Cosby Show" in the 1980s and '90s, was at his side as he made his way into the building.

Cosby smiled but said nothing when someone asked how he was feeling.

Pulliam told reporters she came to the trial to support her TV dad.

"I want to be the person that I would like to have if the tables were turned," she said. "Right now it's the jury's job and the jury's decision to determine guilt or innocence. It's not mine or anyone else's."

Constand, 44, of the Toronto area, is expected to take the stand this week and tell her story in public for the first time. A woman who claims Cosby drugged and assaulted her in 1996 will also testify in an effort by prosecutors to show that he had pattern of behavior.

Cosby built a good-guy reputation as a father and family man, on screen and off, during his extraordinary 50-year career in entertainment. He created TV characters, most notably Dr. Cliff Huxtable, with crossover appeal among blacks and whites alike. His TV shows, movies and comedy tours earned him an estimated \$400 million.

Then a deposition unsealed in 2015 in a lawsuit brought by Constand revealed that Cosby had a long history of extramarital liaisons with young women and that he obtained quaaludes in the 1970s to give to women before sex. Dozens of women soon came forward to say he had drugged and assaulted them.

The statute of limitations for prosecuting Cosby had run out in nearly every case. This is the only one to result in criminal charges against the comic.



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Justices' ruling could help N Carolina Democrats rein in GOP

By Gary D. Robertson

RALEIGH (AP) - North Carolina Democrats could face better odds of winning more legislative seats and helping Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper thwart the GOP's conservative agenda because of U.S. Supreme Court actions June 5 in a case about racial bias in election districts drawn by Republicans.

In a one-sentence order, the justices upheld a lower court ruling that struck down 28 state House and Senate districts because they were illegal racial gerrymanders that violated the rights of black voters.

But voters may have to wait nearly 18 more months for the ruling to yield results, since the justices separately rejected an order by the same three-judge panel to hold special elections this fall in districts that must be redrawn by lawmakers. They wrote that the three judges should have done a better job evaluating whether moving up the schedule was warranted.

The lower court, "addressed the balance of equities in only the most cursory fashion," the justices wrote in an unsigned opinion vacating the scheduling order. "We cannot have confidence that the court adequately grappled with the interests on both sides of the remedial question before us."

The three-judge panel could still order new districts in time for the regular cycle of elections that would end in November 2018. While Monday's (June 5) opinion doesn't prevent the judges from reaffirming a special election schedule this fall, the window to carry it out is small.

The high court's actions follows last month's ruling in which the justices struck down two North Carolina congressional districts - the 1st in the east and the 12th in the Piedmont - because they also diminished the voting strength of the state's black residents. The legislature already redrew its congressional boundaries in February 2016 and used them in last November's election.

The legislative districts were initially drawn in 2011 when Republicans controlled the legislature, as they do now. Civil rights groups and voters challenged the districts, complaining that they packed too many black voters into some districts and made surrounding districts whiter and thus more likely to elect Republicans.

The maps have helped Republicans expand and retain majorities they initially won in 2010, when the GOP took control of both chambers simultaneously for the first time in 140 years. Republicans have used the advantage to cut taxes, restrict abortion and create taxpayer-funded scholarships for children to attend private schools.

The lower court judges unanimously declared that GOP legislators had failed to justify creating so many districts with black voting-age populations above 50 percent.

Democrats need to capture three House seats or six Senate seats currently held by Republicans to eliminate the GOP's veto-proof majorities and enhance Cooper's power. He has vetoed four bills since taking office in January, and legislators overrode all of those vetoes.

"Whether the election is November 2018 or earlier, redrawing the districts is good for our democracy by leveling the playing field for free and fair elections," Cooper said in a statement.

In previously ordering that maps be redrawn quickly and elections be held in the fall, the lower court wrote that the costs of holding special elections "pale in comparison to the injury caused by allowing citizens" to remain represented by lawmakers in gerrymandered districts.