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Confederate Statue Protesters pack Durham courthouse

By Jonathan Drew

(AP) - Dozens of demonstrators packed a North Carolina courthouse on Aug. 17 support people arrested for toppling a Confederate monument, while a statue of Gen. Robert E. Lee was vandalized nearby at Duke University.

The rally at Durham's jail and court complex began with 100 protesters marching to symbolically surrender to deputies for toppling the monument downtown on Aug. 15. Four protesters were arrested on outstanding warrants related to the protest that took down the bronze Confederate soldier. That brought the total number of people arrested in the vandalism to eight.

At least a dozen others who tried to enter the jail were turned away by deputies who checked their names in a computer and found no warrants.

"I feel a lot of support behind me," said Elena Everett, who did have an outstanding warrant and turned herself in. "I think everyone needs to be involved in removing symbols of racism from public spaces."

Several miles away, Duke officials discovered early Aug. 17 that the carved limestone likeness of Lee had scuff marks on its face and damage to its nose. Lee is one of 10 historical and religious figures depicted in Duke Chapel's entryway, including Thomas Jefferson.

Duke was reviewing video footage and hadn't determined who's responsible.

Duke President Vincent Price issued a statement saying he had already been meeting with Duke community members to discuss how to deal with strong reactions to the statue. But he said that vandalizing a house of worship wasn't the answer.

The statues at Duke and in downtown Durham are among several vandalized around North Carolina amid a debate on race stoked by a violent rally in Virginia over the weekend organized by white nationalists. Statues in Wilmington were defaced this week with paint.

The state chapter of the Sons of Confederate Veterans issued a statement that it would offer a reward of up to \$5,000 for information about those who damage statues when "our government fails to act." The group also criticized Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper for his call earlier in the week to remove Confederate monuments from public property around the state.

In downtown Durham, the nearly century-old statue of a bronze Confederate soldier came down Aug. 14 after protesters climbed a ladder, attached a rope and yanked it off its pedestal.

Along with Everett, Aaron Caldwell, Taylor Alexander Jun Cook and Raul Mauro Arce Jimenez turned themselves in Aug. 17 and were arrested. All face felony rioting charges along with misdemeanor counts of damaging property. Investigators say more people could be charged.

While the latest arrests were being processed, dozens filled the hallway in the adjacent courthouse outside a hearing for protesters arrested earlier in the week. They weren't allowed in the courtroom because the sheriff said there were fire safety concerns.

Scott Holmes, a lawyer representing the protesters, said afterward that the felony rioting charges are too harsh and a bad fit for what happened Aug. 14. He hopes that the district attorney will drop some or all of the counts.

"What happened was not a riot. It was a celebratory mood; there was no violence against people," said Holmes, who also teaches law at North Carolina Central University. "The deputies who were there felt no need to intervene to protect any persons, and so at most this is an act of vandalism."

Confederate flag clothes banned by schools' new dress code

HILLSBOROUGH (AP) - A school district in North Carolina has updated its dress code to ban all clothing that depicts the Confederate flag, swastikas or any Ku Klux Klan related symbols or language.

News outlets report Orange County Schools announced the new policy Aug. 14. Parents and students have been asking the district for months to change the dress code to ban the flag.

Last month, a proposed policy prohibited students from wearing clothes that are disruptive, or could reasonably intimidate students, but stopped short of explicitly mentioning the Confederate flag.

WNCN-TV asked School Board Chair Stephen Halikotis about the timing of the change, and if the deadly white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, influenced it. He said government works in a "dinosaur-like way" and that there was "nothing quick" about the decision.



Protests continued in Durham over Confederate Statues. Here are some of the protesters. Artije Photography

Browns players kneel in prayer during national anthem

By Tom Withers

CLEVELAND (AP) - Kneeling and bowing their heads, the Cleveland Browns bonded over something bigger than football.

More than a dozen players formed a circle on the team's sideline Monday night and prayed in silent protest during the national anthem.

The group, which included veterans, rookies, starters and backups, gathered in front of some water coolers and behind their teammates who stood on the sideline shortly before the Browns hosted the New York Giants.

In the aftermath of the recent racially charged conflict in Charlottesville, the Browns felt compelled to use their platform to make a difference.

"I wanted to take the opportunity with my teammates during the anthem to pray for our country," said tight end Seth DeValve, one of two white players to participate. "And also to draw attention to the fact that we have work to do. And that's why I did what I did."

Linebackers Jamie Collins and Christian Kirksey, running backs Isaiah Crowell, Duke Johnson, Terrance Magee and Brandon Wilds, safety Jabrill Peppers, DeValve, wide receivers Kenny Britt and Ricardo Louis and defensive back Calvin Pryor dropped to one knee in a huddle. Rookie quarterback DeShone Kizer, offensive tackle Shon Coleman, punter Britton Colquitt, defensive back Jason McCourty and offensive lineman Marcus Martin stood and supported their teammates by putting their hands on their shoulders.

Colquitt also placed a hand over his heart as Kirksey led the group in prayer.

"As professional athletes, in our realm and with our platform, we can invoke a lot of change," said McCourty, who signed with the Browns as a free agent in March after eight seasons in Tennessee. "Guys are trying to do something to stand on our platform and show people that we want to stand up for this country and show that no matter what your color is, no matter what your background is, whatever, we can all come together and work together to make it a better place."

The protest was the largest so far in a social-consciousness movement started last season by quarterback Colin Kaepernick, who became a polarizing figure for kneeling during the anthem and is currently out of the NFL. In recent days, Seattle defensive lineman Michael Bennett and Philadelphia defensive back Malcolm Jenkins also have called attention to what they feel is racial injustice in the country.

Durham Committee to Hold Founder's Banquet

The Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People will celebrate its 82nd Founders' Anniversary with three events. The first of the three events on this weekend will be a youth forum held in the student union on the campus of NCCU. Immediately following the forum, a free party for the students will take place. Saturday morning we will be hosting our 1st Annual Golf Classic at Fall Village Golf Course in Durham off Hwy 98. 6 p.m., at The Durham Convention Center, located at 301 Morgan Street, Durham, NC 27702. The Keynote speaker for this event will be Congresswoman Maxine Waters. The honorees will be Dr. Lorenzo Lynch and Dr. Howard Fitts.

Oakland running back Marshawn Lynch also has sat during the national anthem in the preseason, but hasn't elaborated on his reasoning.

Browns coach Hue Jackson, who last week clarified previous remarks that seemed to indicate he was opposed to any demonstrations, stood behind his players.

"We respect our players; we respect the flag," Jackson said following Cleveland's 10-6 win. "Those guys came to me and talked to me about it before they ever made a decision to do it. That is the way we feel about it, and we have talked about this. I said at some point in time, they may, and they have. I won't know about the next game until it happens, but again, this was tonight and we will move on from there."

DeValve, who is in his second season out of Princeton, said he and his teammates have had several discussions about recent racial tensions and other social issues.

He didn't want to offend anyone with his protest. "It saddens me that in 2017 we have to do something like that," he said. "I personally would like to say that I love this country. I love our national anthem, I'm very grateful to the men and women who have given their lives and give a lot every day to this country and to serve this country, and I want to honor them as much as I can."

"The United States is the greatest country in the world. It is because it provides opportunities to its citizens that no other country does. The issue is that it doesn't provide equal opportunity to everybody. And I wanted to support my African-American teammates today who wanted to take a knee. We wanted to draw attention to the fact that there's things in this country that still need to change. I myself will be raising children that don't look like me, and I want to do my part as well to do everything I can to raise them in a better environment than we have right now."