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Racist threats rattle students, faculty at Wake Forest university

By Tom Foreman Jr.

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (AP) - Three months after a set of anonymous, threatening, racist, antisemitic and homophobic emails sent a wave of fear through the sociology department at Wake Forest University, the department chairman says he's still waiting for university leaders to announce a meaningful response.

The emails to faculty in sociology and two other departments called for a "purge" of minorities and the LGBTQ community. Alarmed by what he deemed white supremacist terrorism, chairman Joseph Soares canceled sociology classes for a week. When they resumed, Wake Forest police officers were stationed outside classrooms and the building itself. Doors normally open were closed and locked. Even a study lounge was locked.

"It was the most stressful experience of my academic life," said Soares, who began his college teaching career in 1991 and has taught at Wake Forest since 2003. "My faculty were afraid," he added. "They felt like these are the kinds of statements that precede someone showing up and shooting up the place."

In a fall 2019 department newsletter, he wrote that it took seven days before Wake Forest president Nathan Hatch sent emails to the recipients of the threats, and three weeks passed before a university-wide letter went out condemning the emails. At the time, Soares said, there was no indication a plan had been developed to deal with the incident.

"We need better safety protocols and we could use a public repudiation of white supremacy hate threats from your office," Soares wrote to Hatch.

Faculty members unanimously passed a resolution in November saying the administration needs different safety protocols, including the need to notify the target of a threat immediately.

"Have we gotten a report from the administration on whether there's new safety protocols? No," Soares said recently. "Have they gotten back to us on that they did anything with that resolution that we passed unanimously? No. So, I'm still not happy. We still do not have a sense that they learned their lesson and now they've got a new game plan in place. They don't."

Through a spokeswoman, Hatch declined to be interviewed about the episode.

Wake Forest was founded in 1834. Originally an all-white institution, it accepted its first black student in September 1962, five months after trustees voted to end racial segregation. The decision made Wake Forest the first major private university in the South to integrate, according to the university's intercultural center.

Slightly more than 70% of the 5,287 undergraduate students are white, according to a 2019 fall school report. More than 6% of its students are black. Latino students make up 8%.

About 38 percent of sociology majors are black. After the email incident, there were "a few people who didn't want to set foot in or around this building for a very long time," said Alexander Holt, a senior sociology major. "We've never been a department of locked or closed doors."

The police presence among black sociology students left some wary. Holt said police did a good job but he acknowledged conflicting emotions.

"There were police officers posted throughout the building as well, which was good for safety reasons, but also spoke to some lingering tensions that we'd had from previous discussions and from personal experiences as well, for students of color specifically," he said.

Last year, Hatch formed a Commission on Race, Equity and Community that includes students, faculty and staff. A spokeswoman says the 32-member panel met three times during the fall. It has yet to release any findings.

"Wake Forest University is wrestling with its own complex history, and as an educational institution is committed to: seeking and understanding the truth; acknowledging the full complexity of our history; and taking action to address past and present inequities," a commission statement says.

The emails brought attention to multiple racist incidents on the campus dating back at least six years.

Earlier in 2019, the school acknowledged its past yearbooks had included some blackface images. Days later, photographs of former Wake Forest students posing with the Confederate flag came to light. Two of those former students are now university administrators.

In 2018, a video surfaced of a white female student using a racial slur to describe her residence assistant. She later withdrew from Wake Forest.

The 2018 fatal shooting of a Winston-Salem State student on Wake Forest's campus led to a lawsuit by the victim's mother. The lawsuit says minority students had raised concerns in 2014 that university police showed racism in handling events they hosted.

In 2014, an associate chaplain who's black found a bucket of urine in front of his office, and a predominantly white fraternity canceled an off-campus party that critics said caricatured black culture.

Palinda Carrington, a 1995 Wake Forest graduate, remembers encountering racism in a class where she was the sole black student. A white student used a racial slur in reaction to an anecdote told by the instructor, a black woman.

"What is troublesome is that 25 years later, we're still having the same conversation," Carrington said. "I don't know if it's a regression or if it's just a stagnation. But I just had hoped that at some point, we would all do better. That's the part, I think, that's troublesome to me. It just doesn't feel like it's getting any better."

Soares said nerves have calmed in the sociology department, but there's no complete sense of comfort.



In this March 7, 2019 file photo, Associate Justices Paul Newby and Robin Hudson applaud for new Chief Justice Cheri Beasley, center, of the N.C. Supreme Court during Beasley's investiture ceremony in Raleigh. In North Carolina's Supreme Court chamber, above the seat held by Beasley, the second African American chief justice, hangs a towering painting of Chief Justice Thomas Ruffin, a 19th century slave owner and jurist who authored a notorious opinion about the "absolute" rights of slaveholders over the enslaved. In October 2018 the state Supreme Court named a commission to review the portraits in the building that houses the court, including Ruffin's. (Paul Woolverton/The Fayetteville Observer via AP) SEE STORY ON PAGE 2.

New Al Sharpton book looks at America's political crossroads

NEW YORK (AP) - The Rev. Al Sharpton is working on a book that will address what he calls an urgent moment in American history.

The longtime civil rights activist's "Rise Up: Confronting a Country at the Crossroads" is coming out Sept. 15, less than two months before the 2020 election, Hanover Square Press announced Jan. 20 will look back at the Obama administration, the 2016 election of Donald Trump and the transformation of the Republican Party during Trump's presidency.

Sharpton said in a statement that he wanted to "get people to understand the gravity of where we are as a nation; whether we will choose to continue the path of progress towards human rights and to value all people or whether we will choose the path of returning to a value system of where might is right and wealth is the measure of human value."

Sharpton's previous books include "Al On America," "The Rejected Stone: Al Sharpton and the Path to American Leadership" and the memoir "Go and Tell Pharaoh."

Hanover Square Press is an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.

Marker will honor civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer 'I'm Sick and tired of being sick an tired'

INDIANOLA, Miss. (AP) - A historical marker in Mississippi will commemorate the legacy of civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer. Research for the project was led by a Mississippi Valley State University student and a professor who taught him, the Greenwood Commonwealth reported.

C. Sade Turnipseed is an associate professor of history, and 17-year-old Nigerian native Brian Diyaolu took her public history course during the fall semester. They recently received approval from the Sunflower County Board of Supervisors to place the Hamer sign in front of the county courthouse. It will be unveiled during a ceremony March 27.

Students in Turnipseed's course are assigned a historical topic, and Diyaolu's was Hamer. He said he wrote three drafts of the historical marker's narrative before pitching the idea to the supervisors. He said other students helped him edit the narrative and prepare the presentation.

Hamer was born in Montgomery County, Mississippi, to sharecroppers on Oct. 6, 1917. In October 1962, Hamer was escorted by Charles McLaurin and other Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee members when she made her first attempt to register to vote at the Sunflower County Courthouse. At the time, Mississippi and other states had roadblocks, such as literacy tests, to prevent African Americans from voting.

At the 1964 Democratic National Convention, on behalf of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, Hamer testified about resistance she and others faced. She famously said she was "sick and tired of being sick and tired."

A year later, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which prohibited racial discrimination in voting. Hamer was 59 when she died of cancer in 1977.

"She was a beacon of light," Turnipseed said. "Her fight ... enabled all Americans the right to register to vote. That's why we're putting the marker there - because it took so much courage for a woman to do this."

N Carolina attorneys file appeal plans of voter ID ruling

RALEIGH (AP) - North Carolina's attorney general filed formal notice January 24 that his office will appeal a federal judge's ruling that has blocked the latest legislative bid to carry out a voter photo identification law.

Lawyers serving under Democratic Attorney General Josh Stein filed the paperwork before the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on behalf of the State Board of Elections, which was sued over the 2018 law by the state NAACP and local NAACP chapters.

On Dec. 31, U.S. District Judge Loretta Biggs issued an injunction preventing the photo ID requirement from being used at least for the March 3 primary. Biggs wrote it appeared the voter ID law backed by Republican legislators appeared to suffer from the same racial discrimination cited by federal judges who overturned an earlier 2013 voter ID law.

Stein's Department of Justice had already announced its plans to appeal - particularly that it would not seek to do so in time for the March primary because it would cause confusion among voters. Lawyers in the department, which usually defends state agencies in litigation, had said the 2018 voter ID law was much improved for voters lacking access to an ID and that the NAACP failed to show it was enacted with discriminatory intent.

Lawyers for Republican leaders in the General Assembly filed a last-minute plea two weeks ago for Biggs to set aside her injunction, but no action has been taken on that emergency stay.

North Carolina voters approved a constitutional amendment in November 2018 requiring photo ID to vote. The challenged law approved the next month detailed how voter ID would work.



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