

MTSU Black Faculty and Staff Association

In the wake of recent racially controversial events that include the tragedy in Charleston, South Carolina, the nationwide killing of numerous unarmed African Americans by police officers, and the racially charged incidents experienced by St. Louis, Yale and Cornell universities, we believe it is appropriate to remove symbolic vestiges of our troubled racial past from all MTSU buildings.

Despite a decorated military record, the entire legacy of Nathan Bedford Forrest remains inseparably coupled with white supremacy. A slave trading human trafficker before the Civil War, Forrest fought to preserve the legal right to perpetually hold African Americans in inhuman bondage, he authorized the massacre of over 200 surrendered black United States army soldiers, and after the war, his personal celebrity legitimized and nationally proliferated the most notorious domestic terrorist organization in American history. The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was established for the sole purpose of violently intimidating the formerly enslaved black population into permanently occupying an unambiguously subservient social status.

In addition to being the original national leader of the KKK, a group created to terrorize the African American community, in 1875, two years before his death, Forrest engaged in a business venture that relied on convict-lease laborers. Convict-lease programs operated as a quasi-slavery institution that economically exploited mostly black prisoners forcing them to repay arbitrary fines with uncompensated backbreaking labor. This program was granted to him through a contract with the state. Just like his pre-Civil War human trafficking career, Forrest's postwar entrepreneurial enterprises again relied upon the commercial exploitation of black bodies. Every aspect of Forrest's life, before, during, and after the Civil War, was dedicated to the violent preservation of white supremacy.

Like the racial legacy of Nathan Bedford Forrest, the timing and naming of the Forrest Hall building on MTSU's campus were both symbols of white supremacy. Named in 1954, in unapologetic opposition to the landmark Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (ruling educational segregation unconstitutional), administrators on campus sent a clear message to members of the middle Tennessee community and to the nation. This message was simply that, at the time, MTSU was hostile to educational integration. Thankfully, times have changed and MTSU's undergraduate population now reflects the demographic diversity of the state. However, Forrest Hall remains a painful reminder of this legacy of historical intolerance.

In 2016, when more than one in four MTSU students is nonwhite it is time to abandon the legacy of bigotry that Forrest Hall represents. The time has come to reject the hurtful name of a divisive individual who would have resented the current demographic diversity we celebrate on MTSU's campus. We propose that the ROTC Building be renamed Veterans Hall.

Sincerely,

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