



September 4, 2026

On August 31st, several Black student organizations, including The Black Student Movement, the African Student Association, Historically Black at UNC, Sis2Sis, Black Pre-Law Student Association, and the UNC National Society of Black Engineers, were hosting a social event in Greenlaw Hall when an individual entered their meeting, [shouted racial slurs, and physically threatened](#) the students with “a makeshift incendiary device.”

The intruder then fled the building but continued to verbally abuse students near Wilson library. He followed students to the Pit, where a James Lewis Cates Jr. Memorial marker commemorates the 22-year-old who was [murdered in a racist attack in 1970](#) on UNC’s campus.

The University did not issue an Alert Carolina notification, although they have after less threatening campus incidents recently. Then, two days later, rather than the Chancellor or Provost, it was Senior Vice-Provost for Undergraduate Student Success James Orr who issued a general statement without naming the organizations targeted. This was too little too late, without a clear follow-up plan.

This is not a random event, nor is it the only documented incident of racist attacks on campus already this semester, against Asian and Arab as well as Black students and instructors. It matches a pattern across North Carolina. Colleagues at UNC-Wilmington, UNC-Asheville, Western Carolina University, and NC State have been surreptitiously recorded and then [forced out of their jobs](#). Disturbingly—but not surprisingly—each of these intrusive and discriminatory actions targeted Black colleagues. UNC-Wilmington and other campuses (not yet on-record) have started to quietly [defund endowments for Black student scholarships](#).

Our students and colleagues deserve so much better.

Harms to students and university employees are taking place across North Carolina because the UNC System’s policies and practices embolden discrimination by race and gender. Over the past 12 months, the UNC System has [changed curriculums](#) and [erased courses](#) in order to comply with the Trump II administration. UNC-Chapel Hill’s Board of Trustees has refused to approve the hiring of two esteemed women of color ([Nikole Hannah-Jones](#) and [Kiren Asher](#)); high-level administrators have [suspended a professor](#) for speaking their anti-racist views, [ripped away student access](#) to Upendo Lounge for Black students, and [pre-emptively closed global centers](#) of excellence. And the university administration’s [shift to metrics for evaluating programs that privilege making money over building an inclusive democracy](#) invites increased scrutiny on, or at least only conditional investment in, units that focus on the study of Africa, African Americans and the African Diaspora.

When policy and practice justify discrimination, verbal threats and physical violence follow. Thereby, we view the failure to treat this incident with adequate urgency and gravity as only one part of a broader systematic effort to normalize an environment of fear, intimidation, and violence for students, professors, and staff of color on UNC's campus. By publicly and routinely devaluing our lives and labor, outside actors—such as the attacker at Greenlaw—are encouraged to do the same.

The UNC-Chapel Hill Chapter of the AAUP stands with our students as they and faculty, staff and community members come to grips with this racist assault. We also urge the University to closely examine its response to this incident, working together with affected students. Racism, in any form, should have no place on our campus.

We call on administrators to do more than offer thoughts and prayers. Students deserve more than what the Vice Provost calls “violence-prevention education, programming and community-based efforts.” Our community doesn’t need more training. We need real investment in Black and brown and LGBTQ and international students. We need to champion the intrinsic worth of the centers, departments, programs, and instructors who inform, steward, and educate about these communities nationally and internationally. We need uncensored teaching and research that address the exact problems that were so frighteningly highlighted by this latest attack.

A clear commitment from Lee Roberts to rectify this wrongdoing must take place. The Upendo Lounge as a safe space for Black students must be reinstated. Additional funding for the impacted student groups should be provided to account for the greater burden that these students are experiencing in this anti-democratic and dangerous era. The importance of Black and Africana Studies on this campus needs also to be reemphasized and clearly supported by the administration in word and deed. These students and colleagues are doing the work that the administrators are failing to do: keeping each other safe and cultivating an informed and inclusive, global citizenry in increasingly misinformed and volatile times.