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Civil rights leaders demand probe into display of nooses at Cal State Fullerton

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Civil rights leaders will demand today a federal investigation into a display of nooses found in the Cal State Fullerton quad area last week prior to a campus rally against hate.

"The hanging nooses at Fullerton are only the latest in the dozens of hanging nooses that have been found on campuses and work places in California and throughout the nation," said Earl Ofari Hutchinson, President of the Los Angeles Urban Policy Roundtable.

"We are demanding an immediate Justice Department full probe," said Hutchinson, who planned to hold a news conference this morning to publicize the demand.

Five nooses spray-painted orange were found on Nov. 7 hanging on a clothesline alongside t-shirts displaying anti-hate messages. The display appeared just prior to a "Rally Against Hate" demonstration sponsored by the university's Association for InterCultural Awareness.

"It was a smack in the face that something like this could happen in central Orange County," association chairwoman Sumanah Mithani told the Los Angeles Times. "Incidents like this are not going to be tolerated anymore, and we're going to speak out. This was an attack not just on African Americans, but all ethnic groups on our campus."

A week after the incident, many angry campus members gathered during a second rally held on Wednesday afternoon where students were free to speak.

During Wednesday's protest, students of different racial backgrounds, including some from Cal Poly Pomona, UC Irvine and UCLA, showed up in orange shirts expressing their opposition to the orange nooses.

Campus police were also in attendance to ensure a peaceful protest.

"It's an incident, it's not a crime. We do document incidents that happen on campus. Actively, we have nothing to go on, no lead, nobody to talk to," campus police Lt. Fred Molina told CSUF's Daily Titan newspaper.

"What we're asking is for the community to call us, give us some leads so we can find which way to go with this. Students are bound by certain rules of conduct on this campus, so if we get lucky and find out who did this, they will be dealt with in that form."

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Los Angeles Times

<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-noose16nov16,1,4221892.story>
From the Los Angeles Times

Nooses found on campus prompt outcry

Students and faculty at Cal State Fullerton rally against hate after the discovery of the racially charged symbol at a tolerance rally.

By Dave McKibben

Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

November 16, 2007

The discovery of several nooses at a tolerance rally has upset the normally tranquil Cal State Fullerton campus.

The nooses were found attached to a T-shirt display denouncing intolerance. In response, hundreds of students and faculty rallied against hate this week.

Campus police said they were investigating last week's incident as a "somewhat offensive" act but not as a crime.

"It's a freedom of speech area, and it wasn't directed toward any particular group," said campus police Lt. Fred Molina. "But we want to find who's doing this and why."

The Fullerton incident Nov. 7 is just the latest use of the racially charged symbol on college campuses. A makeshift noose made from the string of a sweatshirt hood was found this month in the Purdue University library. Earlier this year, a noose was placed on the office door of a black professor at Columbia University, and a noose was found in a tree at Indiana State University.

Racial trouble in Jena, La., started in September 2006 when three white students hung nooses from a tree. Six black teens who became known as the "Jena Six" were arrested on suspicion of attacking a white student accused of hanging the nooses.

Sumanah Mithani, a Cal State Fullerton junior who helped organize an anti-hate rally Wednesday at Fullerton's quad, said she was "extremely shocked" to find such a "hateful symbol" on campus.

"It was a smack in the face that something like this could happen in central Orange County," said Mithani, who is chairwoman of the Assn. for Intercultural Awareness. "Incidents like this are not going to be tolerated anymore, and we're going to speak out. This was an attack not just on African Americans, but all ethnic groups on our campus."

Ernie Bridges, a lecturer in the Afro-Ethnic Studies Department who teaches a course on the history of racism, said the noose incident was disturbing but not surprising.

"People are going on the assumption that everything is OK," he said. "Why should it surprise

anybody after what happened in Jena and places like Columbia University?"

Two days after the incident, the administration sent a campus-wide e-mail denouncing the act and urging the college to make a "strong statement that CSUF is a welcoming, inclusive university."

"Fullerton takes very seriously any act of prejudice, uncivil behavior or hatred toward others in our community. We denounce the display of symbols that are used as an act of intimidation or fear," wrote Robert L. Palmer, vice president of student affairs.

Wednesday's rally began with a silent protest, in which students wearing bright orange clothes and black armbands hung peace signs from the clothesline where the nooses had appeared. Later, student and faculty leaders spoke against hatred in an "open mic" hour, and a panel of students and faculty led a two-hour discussion in the Student Union.

Bridges said he was encouraged by the Cal State Fullerton administration's quick response.

"They didn't try to cover this up," he said. "If you don't confront things in the beginning they can get out of hand."

During a speech on campus Wednesday, Bridges urged students to be a "conduit for change."

"It's their future that's being challenged," he said. "If you're putting a noose up, it's there to intimidate people. The challenge for students is to not run around pointing a finger, but to spread knowledge and enlightenment about one another so there will be a movement of people who demand peace and a better way of life."

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