# Bomb threats sent to historically black colleges across the United States

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At least 21 historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) received bomb threats over the course of two days earlier this week, triggering a wave of fear and anxiety among students and staff, and forcing many of the colleges to lock down their campuses or cancel classes as law enforcement investigated the threats.

At least six colleges reported bomb threats on Monday, January 31. This includes Howard University in Washington, D.C.; Bethune-Cookman University in Daytona Beach, Florida; Southern University and A&M College in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Delaware State University in Dover, Delaware; Albany State University in Georgia and Bowie State University in Maryland. The following day, which was also the first day of Black History Month, saw more than a dozen additional colleges targeted.

*NBC News* reported on Wednesday that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) had identified six persons of interest. The FBI described the offenders as "tech-savvy" juveniles that utilized "sophisticated methods to try to disguise the source of the threats, which appear to have a racist motivation."

The *Associated Press* reported details provided by Daytona Beach police chief Jakari Young on the threats made against Bethune-Cookman University. Young described a 20-minute phone call, during which the caller who claimed to be part of the Atomwaffen Division, a neo-Nazi terrorist group, outlined a convoluted plot involving multiple bombs and a threatened mass shooting.

In most cases, the bombing threats were delivered over phone calls made in the early morning hours. Many of the colleges issued lockdowns and shelter-in-place orders while FBI and other law enforcement agencies searched their campuses. At Xavier University of Louisiana, for example, the college administration evacuated the threatened area and issued a campus lockdown until it was determined to be safe.

For Howard University, the threats made on February 1 marked the third time in a month that the college had been menaced with violence. On January 5, Howard was among at least 8 HBCU's that reported bomb threats.

No sign of explosives was found at any of the targeted colleges. But the threats caused significant disruption, while provoking fear, anger and apprehension among students and faculty.

The *Washington Post* quoted Jamera Forbes, a senior at Morgan State University in Baltimore and president of the college's student body as saying, "[m]y main concern is my students' mental health. As college students, we already have so much mentally to deal with… We've tried to push through and overcome so much with covid over the years, and we're just trying to get back to a norm."

Mary Schmidt Campbell, president of Spelman College in Atlanta, denounced the threats in an email to staff and students, "The threats are despicable. They are designed to make us feel fearful and vulnerable."

The threats have been made under conditions in which schools and universities are becoming focal points of political radicalization. The reopening of schools for in-person learning in the midst of the uncontrolled spread of COVID-19, which has had predictably catastrophic results, has encountered significant opposition among students and educators, expressed most recently in the wave of protests and walkouts by high school students all over the United States.

The response of the Democratic Party, which has been leading the charge to reopen schools, has been first to center the discussion on race and second, to call

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for a heavier police presence on campuses. Typical was a perspective article in the *Post* by columnist Theresa Vargas, which declared: “For many students, HBCUs are more than learning institutions. They are havens. They are second families. And the recent bomb threats have taken away the security that comes with having that space.”

Howard University was itself the site of significant student protests last fall, with protesters occupying the student center and camping out in tents for over a month in protest of abysmal living conditions. The students were met with a heavy-handed response by the university administration, including attempts by the police to forcibly remove them.

The widespread existence of black mold in ventilation systems, vermin and rats living in student dormitories exposed the falsehoods spread by advocates of identity politics that HBCUs were “havens” and “safe spaces” for African American students.

While there can be no doubt that racism played a major role in the deliberate targeting of historically black colleges by white supremacists, the growth of far-right and fascistic forces in the United States and internationally has deep-going roots in the crisis of capitalism and of American democracy.

On the other hand, Democratic Party officials are utilizing the threats being made against HBCUs to promote the police and the FBI. The tone was set by Florida Democratic Representative and former police chief of Orlando Val Demings, who tweeted on January 31, “[t]he threats against HBCUs today demand a response. As a former law enforcement officer I'll keep working to make sure our institutions and law enforcement have the resources they need to keep all of our students and communities safe.”

Demings was on Democratic President Joseph Biden’s shortlist for Vice President during the 2020 election before he selected then-California Senator Kamala Harris for the position. In April last year, Demings appeared on *CBS*’s “Face the Nation” to defend the police killing of 16-year-old Ma’Khia Bryant in Columbus, Ohio. Bryant was shot several times by an officer during a domestic disturbance.

Demings defended this action, saying at the time “it appears that the officer responded as he was trained to do” when he shot the teenager.

Demings comments on the bomb threats were reinforced by Biden Press Secretary Jen Psaki, who told *TheGrio* that the administration takes “these threats incredibly seriously.” Psaki informed the news publication that the Department of Homeland Security “is in close touch with law enforcement authorities at a federal and local level” and was planning a response.

The Democratic Party’s invocation of law-and-order echoes similar remarks made by the far-right Trump administration. “I will always support the incredible men and women of law enforcement as much as you have always supported me,” said Trump in 2017, shortly after taking office. 'Our country is suffering from a far-left radical movement ... that is trying to defame, demoralize, defund, dismantle and dissolve our great police departments,' he declared in August, 2020, amid mass anti-police brutality protests.

The Democratic Party’s dual-promotion of law enforcement and racialist politics has been a constant theme following the mass protests against police brutality that swept the globe following the brutal murder of George Floyd in May 2020. Those protests, which were multiracial and multiethnic, were met with fierce repression by both the Democratic Party and by the Trump administration.

This promotion of the police and identity politics found a culmination in the election of former police officer Eric Adams as New York City mayor in November. Adams and the New York Democratic Party have been feverishly promoting “law and order” following the killing of two New York City police officers last week. On Thursday, President Biden joined Adams alongside leading New York City police officials to hail the resumption of “anti-gang” neighborhood safety patrols and call for more funding for police agencies across the country.

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