

MT Solidarity

Position Statement on Forrest Hall

Faculty Advisor

Michael Principe

President

Micah Maloney

Executive Council

Josh Liner

Craig Morgan

Dakota Dexter

Dalton Winfree

Scott Martindale

Yessi Short

Seth Limbaugh

Dear Committee,

Since 1998, MT Solidarity has remained a highly active student activist group on MTSU's campus. We have been active in numerous causes across the last 18 years and have attracted support from students, faculty, and community members. One of these causes has consistently been the controversy surrounding the name of the ROTC building, Nathan Bedford Forrest Hall.

Members of MT Solidarity have been proponents of changing the name of Forrest Hall since there was an MT Solidarity. Many of our members have been actively involved in the group Change the Name of Nathan Bedford Forrest Hall (the most vocal group advocating a name change over the past year). The two groups are intimately tied together.

MT Solidarity fully supports a name change of Forrest Hall.

No space will be wasted debating the character of the Confederate general, slave owner, and KKK member Nathan Bedford Forrest. We believe that particular discussion isn't particularly relevant to the current and past issues surrounding the naming of the ROTC building.

What is important is why the building was named as such. The reasons for the name are deeply rooted in MTSU's past embrace of white supremacy and opposition to desegregation. The building was affectionately referred to as Forrest Hall beginning in 1954, the year of Brown v Board. It was officially named in 1958 while desegregation of campus was held off until 1961. While not officially stated, it is clear that the naming of the building and the intense culture on campus of celebrating Forrest were used to intimidate an unwanted black student population.

Numerous protests against Confederate iconography and symbolism followed recorded as early as 1968 in the Gore Center on campus. Many Confederate symbols have been removed from campus with the notable exception of Forrest Hall.

The last protest against the name was only stopped by pressure from donor groups such as Daughters of the Confederacy, a group known to have white supremacist ties. The current round of protests has hit a similar wall with the main opposition to a name change coming from off campus.

MTSU has proven its unwillingness to legitimize the concerns of black students on campus by delegating the issue of the name change to a committee with little authority stacked with many opposing the name change. The public meetings set up by this committee have been packed with far fewer students than community members, even the meeting that took place on campus. These public forums have set up a toxic atmosphere and put the students distressed by the reverence for a slave owner on their campus on the defensive from vicious racist attacks by many community members attending these forums. The last public forum subjected the black students attending and protesting to a barrage of racist insults and heavy police presence clearly designed to silence those opposing the committee process.

To pretend that a “rational debate” can be had between pro-Confederate groups and black students on campus is ridiculous at best. The entire committee process has legitimized highly racist positions under the guise of “preserving history” or “respecting a military hero.” To have repeated public forums in which white community members deny the claim of feelings of racial oppression being made by black students is to uphold the systemic racism so very prevalent in MTSU’s past.

The lack of engagement from those holding high office on campus demonstrate the how little black students and other students of color mean to the administration. Continuing to preserve Confederate symbolism on campus despite decades of student opposition invites the type of visceral responses seen at both public forums.

MT Solidarity urges the committee, President McPhee, and all other relevant parties to change the name of Nathan Bedford Forrest Hall, change it to Veterans’ Hall, name it after a former student veteran, or simply call it the ROTC building. Whatever is chosen, the current name must go if MTSU wishes to ever seriously uphold its supposed commitment to providing a diverse and safe campus for its student population.