

Defamation of a New Legacy

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By Kobie Polk

The somber mood was enhanced Monday by the overcast sky and misty rain as a group of Hampton University students saw – most for the first time – the bent and twisted glasses on the bronze statue of Rosa Parks.

Parks' statue was vandalized about a week after it had been unveiled on Founder's Day. After it was repaired, police say, it was vandalized a second time.

"Honestly, it's a shame," said David Glover, Chief of Hampton University police. Glover said the department was trying to figure out who did it and why. If it was because, as rumored, students were unhappy over the amount of money spent on the park – given the amount of unfinished projects and problems on campus – Glover said that was a mistake.

"If that's the case, I get the message, but I don't agree with how they did it," he said during an interview.

The statue was one of 11 representing notable figures, most African American, who contributed to the history of the university. Legacy Park, with its central fountain and landscaping, sits on the waterfront near the founder's mansion and Memorial Chapel overlooking the James River.

During the first vandalism, Park's glasses were bent downward in the middle and her nose was scratched. Police believe this happened during a celebration commemorating the last 100 days before the seniors graduate. A photograph circulated on Twitter, prompting alumni, employees and students to ask the question: Who would do this?

Hampton University custodian Herbert Hodge went to see the statue when he heard. He recalled growing up during the Civil Rights movement.

"It was a time when blacks couldn't go to certain places," Hodge said, describing the importance of what Rosa Parks did when she refused to give up her seat, launching the movement that brought an end to legal segregation.

Seeing her statue defaced left him nearly speechless.

"I just don't understand," he finally said. Like others, Hodge believes a student damaged the statue.

"We can't blame anyone but ourselves," he said.

Students agreed.

"Honestly, it's appalling," said Alexandria King, a sophomore English major. "I don't understand what the purpose would be. It's just stupid."

Campus police are questioning students and have obtained footage of the

incident, police said. Even if justice is served, Hampton University family members like Hodge and King believe it will not undo the pain.

"It hurt me," said Hodge. "We go to a black school and it hurt me."