

FAMU Community Reacts to Kwame Kilpatrick's Guilty Plea

Contributed by Lawrence Williams -- Black College Wire
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1992 alum's troubles evoke various opinions

Detroit Mayor and FAMU graduate Kwame Kilpatrick agreed to resign recently after pleading guilty to two felony counts of perjury.

This ends a six-month-long legal saga. Kilpatrick agreed to give up his pension benefits, spend 120 days in jail, and pay the city \$1 million in restitution.

Kilpatrick, 38, a 1992 graduate of Florida A&M University, received his degree in political science while playing football for the Rattlers and was a member of the Beta Nu chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. He served on the FAMU Foundation Board of Directors for several months in 2007 before resigning last January, according to university officials.

Responses from present Rattlers differed on campus.

"It was just another way to attack a black man with political power," said 23-year-old Ernesto Barrett Jr.

Barrett, an MBA student from Mt. Laurel, N.J., said he feels the popularity of politics amid the presidential election fever may have been the only reason to prosecute Kilpatrick.

Since taking office as Detroit's 60th mayor in 2002, Kilpatrick has spurred the city with reinvestment in neighborhoods and downtown area. Kilpatrick stepped in when the city was facing some of the most difficult economic conditions in the United States.

For these reasons, political science professor Keith Simmonds, Ph.D., said Kilpatrick needs to pay his debt to society but should be allowed to return into public office.

"This puts an unfavorable light upon public service and was poor judgment rather than someone who is a bad person. He's worthy of redemption and should be allowed to service."

Simmonds, who is also the assistant Dean of Colleges and Sciences, came to FAMU in 1986 and taught while Kilpatrick was enrolled but said he didn't "have the pleasure of having him as a student."

The mayor's troubles began in January when the Detroit Free Press published text messages between the mayor and his former chief of staff, Christine Beatty.

This was the key evidence to contradict Kilpatrick's sworn testimony in a whistleblower trial last year that he and Beatty didn't have an affair.

"I think he is a good person deep down; he just got derailed. This should not discourage other inspiring public leaders but [should be] just a reality check of our own character," Simmonds said.

One student wishes it all could have been avoided.

"I'm just disappointed about the entire situation," said senior Healthcare Management student Terrance White 22, from Pensacola, Fla. "This should have never happened, but issues like this happen."
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Lawrence Williams writes for The Famuan, the Florida A&M University student newspaper, which originally published a version of this article.