

Unearthed Emails Appear To Back Suit Accusing Nicholas Sparks of Racism, Homophobia

 [huffpost.com/entry/nicholas-sparks-lawsuit-emails-racism-homophobia_n_5d02f729e4b0304a120ca54a](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/nicholas-sparks-lawsuit-emails-racism-homophobia_n_5d02f729e4b0304a120ca54a)

A lawsuit from a former employee accusing [Nicholas Sparks](#) of racism and homophobia has been backed up by newly revealed emails reportedly between the accuser and the famed novelist.

The emails, [recently obtained as part of an extensive report by The Daily Beast](#), are related to an ongoing legal battle between Sparks and the former headmaster of a private K-12 Christian school the writer co-founded in New Bern, North Carolina, his hometown, 13 years ago.

The former Epiphany School of Global Studies headmaster, Saul Hillel Benjamin, filed a lawsuit against “The Notebook” author and the school’s Board of Trustees in 2014 seeking punitive damages for “discrimination, breach of contract, emotional distress, and defamation.” According to [a previous article in The Daily Beast](#), Benjamin, a Quaker of Jewish ancestry, claimed in his lawsuit that Sparks willfully kept minority students out of Epiphany, banned students’ exposure to non-Christian religions and discouraged staff from helping bullied LGBTQ students.

Sparks, who has written more than a dozen novels about heteronormative love stories, vehemently denied the accusations after the lawsuit’s filing. But the emails obtained by The Daily Beast appear to back at least some of the claims.

Benjamin said in his lawsuit that he was faced with resistance while working to diversify the school’s student population, which allegedly had just two black students enrolled in 2013, the year the plaintiff started as headmaster. Sparks reportedly wrote in a November 2013 email that “we’ve spent way, way too much time ... talking about ‘tolerance, diversity, non-discrimination, and LGBT’ in these first twelve weeks.” Benjamin also claims in the lawsuit that Sparks told him “black students are too poor and can’t do the academic work” asked of the school’s students. A separate November 2013 email from Sparks obtained by The Daily Beast appears to support that claim, with the writer saying the school’s lack of diversity “has nothing to do with racism” but rather “money” and “culture.”

According to Benjamin’s 2014 complaint, Sparks supported a group of students who bullied the school’s LGBTQ students. The former headmaster also alleged that Sparks referred to a school club for LGBTQ students as “the Gay Club” and that two bisexual instructors were threatened with termination when they came forward to support the LGBTQ students.

According to one of the emails obtained by The Daily Beast, Sparks told Benjamin he “chose to rock this boat early and hard ... with what some perceive as an agenda that strives to make homosexuality open and accepted. ... As for the ‘Club,’ there obviously can’t be one now.”

On Wednesday, Sparks posted a statement on Twitter that denied the content shown in the emails and in Benjamin’s lawsuit, calling the Daily Beast story “not news.”

pic.twitter.com/y4nZX6TByD

— Nicholas Sparks (@NicholasSparks) June 13, 2019

“Epiphany is and remains a place where students and faculty of any race, belief, religion, background or orientation should feel welcome,” the statement says. “My commitment to these values, as well as Epiphany’s commitment to these values, have been and remain constant.”

A federal judge ruled last year that a jury should decide whether the writer defamed Benjamin by allegedly suggesting to other board members that the man had Alzheimer’s and also whether Benjamin resigned or was pressured to quit. That judge dismissed Benjamin’s claims that he was forced out because of trying to diversify the student population and that his Jewish background played a role in his lost employment, according to The Associated Press. The case goes to trial in August.

“I am pleased that the Court has dismissed nearly every claim against me, my Foundation and Epiphany,” Sparks’ statement read. “Very importantly, the Court has dismissed all claims of discrimination or harassment against me. While there will be a trial on a few remaining issues, I am confident that a jury will evaluate these claims fairly and decide those claims in our favor as well.”