



## THE REAL SILENT SAM COALITION: MANIFESTO 2015

*The Real Silent Sam Coalition (RSSC) is an alliance organization of students, faculty, staff and community members who collectively work to confront the historical amnesia that pollutes the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. We understand "history" as a construction, a technology that serves the exploitative agenda of the privileged and erases the experiences and realities of the oppressed. Our work is in questioning what, who, and how we choose to remember.*

*On 30 January 2015, the coalition began new **momentum** in the campaign as we now officially called for Hurston Hall. We have applied creative **protest** strategies- including a people of color caucus, visual **demonstrations**, **media**, and the **vote**- in engaging dialogue with administrators and our community at large. Below is a **declaration** of the Hurston campaign to address confusion and opposition we have received. Since we have presented our manifesto, the coalition has **met again** with the Board of Trustees. We again laid out our demands, among **others' perspectives**. Shortly after, the North Carolina General Assembly **presented a bill** that would co-opt and shut down the coalition's work.*

*The struggle for our campus continues.*

### ARCHIVES

[November 2017](#)[May 2016](#)[April 2016](#)[March 2016](#)[December 2015](#)[October 2015](#)[April 2015](#)[February 2015](#)[January 2015](#)[November 2014](#)[October 2014](#)[September 2014](#)[August 2014](#)[April 2014](#)

## PREAMBLE

Racism and white supremacy are embedded in the physical and mental geography of our campus. They are literally present in each brick of campus buildings that were laid by enslaved Blacks on stolen indigenous land. By maintaining memorials like the Confederate Monument “Silent Sam” and preserving names of buildings like Saunders Hall, UNC chooses to honor people who upheld and enforced legacies of terror. This legacy of hate is pervasive on our campus. The racist geography of our campus invades the minds and bodies of our classmates, viscerally reminding students of color every day that to white students and the UNC administration, they do not matter.

The administration has habitually refused to acknowledge the diversity of our community [its gender, race, religion, creed, etc.]. UNC-Chapel Hill is a Historically White Institution, and we believe that it has shown itself, time and time again, to be more invested in maintaining legacies of violence and hate than it is in creating a safe space that recognizes the complex selves of its students of color. We believe the University is responsible and obligated to give every student an education that does not obliterate truth with whitewashed etchings of Western philosophy nor force students to fragment their identities in order to participate in the university system.

## PRINCIPAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE RENAMING

1. Renaming the current Saunders building will “be a **slippery slope**” to renaming other sites—perhaps the entire campus.
2. The renaming would constitute a “**revisionist history**.”
3. William L. Saunders **may have been** a part of the Klan but he contributed greatly to UNC-Chapel Hill and North Carolina.

We will now rebut each of these arguments individually.

1. We are challenging the name of Saunders Hall with the full understanding that there are many buildings on UNC’s campus that are named after individuals who have participated in and upheld white supremacy. Some of these individuals were other members of the Ku Klux Klan; some were slaveholders. Yet others have benefited from profiteering off the poor or pushed for continued segregation within the university. By choosing to focus our organizing on renaming Saunders Hall, we are not ignoring the presence of these other legacies on our campus. The focus on Saunders Hall was

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decided through the combined dialogue of those already organizing within and around the building. The Geography and Religious Studies Departments are housed in the building and many scholars within those departments had already been mobilized. Additionally, a group of students who attended classes in the building had also already initiated a name change amongst themselves. This organic choice to focus on Saunders Hall underlined its potential as an important example of the impact these spaces have on students of color.

The 'slippery slope' argument is often used to avoid debating the politics of a question, and to shut down conversation by exaggerating and misrepresenting actual demands. This distracts from the fact that the renaming of Saunders Hall has been demanded, and resisted, for decades. When the building is renamed, it will be the result of coordinated and focused organizing from students, faculty, and community members. While we are dedicated to contextualizing UNC's history beyond the limited example of Saunders Hall and indeed seek to rename other buildings as well, it is sensationalist to say total change will come at once. We are not afraid of the 'slippery slope'. We are not afraid of beginning this work for necessary change. We don't ask: where does it stop? Instead we ask: where does it start? The maintenance of Saunders' name on a campus building symbolizes the continued blatant disregard for the harm inflicted on Black bodies and the dismissal of the experiences of student of color on this campus. We demand this name change as proof the university seriously seeks to properly contextualize its space for all of its students.

2. Some have implied that to rename Saunders Hall would be to practice a "revisionist history" that would impair a culture of learning. This argument would have us believe that changing the name of this building would somehow change history, that it would somehow cause us to forget who Saunders was. To this we would like to say, don't worry. We can remember the evil Saunders stood for just fine without honoring his name in carved white marble. This argument is essentially saying that it is more important to preserve the status quo, with the imagined goal of 'not forgetting what Saunders stood for,' then it is to honor and respect the needs of students of color at a university where their historical studies are continuously discredited and under attack.

Our call for a name change is not based on the abstract idea that Saunders and the KKK were and are racist. It is based on the specific acts of violence the Klan committed and the structure of white supremacy it acted to uphold (and is still upheld). It is long past time to stop honoring these acts on UNC's campus. We are not trying to 'revise' history. We are trying to challenge the injustices etched in

the stone of our present in order to influence our future.

3. William L. Saunders may have been apart of the Klan but he contributed greatly to UNC and North Carolina.

This argument seeks to rank Saunders' achievements individually to judge his overall character. It is popular to insist upon the "good" that Saunders did in his life while ignoring the unsavory context and background activity that allowed him many of his accomplishments.

It is true that William L. Saunders was North Carolina Secretary of State from 1879 to his death in 1891, as well as a historian and editor of The Colonial Records newspaper. It is also true that there is documented evidence of Saunders' participation in anti-Black terrorism as Grand Dragon<sup>3</sup> of the North Carolina Ku Klux Klan. While the current Board of Trustees tries to use this documentation to make Saunders' KKK affiliations ambiguous, former BOT members felt a different way: a Board of Trustees' document dated June 15, 1920, recommended Saunders as a namesake for a newly constructed building. On the fourth line down of their list of his qualifications is "Head of the Ku Klux Klan in North Carolina". One of Saunders' top qualifications for the original naming is now being conveniently dismissed.

Let us be clear: the KKK is a white terrorist organization responsible for outrageous violence since its inception in the late 1860s. Saunders' leadership in the KKK clearly indicates his racial politics. Consequently, those attempting to argue that "while Saunders might not have been perfect, we must also consider the good he did for his community" are in effect saying that his role in university and state politics excuses his white supremacist viewpoint. It also ignores the fact that in 1920—the same year the Board of Trustees deliberated named a building in Saunders' honor—was part of a second resurgence of KKK organizing nationwide. The name of Saunders Hall stands not only for that individual, but for all that he represents as a white supremacist idol. It is absurd to suggest that his position in the KKK can be evaluated as a trivial "fault" among other "redeeming qualities." Saunders' life, his name, and the Board of Trustees decision to honor that name all symbolize a legacy of hatred, fear, and violence towards Black people.

## DEMANDS

In the past, the administration and the Board of Trustees have failed to pay attention to the wants and needs of their students. At this point, we are concerned that the administration's inaction signals a lack of care or understanding for its students. We intend to hold the University accountable to its moral obligations to its students.

We DEMAND that Saunders Hall be renamed to Hurston Hall. Saunders was, among other roles, the Grand Dragon of the NC chapter of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). There is no denying Saunders' affiliation with that racist, terrorist organization. As long as his name remains on this campus in hallowed infamy, the University is upholding the legacies of racial violence and subjugation that the Klan represents.

We are calling for Saunders Hall to be known forevermore as Hurston Hall. We choose this name to honor legendary writer and folklorist Zora Neale Hurston. She was also the first Black student to take classes (in secret) at UNC-Chapel Hill, prior to integration. She studied with Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Paul Greene, but left UNC in part due to racist violence on campus. In honoring Hurston, students of Color honor ourselves and all those who have come before us. She wasn't given a place on this campus—now, we give her one.

We DEMAND that a plaque be placed on The Confederate Monument "Silent Sam" contextualizing its violent racial history. The monument is about so much more than the UNC students who fought for the Confederacy. It is about celebrating the preservation of the "Anglo-Saxon race" in the South. It is about marking this campus as a space that upholds white supremacy. Generations of students, faculty, and staff have fought for this violence to be formally recognized. We will not let it be ignored any longer.

We DEMAND that the University incorporate mandatory programming for incoming students that teaches the historical racial violence of this university and town, as well as anti-racism training for faculty, staff, administrators, deans and chairs. There is a culture of tolerance towards racism at this university, which must be called out and addressed.

As students in higher education in the 21st century, we recognize and understand that we have inherited institutions that were founded and intended only for the uplift of the privileged, the wealthy, the white, the male. Those of us who are people of color, those of us who are marginalized in today's societies know that we have achieved a space in the institutions of higher learning only through

struggle. We know through our own experience- UNC was never meant for us. Yet here we are. And here we will stay. We are exercising our right to challenge and alter our institutions when we find them unfit. We do not tolerate the inheritance of these racist institutions.

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