

*We will not forget
We will not be silent*

Fess Up, Silent Sam!

There is a conspiracy of silence concerning the racist history of the University of North Carolina. Meanwhile, black workers and other African Americans still frequently encounter a "plantation mentality" in their daily lives. This racism is sometimes open and direct. More often it is camouflaged and paternalistic--"sugar coated," as civil rights activists described it during the 1960s.

Keith Edwards, the UNC Housekeepers, the Black Public Works Association, and the students and faculty who fought for a free standing Black Cultural Center have called those in power to account for their racism. Yet these struggles are only a beginning.

This fact sheet explores the celebration of slavery, the Confederacy, and white supremacy that is embodied in the names of university buildings and in its most prominent public monument, "Silent Sam." Any movement for racial and economic justice must demand that the university acknowledge and repudiate its racist heritage in both word and deed.

Davie Hall (Department of Psychology)--completed in 1908--a classroom building named after General William Richardson Davie (1756-1820), wealthy North Carolina planter and attorney, known as the "father of the university." As a representative to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787, Davie spoke strongly for the interests of slave holders. By 1790 he owned thirty six slaves. He retired to "Tivoli Plantation" in South Carolina.

Smith Hall (Playmakers Theater)--completed in 1851--named after General Benjamin Smith (1756-1826), Governor and wealthy slave owner from Brunswick County. Smith's home was known as "Orton Plantation." He donated 20,000 acres of land to the university in 1789. Originally, Smith Hall was used to house the university's small library, but primarily it was used as a ballroom.

Ruffin Residence Hall--completed in 1922--named after Thomas Ruffin (1787-1870) and Thomas Ruffin Jr. (1824-1889). Both Ruffins were wealthy slaveowners in Orange County, state Supreme Court Justices, and university trustees. As Chief Justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court Thomas Ruffin wrote: "The power of the master must be absolute to render the submission of the slave perfect."

Mitchell Hall (Geology)--completed in 1964--named after Professor Elisha P. Mitchell (1793-1857). Mitchell taught chemistry, mineralogy, and geology at the university from 1818 until his death. Although a native of Connecticut, Mitchell owned four slaves by 1820, eighteen in 1840, and twenty in 1850. It was under Mitchell's direction as Bursar of the university that slaves built the stone walls surrounding the campus.

Swain Hall (Department of Radio, Television, and Motion Pictures)--completed in 1914--named after David Lowry Swain (1801-1868), Governor of North Carolina and President of the university from 1935 to 1868. Swain led the North Carolina Constitutional Convention of 1835 that disenfranchised free black citizens. While president of the university, Swain's wealth increased dramatically. In 1850 he owned nineteen slaves. By 1860 Swain owned thirty two slaves and was one of the richest men in Chapel Hill. Following the Civil War, Swain led a delegation that pleaded with General Sickles of the Union Army to allow the reinstatement of whipping as a remedy for the lack of labor discipline among black workers.

Cameron Avenue--paved in 1927--named after Paul C. Cameron (1808-1891), wealthy planter and businessman of Orange County. Paul Cameron became the richest man in North Carolina when he inherited the vast holdings of his father, Duncan Cameron, in 1853. This inheritance included the family plantation "Fairintosh." Duncan Cameron served on the university Board of Trustees and was elected the first chairman of the Executive Committee in 1835. Paul served on the Board of Trustees from 1858 to 1868 and from 1875 to 1891. Prior to the Civil War, Paul Cameron was the largest slaveholder in North Carolina.

Saunders Hall (Religion and Geography)--completed in 1922--named after Colonel William L. Saunders (1835-1891), the building was designed for the departments of History and Sociology. Saunders graduated from the university in 1854, studied law under Judge William Horn Battle, and rose to the level of colonel in the Confederate army under Robert E. Lee. Following the war he returned to Chapel Hill where he directed the activities of the North Carolina Ku Klux Klan during 1867-70, the period of its most intense activity. After the restoration of Democratic Party rule in the state legislature, Saunders served on the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees with Paul Cameron and Kemp Plummer Battle, the son of Judge Battle. Saunders was North Carolina Secretary of State from 1879 to 1891. He is remembered as the compiler and editor of the *Colonial Records of North Carolina*.

Battle-Vance-Pettigrew Halls (University Personnel Department, Scholarship

Programs, Student Aid Office, Affirmative Action Office)--completed in 1912--named after Kemp Plummer Battle, president of the university 1876-1891; Zebulon Baird Vance, Civil War Governor of North Carolina (also 1877-1879), senator from North Carolina 1879-1894; James Johnson Pettigrew, UNC alumnus who died in battle while a brigadier general in the Confederate army.

Aycock Residence Hall--completed in 1924--named for Charles B. Aycock (1859-1912), leader of the white supremacy campaign that ushered Jim Crow into North Carolina at the turn of the century, Governor of North Carolina 1901-1905.

Cobb Residence Hall--completed in 1952--named after Professor Collier Cobb (1862-1934), who in 1906 called Col. William L. Saunders the greatest North Carolinian ever to have lived.

"Silent Sam" (Confederate monument)--completed in 1913--donated by the North Carolina Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the UNC Alumni Association, the statue commemorates UNC's Confederate war dead. At some later time the statue became known as "Silent Sam," in reference to the joke that he only shot off his gun when a virgin passed. The statue was taken down by the university in 1987, cleaned, restored, and given a protective coating against corrosive automobile exhaust and acid rain.

It would be unrealistic to expect that a southern university founded in 1793 would not have buildings named after wealthy slaveowners, Confederate officers, and champions of segregation and white supremacy. Unfortunately, the university continues to promote the virtues of all these men without any criticism of the undemocratic principles they upheld or the evil they did. For instance, in the 637 page book published by the Facilities Planning and Design Department in 1994 for the university's Bicentennial, there is no mention of slavery or white supremacy in all of the glowing biographies of those honored by public buildings. Like Silent Sam, these racists got a good cleaning and a restorative protective coating against the danger of exposure. More to the point, the university has never done anything to publicly take responsibility for its long history of racial subjugation and exploitation of black slaves and workers. The lone building named after an African American, the Sonya Haynes Stone Black Cultural Center, took a tremendous struggle to win and may never be built due to a lack of funding support. Only a few years ago the plantation mentality of university administrators and many white students resulted in the placing of a statue representing a black student wearing gym shorts and spinning a basketball on his fingertip in front of Davis Library.

The significance of building naming at the university is not only in the impact of these public memorials on campus. Because this has been the leading university in the state, these are the men who have shaped North Carolina law, legislation, and governance. They are the men who retrieved and edited the history of the state. They are the people who have trained all the leaders of the state in every field for generations.

* also, Jackson Hall, Tate-Turner-Kurmt, and Check-Clark
(Undergrad Admissions) (Social Work) (University Laundry)