

ABSTRACT

Charlotte Fryar: Reclaiming the University of the People: Racial Justice Movements at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1951-2018
(Under the direction of Seth Kotch)

This dissertation examines how Black students and workers engaged in movements for racial justice at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill from 1951 to 2018 challenged the University's dominant cultural landscape of white supremacy—a landscape in direct conflict with the University's mission to be a public university in service to all citizens of North Carolina. Beginning with the University's legal desegregation, this dissertation tells the history of Black students' and workers' resistance to institutional anti-Blackness, demonstrating how the University consistently sought to exclude Black identities and diminish any movement that challenged its white supremacy. Activated by the knowledge of the University's history as a site of enslavement and as an institution which maintained and fortified white supremacy and segregation across North Carolina, Black students and workers protested the ways in which the University reflects and enacts systemic racial inequities within its institutional and campus landscapes. To oppose institutional anti-Blackness, Black students and workers constructed a counter-history of the University as determined by the legacy of Black freedom striving in Chapel Hill, which operated against the dominant narrative of the University's reputed liberalism.

Drawing on an interdisciplinary methodology from oral history and public digital humanities, this dissertation uses a dual critical geography and critical race theory framework to

analyze how students and workers have organized to challenge the University's anti-Blackness. This dissertation contends that Black students and workers organized to create, contest, and reclaim specific spaces within the University's campus landscape, directing the institution towards a yet-unrealized future as a place of humanity, dignity, and equity for all campus actors. This dissertation explores several spaces of resistance on the campus—the South Campus dormitories, Lenoir Hall, Manning Hall, Upendo Lounge, the Black Cultural Center, the Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History, the Cheek-Clark Building, Saunders Hall, and the Confederate Monument and Unsung Founders Memorial in McCorkle Place—to provide a groundwork for conceptualizing ways in which future campus organizers can utilize the legacy of past racial justice movements to orient the University towards reparative justice.