

CHAPTER SEVEN: SAUNDERS HALL

In May 2015, the University's Board of Trustees voted to rename Saunders Hall, marking the first time a building on the campus had been renamed for reasons relating to the legacy of the building's namesake.⁴⁰³ Saunders Hall, home since 1922 to the History Department, and later the Religious Studies and Geography Departments, was named to honor William L. Saunders, a member of the class of 1854 and head of North Carolina's Ku Klux Klan. Now, the Board of Trustees declared, the building would be known as Carolina Hall, a name which "would highlight the building's dedication to all the people of the State, including those who have been oppressed."⁴⁰⁴ The renaming of this building was a direct result of almost two decades of student organizing, which had focused primarily on Saunders Hall among many spaces within the campus landscape that honored leaders of white supremacist movements. This chapter argues that the movement to contest Saunders Hall, which began in the 1990s, marked a significant shift in racial justice movements from the creation of Black spaces to the direct contestation of spaces which represented and enacted the University's white supremacy. And as the movement against Saunders Hall continued, the organizing framework shifted again towards reclamation, as Black

⁴⁰³ "Trustees Rename Saunders Hall, Freeze Renamings for 16 Years," *Carolina Alumni Review*, 28 May 2015, <<https://alumni.unc.edu/news/trustees-vote-to-rename-saunders-hall-put-16-year-freeze-on-renamings/>>; The second space on campus "renamed" for reasons related to the namesake was Kenan Memorial Stadium. Until October 2018, it was named in honor of William Rand Kenan Sr., but after historians brought to light his role in the Wilmington Massacre of 1898, the University moved forward with a plan to rededicate the building after his son, William Rand Kenan Jr., who donated the funds that created the stadium.

⁴⁰⁴ Board of Trustee Meeting Minutes, Board of Trustees Archives, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, April 2015, <https://bot.unc.edu/files/2015/04/UNC-BOT-Saunders-Hall-Transcription-edit_RH.pdf>.

students began to develop a new sense of place for Chapel Hill and re-conceptualize what it meant to use the institution's own history as a tool to challenge white supremacy.

Students Seeking Historical Truth

The first mention of Saunders's leadership of the Ku Klux Klan in a student publication was in March 1975, when *The Daily Tar Heel* published a piece comparing Saunders to the publicity director of the KKK, David Duke, who had recently visited the campus to deliver a lecture which had been protested by members of the Black Student Movement (BSM). Reporting on the connections between Saunders and Duke, Elizabeth Leland wrote: "Saunders, a patriot, a devoted North Carolinian. Or Saunders, the emperor of a racist organization. As you walk through the 62-room building named for this man, the choice is yours. The university made its opinion known upon dedication of the building 53 years ago."⁴⁰⁵ Over the next twenty years, the fact of Saunders's involvement in the Ku Klux Klan was periodically mentioned in *The Daily Tar Heel* and *Black Ink*, but other campaigns for the creation of Black counter-spaces took prominence in movements for racial justice.

Students Seeking Historical Truth (SSHT) became the first student organization that formed to contest the University's history of anti-Black violence. Founded in the fall semester of 1999, SSHT had two main goals: "First, to obtain official acknowledgement from the University of its history and that the University takes steps to teach and enlighten the campus community about its history. The second goal is to erect a public monument to the contributions that Blacks have made to this university."⁴⁰⁶ Kristi Booker, a Black student and graduate of 2002, had been

⁴⁰⁵ Elizabeth Leland, "Saunders led N.C. Klan," *The Daily Tar Heel*, 19 March 1975, 4.

⁴⁰⁶ Saunders Hall Anti-Klan decoration, presentation, and speak-out, October 1999, Videotape VT-5441/31, 8mm Hi8 cassette in the John Kenyon Chapman Papers #5441, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

inspired to create SSHT after a conversation she had with Yonni Chapman, then a masters graduate of the History Department and a local social justice organizer, from whom she had learned of Saunders's leadership of the Ku Klux Klan. "The problem is that the University continues to honor and condone Saunders," she told *The Daily Tar Heel*. "By doing that they condone the immoral practices of the Ku Klux Klan."⁴⁰⁷

Booker arrived in Chapel Hill in the fall of 1998 from Charlotte, North Carolina, where she had been one of only six Black students at her high school. Her experiences with Black student solidarity groups at her high school and within the BSM encouraged her to form SSHT as a way to interrogate the progressive and predominantly white portrayal of the University's history.⁴⁰⁸ Booker explained in an October 1999 panel discussion that SSHT's goal at its founding was not to advocate for changing the name of Saunders Hall, but to commemorate "the victims of Saunders's violence."⁴⁰⁹ Nor was their issue just relegated to the campus landscape. As Booker's comments to *The Daily Tar Heel* demonstrate, SSHT focused on the campus landscape only as a way to bring awareness to the University's anti-Black institutional landscape, with a history that "reflects a deep commitment to Black degradation."⁴¹⁰ From their origins, SSHT, with a membership of both Black and white students, was clear that their goal was not to

⁴⁰⁷ Geoff Wessel, "Buildings' History Criticized," *The Daily Tar Heel*, 8 October 1999, 1.

⁴⁰⁸ Emily Fleming, "Booker Embraces Solidarity, Heritage," *The Daily Tar Heel*, 9 November 2001, 1.

⁴⁰⁹ University Buildings: Racist Pasts and Current Meanings, Saunders Hall Anti-Klan panel, October 1999, 8mm Hi8 cassette in the John Kenyon Chapman Papers #5441, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁴¹⁰ T. Elon Dancy, Kirsten T. Edwards, and James Earl Davis, "Historically White Universities and Plantation Politics: Anti-Blackness and Higher Education in the Black Lives Matter Era," *Urban Education* 53, No. 2 (2018): 177.

simply to draw attention to the namesake of one building but to contest the University's long history of racial violence and injustice.

SSHT identified a number of buildings on the campus named in honor of enslavers, Jim Crow-era white supremacists, and mid-twentieth century segregationists. In close proximity on the campus to Saunders Hall, the organization singled out Steele Building, named to honor Walter Leak Steele, "a vocal opponent of the Reconstruction Acts," and Murphey Hall, named to honor Archibald DeBow Murphey, an early graduate of the University "who owned several slaves."⁴¹¹ At a presentation to a meeting of the BSM, SSHT identified still other buildings named in honor of white supremacists, including Ruffin Residence Hall, Davie Hall, Swain Hall, Mitchell Hall, Aycock Residence Hall, and finally, Memorial Hall, which they argued "pulls it all together," by honoring dozens of the state's antebellum white elite and Confederate officers.⁴¹² Booker, who had "researched on her own about the history of UNC buildings," compiled their findings in Wilson Library's University Archives.⁴¹³ Chapman, who had, by 1999, written a lengthy masters thesis on the history of activism in the Black community of Chapel Hill and provided historical research for the Housekeepers Association only a few years prior, supported Booker's research.

Chapman, with his interest in combining history with activism in pursuit of social justice at the University and within the Town of Chapel Hill, continued to play a crucial role in supporting several campus organizations, beginning with the Housekeepers Association. As

⁴¹¹ Katy Nelson, "Names Reflect Complex History," *The Daily Tar Heel*, 8 October 1999, 7.

⁴¹² Saunders Hall Anti-Klan decoration, presentation, and speak-out, October 1999, Videotape VT-5441/31, 8mm Hi8 cassette in the John Kenyon Chapman Papers #5441, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁴¹³ Brooke Roseman, "Group: UNC Must Own Up to Past," *The Daily Tar Heel*, 7 October 1999, 1.

Chapman explained in the introduction to his dissertation, he “became interested in the names of university buildings during the 1990s when I was helping the UNC Housekeepers Association research the history of black workers at the university.”⁴¹⁴ Chapman understood profoundly the problem of sustaining a social movement through the four year cycles of student life, and he worked to bridge those gaps in time by continuing to educate incoming students about the University’s history and the legacy of its past.⁴¹⁵ Chapman’s contributions to campus movements for racial justice as a scholar and activist were considerable, and his legacy as an organizer in North Carolina continues to surface in more contemporary movements for Black voting rights and criminal justice reform.⁴¹⁶ Chapman’s masters thesis, dissertation, and other writings influenced two decades of students interested in the Black history of the institution, and he was one of the first scholars to explore the connections between institutions of higher education and the legacy of enslavement, asking questions about the history of predominantly white institutions that other scholars would not begin to explore until a decade later.

Although Chapman, as an older white heterosexual man from Ohio, was significantly different in many ways from the young Black largely female leadership of the movements he supported, Chapman’s dedication to racial justice propelled him into almost every social justice campaign in Chapel Hill through the 1990s and 2000s. Cognizant of the supporting role he could play as a white man in racial justice movements, Chapman continued to use his privileges to

⁴¹⁴ John K. Chapman, *Black Freedom and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1793-1960*. (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006), v.

⁴¹⁵ For Students Seeking Historical Truth in particular, Chapman also played the crucial role of documenting the organization. Because their movement was short-lived, there are only a handful of articles on their organizing in the *Daily Tar Heel* and *Black Ink*. Chapman filmed their lectures, speak-outs, and crucially, their decoration of Saunders Hall, videos which may all be accessed in the John Kenyon Chapman Papers #5441, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁴¹⁶ Interview with Donelle Boose by Charlotte Fryar, 17 November 2017, L-0451.

assist justice movements on the campus that were led by Black students and workers. His involvement in activism surrounding public acknowledgement of the University's history led many white students and faculty into conversations about racial justice on the campus for the first time. Deeply committed to teaching white people about anti-racism, Chapman dedicated much of his organizing energies at the University to addressing white students and faculty, teaching them how to disinvest from white supremacy.⁴¹⁷

Although Chapman continued to support Black-led campus organizations, he also sought to shift the organizing framework of racial justice movements from Black space creation towards the contestation of white supremacy as a way to involve white citizens, including himself, in racial justice movements. In this shift from a focus on creating Black spaces to contesting spaces that enacted and represented white supremacy, Chapman sought the active participation of white students, faculty, and workers, who had rarely been involved in prior racial justice movements in Chapel Hill. For SSHT in particular, Chapman played the crucial role of activation by introducing Booker to another side of the history of the University, and also that of white ally in support of an organization built by a young Black woman. By supporting SSHT but not leading it, Chapman helped to bring white students into the membership of SSHT, a multiracial student organization that took a direct stand against white supremacy.⁴¹⁸

Through the early weeks of the fall semester of 1999, SSHT held a handful of meetings to discuss their plans for taking their issue to a wider audience. "They had these small vigils, and

⁴¹⁷ Autobiography 1-5, April 2009 WMA Files in the John Kenyon Chapman Papers #5441, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁴¹⁸ Autobiography 1-5, April 2009 WMA Files in the John Kenyon Chapman Papers #5441, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

it would be them, and they would be standing around a statue,” Erica Smiley, a Black student organizer and 2001 graduate, remembered. “At some point they really wanted to do something big and said they wanted to start focusing on the religious [studies] building, which was named after Saunders.”⁴¹⁹ In the early morning hours of Wednesday, October 6th, members of the organization decorated Saunders Hall, Murphey Hall, and Steele Building. They hung a red sheet over the engraved Saunders Hall sign, which read “KKK,” a white sheet over Murphey Hall, which read “Hitler Hall,” and another sheet over Steele Building, which read “David Duke KKK.”

Seventy-seven posters were taped around and on Saunders Hall, a number which signified the seventy-seven years since the building’s dedication. On the posters, after listing the offenses perpetrated by members of the Ku Klux Klan including “intimidation, mutilation, lynching, rape,” the posters read in large font: “WHITE SUPREMACIST. Are You Proud to Be a Tar Heel?” Papers were taped to the brick pathways between the three buildings, reading “The Great Cover-Up,” “Fess Up Silent Sam,” and naming other white supremacists whose names were on University buildings, including “Elisha P. Mitchell,” “Charles B. Aycock,” and “David L. Swain.” They also hung nooses in the trees and bushes around the building to symbolize the legacy of the Ku Klux Klan.⁴²⁰

By the time eight o’clock classes began the next day, the posters, sheets, papers, and rope had all been removed and confiscated by the University’s Department of Public Safety. “This

⁴¹⁹ Interview with Erica Smiley by Charlotte Fryar, 8 December 2017, L-0465.

⁴²⁰ Saunders Hall Anti-Klan decoration, presentation, and speak-out, October 1999, Videotape VT-5441/31, 8mm Hi8 cassette in the John Kenyon Chapman Papers #5441, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

was vandalism—it doesn't belong stuck on a building,” Jeff McCracken, then the University Police Major, told *The Daily Tar Heel*.⁴²¹ University Police, reacting to the nooses hung in the trees around the building, began to treat the decoration as a hate crime. Erica Smiley, unaffiliated with SSHT but eager to support the group, woke up early to see the decoration, and remembered that “they had put all this stuff up to demonstrate this racist history of this building, but what was hard about it...is that it wasn't obvious what they were doing. There was not a sign saying “The legacy of this building is—.”⁴²² SSHT's decoration was intended to be a form of performance art, demonstrating that buildings named to honor perpetrators of state-sanctioned anti-Black violence and terrorism ought to be visible to everyone as a crime scene. “We created our own memorial to show what Saunders was: a murderer, a slave owner and the emperor of the KKK,” SSHT member Eboni Staton explained.⁴²³ The reaction of University Police to SSHT's decoration of Saunders Hall was a demonstration of the structural nature of “the relationship between police violence and the social institution of policing,” evidenced in the police's treatment of performance art as a hate crime, for which SSHT students were later threatened with expulsion.⁴²⁴

The next day, SSHT held a speak-out in the Pit, where they invited students to reflect on the history of the University and the ways in which it was visible on the campus landscape. For

⁴²¹ Elizabeth Breyer, “Students Hang Nooses, Posters to Protest Names On Buildings,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, 7 October 1999, 1.

⁴²² Interview with Erica Smiley by Charlotte Fryar, 8 December 2017, L-0465.

⁴²³ Elizabeth Breyer, “Students Hang Nooses, Posters to Protest Names On Buildings,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, 7 October 1999, 1.

⁴²⁴ Steve Martinot and Jared Sexton, “The Avant-Garde of White Supremacy,” *Social Identities* 9, No. 2 (June 2003): 171.

over two hours, students came forward to register their shock at the history that Booker had excavated and SSHT had made public. “This campus is for everybody,” a white student at the speak-out said the crowd, “and the fact that a large part of the campus has to look at a building named to honor people who did those kinds of things to them in the past is really a travesty. It makes no sense.”⁴²⁵ Although SSHT dissolved by the end of the semester (perhaps precipitated by the threats of expulsion leveraged against leaders of the organization for their “vandalism” of the campus’s buildings), comments from white and Black students at the October 7th speak-out thanking members of SSHT for their research, validated the organization’s stated purpose to educate the University community. Later that year, Erica Smiley launched a campaign for student body president, galvanizing a progressive multiracial coalition of students and drawing on discussions about racial inequity on campus that SSHT had also highlighted.⁴²⁶

SSHT’s decoration of Saunders Hall set an important precedent in making that building the focus of future efforts from organizers to contest aspects of the University’s history visible within the racialized campus landscape. It also represented a shift in racial justice organizing, which up until the decoration of Saunders Hall had largely been focused on the creation of spaces for Black students and workers as a way to challenge the cultural landscape. By contesting a specific space which represented the white supremacy of the entire institution, members of SSHT adopted a different organizing approach to challenge the dominant institutional culture which relegated Blackness as outside the bounds of humanity.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁵ Saunders Hall Anti-Klan decoration, presentation, and speak-out, October 1999, Videotape VT-5441/31, 8mm Hi8 cassette in the John Kenyon Chapman Papers #5441, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁴²⁶ Interview with Erica Smiley by Charlotte Fryar, 8 December 2017, L-0465.

⁴²⁷ Frank B. Wilderson, *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 5.

On the Wake of Emancipation Campaign

In the spring of 2001, the movement that Kristi Booker had begun, picked up again under a different name. Booker, now the president-elect of the BSM, organized in April 2001 the On the Wake of Emancipation Campaign (OWEC), designed as “a way to bring attention to unfair and discriminatory acts on campus” against Black students.⁴²⁸ Booker created OWEC largely in response to the publication of a David Horowitz editorial which ran in *The Daily Tar Heel* (and dozens of other campus newspapers at universities across the country) as an advertisement, titled “Ten Reasons Why Reparations for Slavery is a Bad Idea—And Racist Too.”⁴²⁹ Catalyzed by the University’s lack of response to the Horowitz editorial, OWEC developed a list of fourteen demands, and on April 2nd, they marched from Saunders Hall to South Building, delivering the list to Provost Robert Shelton. Among the demands, several related directly to the history of the institution that Booker had highlighted during her leadership of SSHT, including that “The University take a more active role in the accurate depiction of the history of underrepresented groups,” that there be “Public recognition of contributions of African-Americans to the University,” and to “Restore the headstones in the Slave Cemetery.”⁴³⁰ Booker explained the similarity between OWEC’s fourteen demands and the BSM’s original 1968 demands, telling *The Daily Tar Heel* that “these are basically the same things, and we need action to be taken on them.”⁴³¹

⁴²⁸ April Bethea, “On the Wake of Emancipation,” *Black Ink*, May 2001, 8.

⁴²⁹ Jenny Fowler, “Demonstrations Storm Campus, Protest Racism At University,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, 3 April 2001, 1.

⁴³⁰ April Bethea, “On the Wake of Emancipation,” *Black Ink*, May 2001, 8.

⁴³¹ Kim Minugh and Daniel Thigpen, “Students Meet With Campus Officials to Discuss Racism at UNC,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, 9 April 2001, 1; Between the 1968 BSM Demands and the 2001 OWEC demands, Black students

Another organization, the Freedom Legacy Project (FLP), first organized by Yonni Chapman in 1995, supported the On the Wake of Emancipation Campaign in their demands. Chapman had imagined FLP to be a central resource space for social justice movements in Chapel Hill and Carrboro. In early organizational documents, the stated purposes of FLP were to “1) strengthen individuals, organizations, and movements working for social justice, 2) retrieve, preserve, and popularize the history of those who have been forced to struggle for freedom, 3) preserve and popularize the history of current freedom struggles, 4) enliven and enlarge democracy in our communities and institutions.”⁴³² Although FLP never became the non-profit social justice hub that Chapman envisioned, the organization worked to support efforts of other student and community organizations, including OWEC. Through 2000 and 2001, FLP, primarily under Chapman’s leadership, sponsored several panel discussions on institutional racism at the University and the legacy of the University’s past in maintaining structural racism on the campus landscape.⁴³³ In their support of OWEC’s fourteen demands of the University, FLP hoped “to bring attention to the lack of clear involvement of university administrators in fighting discrimination and institutional racism at UNC.”⁴³⁴ Although the fourteen demands were received by the University, they were not met, as students perhaps suspected would be the case. “Only time will tell whether or not anything will be done,” Fred Hashagen, a spokesman for

had previously issued lists of demands to the University’s administration at least three other times, in 1973, 1979, and 1997.

⁴³² Freedom Legacy Project Proposal, 11 September 1995 in the John Kenyon Chapman Papers #5441, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁴³³ Noelle Hutchins, “Panel Discusses Institutional Racism,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, 4 April 2001, 1.

⁴³⁴ April Bethea, “On the Wake of Emancipation,” *Black Ink*, May 2001, 8.

OWEC, told *The Daily Tar Heel*.⁴³⁵ As students left campus for the summer, the movement subsided.

Campaign for Historical Accuracy and Truth

Yonni Chapman, who had inspired the creation of Students Seeking Historical Truth, was able to sustain the conversation about the University's racialized campus landscape largely through his own interest in the University's history. In 2005, after returning to the University to earn a Ph.D. in History, Chapman formed another organization, the Campaign for Historical Accuracy and Truth (CHAT). Donelle Boose, a Black student and member of the class of 2006 who joined CHAT, explained that Chapman was "the impetus, brainchild behind CHAT, because he had this firm belief that people's misunderstanding about who they were was rooted in the stories they told themselves about their history."⁴³⁶ CHAT organized around similar goals of SSHT and OWEC, including "educating the Carolina community about our true history, insuring that the university tells its story without censoring either the injustices committed in its name or the contributions of historically disenfranchised groups, and using our understanding of history to strengthen movements for justice at UNC."⁴³⁷

The membership of CHAT was significantly different than its predecessors. Comprised largely of white graduate students and staff, many of them Chapman's colleagues and friends (Boose was one of the only Black members and one of the only undergraduate members of the

⁴³⁵ Jenny Fowler, "Demonstrations Storm Campus, Protest Racism At University," *The Daily Tar Heel*, 3 April 2001, 1.

⁴³⁶ Interview with Donelle Boose by Charlotte Fryar, 17 November 2017, L-0451.

⁴³⁷ Campaign for Historical Truth and Accuracy application to the Carolina Student Union, 3 November 2005 in the John Kenyon Chapman Papers #5441, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

organization), CHAT sought to use the privileges of the whiteness of their membership to bring awareness to the ways in which the institution's normative white supremacy forced Black people beyond the institution's intellectual, economic, and cultural boundaries.⁴³⁸ In this way, it was not just CHAT's white membership that marked it as a different kind of organization. It was also one of the only predominantly white organizations (perhaps along with the Southern Student Organizing Committee of the 1960s) which sought to use its own white privilege specifically for the cause of racial justice at the University.

CHAT also expanded the movement for historical truth beyond building names to highlight the history of labor movements at the University, connecting that history to contemporary labor actions. "So we had this campaign for trying to bring awareness to—I think it was 1969, that was the year of the [Foodworkers'] strike—to the student population," Boose explained. "The idea was to connect the two struggles and to celebrate people who are in the community, who are ignored, but who are with you in community every day."⁴³⁹ In this focus on the history of labor movements, CHAT partnered with the University's chapter of Student Action With Workers (SAW), which had spent much of 2005 working to support an organizing drive for Aramark employees in the University's dining halls with the Service Employees International Union.

CHAT and SAW worked together on a number of actions relating to this organizing drive and the University's backlash against Aramark employees who were active in building the union. CHAT, in its direct involvement with workers rights, differed somewhat in focus from its

⁴³⁸ Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," *Peace and Freedom Magazine*, (July/August 1989): 10-12.

⁴³⁹ Interview with Donelle Boose by Charlotte Fryar, 17 November 2017, L-0451.

predecessors, SSHT and OWEC, highlighting not just the racist history of the University, visible in building names like Saunders Hall, but also focusing on the strong legacy of Black labor movements that served as their inspiration.⁴⁴⁰ In their focus on the history of Black worker-led movements, CHAT engaged in counter-storytelling as a way to “strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance.” The counter-storytelling that they engaged in set an important precedent for future student organizers in that the history they crafted was not just a response to the “majoritarian story” of the University’s liberalism, but instead was more so a “method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told.”⁴⁴¹

While the issue of Saunders Hall itself was not an explicit focus of CHAT, the legacy of the University’s past and its operation in the collective memory of the institution certainly was. “What we wanted folks to understand with CHAT is that this is not just like, oh, we just want a plaque,” Boose said, “The plaque is irrelevant—not irrelevant but, not the point. The point is the remembering so that you can understand in this particular moment the power that you have.”⁴⁴² CHAT spent the 2005 to 2006 school year organizing to honor the leaders of the 1969 Foodworkers’ Strikes, Elizabeth Brooks and Mary Smith, with their goal being an award for Brooks and Smith and plaque placed outside of Lenoir Hall commemorating the strikes.

The organization dissolved in the fall of 2006, after Chapman defended his dissertation on the history of Black freedom and the University through the mid-twentieth century. Chapman,

⁴⁴⁰ “UNC Labor History,” UNC-CH Student Action with Workers, 2005, <<https://uncsaw.wordpress.com/unc-labor-history/>>.

⁴⁴¹ Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso, “Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 8, No. 1 (2002): 32; Lisa Ikemoto, “Furthering the inquiry: race, class, and culture in the forced medical treatment of pregnant women,” in *Critical race feminism: a reader*, ed. Adrien Wing, 136-143, (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

⁴⁴² Interview with Donelle Boose by Charlotte Fryar, 17 November 2017, L-0451.

who had always been the driving force of CHAT, died three years later, in 2009, after twenty-nine years living with cancer.⁴⁴³ Chapman was posthumously honored with his own place in the commemorative landscape of Chapel Hill with his name added to a marker on the Peace and Justice Plaza, in front of the Chapel Hill Post Office and across the street from McCorkle Place.⁴⁴⁴ Because Chapman had served for over a decade as the bridge across the four-year cycles of student life and movement-making, after his death, the movement to contest spaces of racial injustice subsided for over five years. Although Chapman had been a catalyst, leader, and advocate for many racial justice movements in Chapel Hill and across the South, his legacy for contemporary students has largely been tied to his dissertation, which mapped the long history of Black freedom striving in Chapel Hill through the mid-twentieth century, meticulously drawing connections between previous justice movements and a future for Chapel Hill directed by social justice.

While Chapman's legacy has continued through the usefulness of his dissertation, the legacy of CHAT as an organization which challenged narratives of liberalism in Chapel Hill has been mitigated by its brief tenure as a formal student organization. "I never thought about CHAT as an organization meant for permanence," Boose said. "We thought about it as a means of bringing people together with similar questions and concerns to deal with things."⁴⁴⁵ Despite being a short-lived organization, CHAT played a crucial role in expanding the dialogue surrounding the University's history to include not just buildings named for white supremacists,

⁴⁴³ John K. "Yonni" Chapman Obituary, *Raleigh News & Observer*, 25 October 2009.

⁴⁴⁴ "Peace and Justice Plaza," About Chapel Hill, Town of Chapel Hill, 2019, Accessed 6 January 2019, <<https://www.townofchapelhill.org/residents/about-chapel-hill/history/peace-and-justice-plaza>>.

⁴⁴⁵ Interview with Donelle Boose by Charlotte Fryar, 17 November 2017, L-0451.

but a broader understanding of how labor, race, and movement-making influenced the institution's past and present. When CHAT dissolved in 2006, it was clear that campus movements concerned with historical truth and racial justice meant the issue to be one that stretched across the campus and into the present, rather than one focused solely on Saunders Hall with a legacy that remained fixed in the early twentieth century. It also had firmly established the new organizing framework for racial justice movements centered around the contestation of spaces which represented and enacted white supremacy, rather than focusing on the creation of Black counter-spaces.

The Real Silent Sam Coalition Forms

In August 2011, a new organization comprised of both students and Chapel Hill and Carrboro permanent residents formed, named in opposition to the most striking monument to white supremacy on the campus, the University's Confederate Monument, known as "Silent Sam." Invoking the language of "historical accuracy" from CHAT, the Real Silent Sam Coalition (RSSC) was comprised of white and Black individuals "who are devoted to bringing historical accuracy to all members of our campus and our greater surrounding community." Through the 2011 to 2012 school year, RSSC held several demonstrations at the Confederate Monument, targeting that space in particular as one that needed historical and cultural contextualization. Although in this early iteration of RSSC, Saunders Hall was not specifically named as a space which needed contextualization or review, the group's public writings display concern for the entire campus landscape: "One cannot feel welcome on a campus whose geography is adorned with quiet but unsubtle remembrances like the names of white supremacists engraved on our

buildings, and confederate soldiers on our front lawn, so long as they boldly go unexplained and unproblematized.”⁴⁴⁶

RSSC adopted a broad spatial scope to their organizing, reasoning with evidence from the institution’s past that anti-Blackness was the University’s constitutive form of past and present place-making and that there was a demand to act on the legacies of past racial justice movements to develop an entirely new sense of place for Chapel Hill. In doing so, the 2011 to 2013 iteration of RSSC followed in the footsteps of the housekeepers movement, helping to set the foundation for future acts of reclamation—a method by which to assert ownership of the University using the history of Black freedom striving in Chapel Hill to reclaim their right to self- and place-possession from the anti-Black institution.

Organizers in RSSC drew on this history through both Chapman’s dissertation and a tour of the Black history of the campus developed and led by Tim McMillan, a white professor of African, African-American, and Diaspora Studies. McMillan described the Black and Blue Tour as “a racialized history of the University” conducted as “a walk through time and space starting at the origin point of the campus, McCorkle Place, and ending in another origin part of the town of Chapel Hill, which is the old Chapel Hill Cemetery.” The popularity of the tour, led by McMillan over a dozen times a year from 2001 to 2014, exposed hundreds of people to a counter-history of the institution as a site of enslavement and continued racial discrimination, and helped to shape students’ and workers’ access to the Black history of Chapel Hill.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁶ “Introduction to Real Silent Sam #1,” The Real Silent Sam Tumblr, 7 September 2011, Accessed 15 March 2018, <<http://realsilentsam-blog.tumblr.com/post/31088763648/introduction-to-real-silent-sam-1>>.

⁴⁴⁷ Interview with Tim McMillan by Charlotte Fryar, 29 November 2017, L-0462.

On February 15, 2012, RSSC delivered to the seemingly progressive chancellor Holden Thorp and the Board of Trustees their first list of demands, which targeted the University's Confederate Monument as one example of broadly experienced anti-Blackness on the campus landscape. RSSC called for "the establishment of a 'memorial review' process which...will serve as a model for evaluating other monuments and buildings on campus," with the goal that continual review would "encourage constant dialogue and critical thought, in keeping with the mission of the university."⁴⁴⁸ After initially signaling to RSSC that he would consider their demands, Thorp demurred, suggesting only one possibility: a plaque to be placed on the University's Unsung Founders Memorial, which recognizes "the people of color bound and free, who helped build the Carolina that we cherish today."⁴⁴⁹

This proposed solution was not what the members of RSSC had in mind. Thorp's suggestion, though likely intended as an enlightened solution to the issue, was actually an example of the institution's practice of containing Black identities. By proposing that a commemorative plaque be placed on the Unsung Founders Memorial, Thorp signaled his support for constraints to be placed around any further potential recognition of the institution's white supremacy, which Aubrey Kobayashi and Linda Peake explain "is indicated less by its explicit racism than by the fact that it ignores, or even denies, racist indications."⁴⁵⁰ Thorp, in denying

⁴⁴⁸ "Real Silent Sam Proposal, Delivered to Chancellor Thorp, Feb 15, 2012," The Real Silent Sam Tumblr, 15 February 2012, Accessed 15 March 2018, <<http://realsilentsam-blog.tumblr.com/post/31088763648/introduction-to-real-silent-sam-1>>.

⁴⁴⁹ Unsung Founders Memorial, UNC (Chapel Hill), Commemorative Landscapes of North Carolina, Documenting the American South, Accessed 8 March 2018, <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/commland/monument/45/>>.

⁴⁵⁰ Aubrey Kobayashi and Linda Peake, "Racism out of place: thoughts on whiteness and an antiracist geography in the new millennium," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90, No. 2 (2000): 394.

RSSC's claims that the whole campus landscape reflected the institution's racist past and present, reified and protected the institution's white supremacy.

Many of the early student organizers in RSSC—including three women of color who had led the organization, Zaina Alsous, Nicole Campbell, and Kristen Maye—graduated from the University in 2012 or 2013, leaving behind a movement unclear on where it should next try to target its goals for historical accuracy. “By my sophomore year, I was the only student in Real Silent Sam Coalition,” Blanche Brown, a white student remembered. Brown, who wanted to keep the movement going, knew that “the biggest thing that needed to happen was getting students mobilized and involved again.” She turned to friends and classmates, and “then it became Taylor Webber-Fields, Omololu Babatunde...and me.” Through the fall semester of 2013, the three friends began to build the coalition again, and “slowly,” Brown explained, “we just built up interest and just had actions and reached out.”⁴⁵¹ As RSSC expanded its membership, it did so with a purposeful horizontal leadership model, so that students could come in and out of the organization as their movement continued.

In the spring of 2014, RSSC made the strategic choice to focus their efforts for the semester on Saunders Hall, instead of the Confederate Monument. “It’s less divisive than dealing with Silent Sam,” Brown explained to *The Daily Tar Heel* in April 2014. “We have the chance to win.”⁴⁵² Mars Earle, who began attending RSSC meetings in the fall of 2013, remembered that “Saunders was a really strategic choice in that there is just so much easily found direct evidence of the racism that we’re accusing him of...It just really was something that felt like we can make

⁴⁵¹ Interview with Blanche Brown by Charlotte Fryar, 15 April 2015, L-0454.

⁴⁵² Julia Craven, “Students Call on trustees to Rename Saunders Hall,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, 24 April 2014.

this case, and really be able to articulate it so simply and so easily with evidence from their [the University's] own records for every single point."⁴⁵³ To make their case to the student body, RSSC employed a number of different direct action methods, including "banner drops...taking over the Pit and literally using our bodies as reminders and eulogies for folks. There were countless, countless, countless marches and press conferences, sit-ins. And it was never ending."⁴⁵⁴ Like Students Seeking Historical Truth, RSSC employed performance art as a strategy of direct action, because as Brown explained, "that's how we engage people who aren't maybe aware of a lot of things and how we engage with students."⁴⁵⁵

Although the movement continued to grow, some members of RSSC remained pessimistic that the Board of Trustees, the governing body who had the ability to change the names of buildings, would ever rename Saunders Hall, even after RSSC was asked to present to trustees at a May 2014 meeting. In response to RSSC's presentation to the Board, trustees promised to consider the renaming of Saunders Hall, but did not take the issue up in committee meetings that summer. "That is the tactic," Brown explained. "We presented to the Board of Trustees last May [in 2014], and they were like, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah. We'll get back to you.' Nothing for a year until we made a huge, giant, public stink about it."⁴⁵⁶

When RSSC students returned to campus in the fall, their cause was bolstered by the emergence of the national Black Lives Matter movement in the wake of events in August 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri, where a white police officer murdered Michael Brown, an unarmed Black

⁴⁵³ Interview with Mars Earle by Charlotte Fryar, 2 March 2018, L-0457.

⁴⁵⁴ Interview with Mars Earle by Charlotte Fryar, 2 March 2018, L-0457.

⁴⁵⁵ Interview with Blanche Brown by Charlotte Fryar, 15 April 2015, L-0454.

⁴⁵⁶ Interview with Blanche Brown by Charlotte Fryar, 15 April 2015, L-0454.

teenager. With a focus still on renaming Saunders Hall, RSSC took on a new meaning for many Black students looking for a place to discuss anti-Black violence happening in the country and on their campus. “I just think that we were having an ongoing conversation that wasn’t happening in other spaces, so when people were feeling upset about police brutality, when people were feeling upset about all of these different things that were happening, it was almost like we were a go-to space,” Taylor Webber-Fields explained. “People knew that if you wanted to have a hard conversation, this was going to be a place that you could do it.”⁴⁵⁷ RSSC drew directly on the legacy of prior racial justice movements while they built their campaign. “I think a lot of CHAT, and Students Seeking Historical Accuracy [sic]. I was thinking a lot about Yonni Chapman, whose work has been huge, . . . building the Stone Center, students organized around that and raised money themselves to have the Sonja Haynes Stone Center,” remembered Blanche Brown.⁴⁵⁸

The 2013 to 2015 iteration of RSSC also became the first organization in the history of racial justice movements at the University to explicitly use Black feminist theory to support their movement, organizing against multiple connected forms of injustice. Practitioners of Black feminism, explained in the Combahee River Collective Statement in 1977, “are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as [their] particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking.”⁴⁵⁹ RSSC, in synthesizing multiple systematic

⁴⁵⁷ Interview with Taylor Webber-Fields by Charlotte Fryar, 29 November 2017, L-0468.

⁴⁵⁸ Interview with Blanche Brown by Charlotte Fryar, 15 April 2015, L-0454.

⁴⁵⁹ The Combahee River Collective, “The Combahee River Collective Statement,” in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the case for Socialist Feminism*, ed. Zillah Eisenstein, 362-372, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978).

processes of enacting oppression as the target of their movement, championed a distinct kind of liberation politics at the University. In this way, RSSC shared their practice of liberation politics with that of the developing national Black Lives Matter movement, which “affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, Black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women, and all Black lives along the gender spectrum.”⁴⁶⁰

For some Black members of RSSC, practicing Black feminism meant supporting their peers and friends through intentional healing practices as they experienced discrimination on the campus. “Just individually the ways that we learned to organize as an united front and prioritize healing and prioritize the leadership of women and femmes, I think that really influenced and then directed the folks that were organizing together,” said Mars Earle.⁴⁶¹ For other Black members, the liberation politics that emerged from the community of student organizers within RSSC shifted directly towards the understanding of how interlocking forms of oppression operated within the institution. Omololu Babatunde explained that members of the movement began to “think about what is inter-communalism and what does it mean that, yes, we’re organizing around our Blackness and the way that we’ve been dispossessed, particularly here in this location of our Blackness, but how that aligns with all the different ways that we are being dispossessed all the time, and we have to align with each other.”⁴⁶²

For Shannon Brien, a white supporter of RSSC, understanding interlocking oppressions meant thinking about the movement as “intersectional in so much as that current campus

⁴⁶⁰ About, Black Lives Matter, Accessed 7 January 2019, <<https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>>.

⁴⁶¹ Interview with Mars Earle by Charlotte Fryar, 2 March 2018, L-0457.

⁴⁶² Interview with Omololu Babatunde by Charlotte Fryar, 1 December 2017, L-0449.

organizing is anti-racist and anti-capitalist, and tries to center queer folks and trans folks. It's focusing on all of these things at the same time."⁴⁶³ Regardless of the form that RSSC's liberation politics took on for students individually, it is important to recognize the organization as the first to explicitly take a Black feminist approach to the "interlocking" forms of oppression within the institution, a framework that continues to direct racial justice movements in Chapel Hill.⁴⁶⁴

That fall, as RSSC's membership continued to grow, the University-appointed independent investigator Kenneth Wainstein issued what became known as the Wainstein Report. This document appeared to be the final report on the University's academic-athletic scandal, a controversy of alleged fraud and academic dishonesty involving several of the University's athletic programs and academic departments over two decades. The scandal had begun to unspool in 2010 with reports of academic fraud involving a tutor in the athletic department's academic support program, but as institutional whistle-blowers came forward and the University sanctioned several independent investigations, it became clear that faculty and administrators across several academic and athletic programs had participated to varying degrees of culpability in helping student athletes maintain academic eligibility.⁴⁶⁵

But the Wainstein Report named the African and African-American Studies (AFAM) Department as the sole location of academic impropriety across the campus, where two individuals, the report argued, executed a master scheme to defraud over three thousand students

⁴⁶³ Interview with Shannon Brien by Charlotte Fryar, 5 May 2015, L-0453.

⁴⁶⁴ The Combahee River Collective, "The Combahee River Collective Statement," In *Capitalist Patriarchy and the case for Socialist Feminism*, ed. Zillah Eisenstein, 362-372, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978).

⁴⁶⁵ Dan Kane, "UNC tolerated cheating, says insider Mary Willingham," *Raleigh News & Observer*, 17 November 2012.

of their education by allowing them to take “nonexistent classes” for academic credit. The department underwent deep scrutiny and condemnation as an academic field of study, though the “paper classes” had been arranged by only two individuals in the department and supported by staff members and administrators across the campus.⁴⁶⁶ Reginald Hildebrand, who taught in the department for over two decades, explained how the institution’s inherent anti-Blackness allowed for AFAM to become an object of attack, stating that AFAM “would not have taken the bounce it did if, somehow, in the background, we weren’t talking about what people perceive to be a Black department, a Black subject, and Black athletes.”⁴⁶⁷ By prioritizing the reputation of the athletic department in their investigations, the University created the conditions for AFAM to be widely vilified across the institution and in national media coverage of the scandal.

Tim McMillan, who had developed the Black and Blue Tour with his students in the AFAM Department, resigned for his involvement in the scandal, but many students in AFAM suspected that McMillan had been scapegoated for his role in helping to make public the University’s historic involvement in the systemic subjugation of Black citizens in Chapel Hill through the tour.⁴⁶⁸ Soon after McMillan’s resignation, the UNC Visitor’s Center began offering a “Black and Blue Tour” through their Priceless Gem walking tour series, now led by another white lecturer, Robert Porter, in the former AFAM Department, renamed in 2015 as the African, African-American, and Diaspora Studies (AAAD) Department. While the institutional tour offered many of the highlights of McMillan’s tour, it appeared to some Black students to be a

⁴⁶⁶ Sarah Lydall, “UNC Investigation Reveals Athletes Took Fake Classes,” *The New York Times*, 22 October 2014.

⁴⁶⁷ Interview with Reginald Hildebrand by Charlotte Fryar, 27 March 2017, L-0460.

⁴⁶⁸ Evan Semones, “Tim McMillan resigns amid fallout from Weinstein report,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, 6 January 2015.

diluted and institutionally affirmative version of the original tour.⁴⁶⁹ As the institutional tour continued, members of RSSC began to offer their own tour of the campus landscape, modeled after McMillan’s original tour but incorporating new histories of institutional anti-Blackness, including the defamation of the AAAD Department. In doing so, Black students engaged in another form of counter-storytelling, making clear the connections between the anti-Blackness in the University’s past with that of its present.⁴⁷⁰

In response to the accusations circling in national and local media publications which disparaged the AAAD Department, RSSC organized a “Speaking Back to The Wainstein Report” rally in support of AAAD and the mentoring that Black students received from the faculty in the department. The rally, as described by Webber-Fields, “was just such a critical moment because overall the whole moment was for restoring voice, changing the narrative, and laying claims to space.”⁴⁷¹ For Mars Earle, the yet unarticulated but underlying purpose of RSSC became clear following the Wainstein rally, during which dozens of Black students described what it felt like to be a Black student on the campus within the dominant culture of white supremacy: “Real Silent Sam became a place of okay, all these things are really intersecting around this issue of taking back space.”⁴⁷²

Webber-Fields’s and Earle’s use of the language of “taking back space” and “laying claims to space” both introduce the act of reclamation of campus spaces within the spatial logic of the University as a place directed not by the narrative of the University’s liberalism, but by the

⁴⁶⁹ Interview with Omololu Babatunde by Charlotte Fryar, 1 December 2017, L-0449.

⁴⁷⁰ Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso, “Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 8, No. 1 (2002): 23-44.

⁴⁷¹ Interview with Taylor Webber-Fields by Charlotte Fryar, 29 November 2017, L-0468.

⁴⁷² Interview with Mars Earle by Charlotte Fryar, 2 March 2018, L-0457.

history of Black freedom striving in Chapel Hill. Like the Housekeepers Association's "Modest Proposal," members of RSSC were beginning to articulate in their public discourse a new approach to organizing, distinct from previous efforts focused on either creation or contestation of space. The reclamation of space involves an assertion of ownership over the socio-spatial dimensions of the institution's history and a conviction of self- and place-possession within and against the white supremacist institution. RSSC, in these beginning efforts at the reclamation of the University, was also beginning to shape a new campaign around the concept of the reclamation of the history of Black freedom striving at the University, which they identified as particularly resonant in one individual: the Black writer, folklorist, and activist, Zora Neale Hurston.

"UNC Calls for Hurston Hall"

At the beginning of the spring semester of 2015, the movement built by RSSC reached "a fever pitch," as Webber-Fields described it.⁴⁷³ On January 30, 2015, over one hundred students marched from the Pit to the Confederate Monument, rallying not just to remove Saunders's name from the building, but to rename the building Hurston Hall, in honor of Zora Neale Hurston. "At that time," Babatunde explained, "Black students at UNC from all different populations—Black Greek life, all different Black students from BS[M], from different sects of Black UNC communities—were together organizing, and it was under *umoya* [Swahili for unity]...and everyone there had decided it was Hurston Hall."⁴⁷⁴ In 1939, over a decade before the formal desegregation of the University, Hurston, while working as a professor in the Drama Department at the North Carolina College for Negroes (now North Carolina Central University), audited a

⁴⁷³ Interview with Taylor Webber-Fields by Charlotte Fryar, 29 November 2017, L-0468.

⁴⁷⁴ Interview with Omololu Babatunde by Charlotte Fryar, 1 December 2017, L-0449.

class at the University of North Carolina taught by Drama professor Paul Green. When a white undergraduate complained about her presence on the campus, Green moved the class to his home.⁴⁷⁵ By invoking Hurston's name and sharing her story to oppose the public narrative of the University's liberalism, Black students engaged in counter-storytelling, exposing and challenging the white supremacy enacted by white students and administrators.⁴⁷⁶

Students identified Hurston as the first Black student at the University, though there was no formal archival proof in the University registrar or elsewhere that she had been enrolled.⁴⁷⁷ "Potentially we could have pulled a Pauli Murray Hall because there's documentation," Babatunde said. "We could have made a case for it. There's no *way* the administration would *ever* put Hurston on that building, there's absolutely no way, because it just wasn't legible to them."⁴⁷⁸ The concept of replacing the name of a leader of the Ku Klux Klan with that of one of the nation's most famous Black writers and scholars was a powerful notion of reclamation, a strategy by which Black students could reclaim a space previously inscribed to the legacy of white supremacy as a space which would commemorate Hurston. By invoking the name "Hurston Hall" when identifying the building, the act became for RSSC members and supporters a way for themselves to reclaim, not just the space itself, but the history of the institution as directed by the powerful legacy of Black freedom striving in Chapel Hill.

⁴⁷⁵ "'Black and Blue' tour traces Carolina's racial history," *University Gazette*, 11 February 2014, <<https://gazette.unc.edu/2014/02/11/black-and-blue-tour-traces-carolinas-racial-history/>>.

⁴⁷⁶ Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso, "Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 8, No. 1 (2002): 23-44.

⁴⁷⁷ "'Black and Blue' tour traces Carolina's racial history," *University Gazette*, 11 February 2014, <<https://gazette.unc.edu/2014/02/11/black-and-blue-tour-traces-carolinas-racial-history/>>.

⁴⁷⁸ Interview with Omololu Babatunde by Charlotte Fryar, 1 December 2017, L-0449.

While no formal documentation existed to support the claim that Hurston had been the first Black student at the University, Blanche Brown found an historical document that she thought could transform the movement to remove Saunders's name from the building. "In the University Archives, there is a specific section just for the Board of Trustees," she explained. "I looked at the year that Saunders Hall was dedicated. And it sort of goes through the whole building process, and then it has the meeting where they decided that they would name it after Saunders, and they had this sort of resume of his that they used to justify the naming...The second thing listed was that he was head of the North Carolina Ku Klux Klan." This was conclusive proof that the University's Board of Trustees had named the building in honor William Saunders, not in spite of his activities in the Ku Klux Klan, but because of them. "So that was a really big thing," Brown remembered. "My heart just leapt with joy, because I was like, 'When people see this document, there is no way that they will think that we can leave this building the way it is.'"⁴⁷⁹ Brown's discovery in Wilson Library's University Archives followed the archival path advanced by Yonni Chapman and Kristi Booker, both of whom had used the institution's own archive as a tool to transform the institution.

Through the rest of the spring semester of 2015, support for RSSC's cause grew, as more predominantly white organizations, including the Campus Y and Student Government, stated their support for the removal of Saunders's name from the building.⁴⁸⁰ In March 2015, the University's Board of Trustees issued a call to the University's students, faculty, and staff to submit opinions to the Board on the renaming of Saunders Hall. As the issue continued to grow,

⁴⁷⁹ Interview with Blanche Brown by Charlotte Fryar, 15 April 2015, L-0454.

⁴⁸⁰ "Renaming of Saunders Hall: Campus Y Cabinet Statement," UNC Campus Y, 23 April 2015, Accessed 1 November 2018, <<http://campus-y.unc.edu/news/campus-y-cabinet-statement-renaming-saunders-hall>>.

the crucial role that RSSC had played in making the issue known and providing historical documentation seemed to be forgotten in the weeks before the April 2015 Board of Trustees meeting, when there would be a discussion on the issue of renaming Saunders Hall.⁴⁸¹ Three members of RSSC—Taylor Webber-Fields, Omololu Babatunde, and Dylan Su-Chan Mott—spoke to the trustees in addition to a representative from the UNC Young Republicans and faculty from the School of Law and the History Department.⁴⁸² “We were the entertainment piece of that Board of Trustees meeting,” Webber-Fields remembered, “The whole thing was weird. It was almost like people were settling in with their popcorn, like ‘Oh, what are they going to do?’”⁴⁸³

For the individual students that had spent over two years organizing direct actions of every kind, being invited to the Board of Trustees meeting, having already publicly argued for the importance of the issue, was demeaning. “Students did history, got documents, put an argument together, got it to you, and now you are constructing [the renaming of Saunders] for us,” Babatunde stated regarding the faculty member from History who presented before the trustees at the April meeting.⁴⁸⁴ The co-opting of Black student labor in the research and interpretation of the issue demonstrated that the institution regarded Black students as property, from which labor, even intellectual labor, could be withdrawn, without mention of the students’

⁴⁸¹ Interview with Omololu Babatunde by Charlotte Fryar, 1 December 2017, L-0449.

⁴⁸² Board of Trustee Meeting Minutes, Board of Trustees Archives, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, April 2015, <https://bot.unc.edu/files/2015/04/UNC-BOT-Saunders-Hall-Transcription-edit_RH.pdf>.

⁴⁸³ Interview with Taylor Webber-Fields by Charlotte Fryar, 29 November 2017, L-0468.

⁴⁸⁴ Interview with Omololu Babatunde by Charlotte Fryar, 1 December 2017, L-0449.

research and reasoning.⁴⁸⁵ Citing the scholarly work of Yonni Chapman, RSSC students presenting to the trustees demonstrated the clear connections between the University's relationship to anti-Black violence in its past and in its present. For almost two decades, they explained, students had revealed the ways in which the movement around Saunders Hall was about more "than just renaming a building. This movement is about the future of this university. It is about facing the violent, racial history of UNC Chapel Hill, of the State of North Carolina and of the United States."⁴⁸⁶

White-Washing History With Carolina Hall

On May 28, 2015, the Board of Trustees voted to pass three resolutions. Led by Trustees Alston Gardner and Chuck Duckett, they explained the principles that had led their decision-making. All solutions to the issue of Saunders Hall had to:

- "Be grounded in evidence and research
- Be focused on teaching and learning
- Be careful not to impose today's social norms on the past
- Not hide the unpleasant aspects of our history
- Be accurate, complete, and accessible
- Be practical and sustainable for future generations
- Lastly, must include clear responsibility for execution."

These principles are key to understanding the outcome of the three resolutions, particularly that the solutions "be grounded in evidence and research" and that the trustees "be careful not to impose today's social norms on the past." In accordance with these principles, the trustees called for: the creation of a Chancellor's Task Force on UNC-Chapel Hill History (without mention of

⁴⁸⁵ T. Elon Dancy, Kirsten T. Edwards, and James Earl Davis, "Historically White Universities and Plantation Politics: Anti-Blackness and Higher Education in the Black Lives Matter Era," *Urban Education* 53, No. 2 (2018): 186-187.

⁴⁸⁶ Board of Trustee Meeting Minutes, Board of Trustees Archives, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, April 2015, <https://bot.unc.edu/files/2015/04/UNC-BOT-Saunders-Hall-Transcription-edit_RH.pdf>.

the 1998 Commemorative Commission, created as a result of the housekeepers' settlement, and an obvious predecessor to the new Task Force); the renaming of Saunders Hall to Carolina Hall, while also "recogniz[ing] and appreciat[ing] Mr. Saunders [sic] many contributions to UNC and the State of North Carolina;" and a sixteen-year freeze on "renaming historical buildings, monuments, memorials, and landscapes."⁴⁸⁷

Several trustees cited the document found by Blanche Brown in University Archives—the 1920 meeting minutes of the University's Board of Trustees that listed Saunders's participation in the Ku Klux Klan—as the motivating factor in their vote to rename the building. "The deciding factor for Trustee Clay," the 2015 meeting notes read, "hinged on the historical record of the 1920 Board [of Trustees] having cited Saunders' leadership of the KKK as a qualifying factor." Trustee Sallie Shuping-Russell stated that until finding these meeting minutes in the archives, "there was no record to be found, at least at the University, of his leadership in the organization [of the Ku Klux Klan]." The document found by Brown had forced trustees to confront the institution's widespread investment in white supremacy as one of its foundational values. But in the trustees' resolutions there was a singular focus on Saunders himself, which ignored the reality that there were other landmarks within the campus landscape that would show the "unpleasant aspects of our history," signaling the trustees' unwillingness to truly address the institution's white supremacy.⁴⁸⁸

By fixating on Saunders, trustees fortified the University's racist history and current racialized processes, thereby reinforcing the racial binding of the campus landscape to exclude

⁴⁸⁷ Board of Trustee Meeting Minutes, Board of Trustees Archives, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 28 May 2015, <<https://bot.unc.edu/files/2013/07/May-Minutes-signed.pdf>>.

⁴⁸⁸ Board of Trustee Meeting Minutes, Board of Trustees Archives, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 28 May 2015, <<https://bot.unc.edu/files/2013/07/May-Minutes-signed.pdf>>.

and discriminate against Chapel Hill's Black citizens. By creating a boundary around the issue, the trustees demonstrated the way in which the University maintains the cultural paradigm of "diversity without justice" by constricting any social movement which challenges the white supremacy of the institution and the campus.⁴⁸⁹ Although Trustee Cochrane (one of three trustees who voted against the renaming of the building) stated that "the issue here was about more than a name — that it is also about history, education, and explanation," it was clear that the trustees' focus on the tangible proof that Saunders had been the head of the state's Ku Klux Klan missed the larger point that student organizers in RSSC had made since 2011: "We cannot pick and choose which histories we explore, the history of our campus is the history of students, it is the history of workers, it is the history of this town."⁴⁹⁰

Although RSSC organizers had wanted the removal of Saunders's name from the building, "the moratorium [on renaming] was just an extra slap in the face," Mars Earle explained. "And the really beige naming of Carolina Hall, particularly since their pushback on Hurston, as a name, was really dismissive of her as a person and why the coalition had chosen that name in the first place—an uplifting and visibility of particularly Black women on UNC's campus."⁴⁹¹ Other students were just as furious as Earle at the trustees' decision. "I was livid when I heard about that sixteen year freeze and even more so pissed when I heard that they changed it to Carolina Hall," Michelle Brown, a graduate of 2018 said. "Every nook, cranny, and

⁴⁸⁹ John K. Chapman, *Black Freedom and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1793-1960*, (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006), 191.

⁴⁹⁰ Board of Trustee Meeting Minutes, Board of Trustees Archives, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 28 May 2015, <<https://bot.unc.edu/files/2013/07/May-Minutes-signed.pdf>>; "Introduction to Real Silent Sam #1," The Real Silent Sam Tumblr, 7 September 2011, Accessed 15 March 2018, <<http://realsilentsam-blog.tumblr.com/post/31088763648/introduction-to-real-silent-sam-1>>.

⁴⁹¹ Interview with Mars Earle by Charlotte Fryar, 2 March 2018, L-0457.

brick on this campus is named for somebody. Y'all can't think of one name to name that whole building after other than Carolina Hall?"⁴⁹²

The refusal to acknowledge Zora Neale Hurston was explained by trustees by the fact that the students' claim that she was the University's first Black student was not "grounded in evidence and research."⁴⁹³ The obsession with historical fact apparently only to be found through archival documents housed at the University belied an historical reality supported through secondary materials and widespread support from Black and white Chapel Hill citizens. All three of the trustees' resolutions—the neutral naming of Carolina Hall, the creation of a Chancellor's Task Force on UNC-Chapel Hill History, and the sixteen-year freeze on renaming elements of the landscape—seemed designed to quell future movements that might contest the University's anti-Blackness. "It just spoke volumes to what this University was willing to value and more than that, what people were willing to defend," Michelle Brown said. "With William Saunders Hall, they were willing to change that one name and meet that demand, but immediately turned around and reminded us that we are minorities, we are without power, and that we need to be silenced by saying there is a sixteen year freeze...So give up now and stop asking too much."⁴⁹⁴

A subsequent exhibit placed in Carolina Hall in the fall of 2016, curated by members of the Chancellor's Task Force on UNC-Chapel Hill History aimed to provide "a frank examination of our past, including the long and bloody battle over race and democracy that occurred in North Carolina following the end of the Civil War," and "to point to the value of historical study in

⁴⁹² Interview with Michelle Brown by Charlotte Fryar, 2 March 2018, L-0456.

⁴⁹³ Board of Trustee Meeting Minutes, Board of Trustees Archives, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 28 May 2015, <<https://bot.unc.edu/files/2013/07/May-Minutes-signed.pdf>>.

⁴⁹⁴ Interview with Michelle Brown by Charlotte Fryar, 2 March 2018, L-0456.

making a better university for today and tomorrow.”⁴⁹⁵ After a thorough examination of North Carolina’s white supremacist movements through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the exhibit ends with a short summary of the organizing that students had done around the issue of Saunders Hall, grouping together Students Seeking Historical Truth and the Real Silent Sam Coalition, and excluding mention of Yonni Chapman. This exclusion of Chapman was experienced deeply by contemporary students, even those who had never known him, but had learned from his scholarship. “It is the work that that exhibition should have been, because that’s the legacy,” Babatunde said. This section of the exhibit, the first attempt by scholars to provide context for the student organizing that had resulted in the removal of William Saunders’s name from the building, Babatunde explained, was just “about student activism...but we weren’t being student activists; we were deciding that we were not going to participate in the roles that we were given...so if you’re going to have an exhibition...why don’t you talk about how did people start to think that they could even instantiate a Hurston Hall?”⁴⁹⁶

Babatunde’s explanation highlights an important way in which “student activism” can be appropriated by the University to support the superficial ideological and racial diversity of the institution, without making adjustments to the hegemonic culture which denies justice for Black Chapel Hill citizens. The University plagiarized students’ labor as organizers against the anti-Black institution in the institution’s retelling of the way in which it had “confronted” the history of Saunders Hall, in effect falsely performing its own anti-racism.⁴⁹⁷ As scholar Sara Ahmed

⁴⁹⁵ “Changing the Name—Learning from the Past, Seeking A Just Future,” The Carolina Hall Story, Accessed 16 July 2018, <<https://carolinahallstory.unc.edu/changing-the-name-carolina-hall-story/>>.

⁴⁹⁶ Interview with Omololu Babatunde by Charlotte Fryar, 1 December 2017, L-0449.

⁴⁹⁷ “Changing the Name—Learning from the Past, Seeking A Just Future,” The Carolina Hall Story, Accessed 16 July 2018, <<https://carolinahallstory.unc.edu/changing-the-name-carolina-hall-story/>>.

explains, “when anti-racism provides a discourse of organizational pride, then racism is not recognized and is enacted in the mode of nonrecognition.” By using students’ labor to support the institution’s “organizational pride,” rendered through the celebration of its diversity and even ostensible anti-racism, the University ignored the students’ claims on their own history and labor.⁴⁹⁸ The University’s refusal to use the exhibition space in Saunders Hall to recognize the full legacy of student organizing that had led to the building’s renaming allowed the institution to render its racism as a facet of its past, instead of acknowledging anti-Blackness as a central value of its present.

Legacy of Saunders Hall and Hurston Hall

Although the stone tablet on the building’s facade that once read “Saunders Hall” was covered with another tablet reading “Carolina Hall,” the dual legacies of Saunders Hall and Hurston Hall remain within the institution. Neither name has faded from use as a name for the building, displaying a division in the collective memory of the University which mirrors the overall campus landscape—though there are some physical representations of the successes of racial justice campus movements, the campus and the institution remain dedicated to the support of white supremacy in order to maintain “cultural and moral legitimacy, and political and economic hegemony.”⁴⁹⁹ Even without its name etched in stone, Saunders Hall exists as a symbol of white supremacy, still visible across the campus landscape and experienced widely within the institution.

⁴⁹⁸ Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity In Institutional Life*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 145.

⁴⁹⁹ Clyde Woods, *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*, (London: Verso, 1998), 158.

The University sought to contain within the name of Saunders Hall the entirety of the campus landscape, which broadly reflects and enacts racial inequities, but the Black student-led contestation of Saunders reflected instead a deep understanding of the history of the University as a site for state-sanctioned anti-Black violence. By 2014, when RSSC began organizing to rename Saunders Hall, they drew on the history of student-led organizing in SSHT, OWEC, and CHAT to engage in counter-storytelling, sharing the long history of Black freedom striving in Chapel Hill and the University's repression of Black student and worker-led movements. The history crafted by the students who contested the space of Saunders Hall has become crucial to the continued reclamation of the University, particularly in the recent movement against what was formerly the most obvious monument to white supremacy on the campus, the Confederate Monument.

Although the name Hurston Hall most clearly reflects the memory of the powerful storyteller and scholar, Zora Neale Hurston, it perhaps most potently orients future organizers towards the potential offered by an approach to organizing based on the reclamation of the University. The legacy of Hurston Hall advances for future organizers the powerful act of Black self-possession against the University's white supremacy and an assertion of ownership over the socio-spatial dimensions of Chapel Hill. The resilience of student organizers and their successes in crafting a counter-history of the space to challenge the boundaries placed by trustees around Saunders Hall displayed the fragility of the University's racialized campus landscape and the potentials for the reclamation of the University as a place owned by all campus actors.⁵⁰⁰

⁵⁰⁰ Daniel Trudeau, "Politics of belonging in the construction of landscapes: place-making, boundary-drawing and exclusion," *cultural geographies* 13, No. 1 (2006): 437.