

Material Histories: The Memorial Landscape of UNC

Created by Rachel Ciampoli for GEOG 423, Spring 2023

Format: 50-75 min. Class (depending on inclusion of additional activity), minimum 8 students (requires group work), in-classroom and outside activities

Subjects: campus history, enslavement, memorials/monuments, public history, archival research, oral history, commemoration, African American history, Chapel Hill

Related Disciplines: History, Art History, Geography, American Studies, African and African American Diaspora, Anthropology, Library Science

Framework

This lesson is designed to engage students in close-looking exercises of UNC's built environment, particularly the memorial landscape on campus. Students will learn more about the history of UNC's monuments through primary and secondary source texts and direct observation. The readings and activity can serve as a supplement to a larger course unit or theme.

Objectives

1. Discuss the politics of memorializing histories of enslavement as outlined in the assigned readings
2. Closely examine physical/material manifestations of commemoration on UNC's campus through the following monuments—Unsung Founders, Bond and Free; Caldwell Monument; Memorial to Founding Trustees; Silent Sam
3. Interrogate tension/differences between past events, recorded history, and memorialization efforts within UNC

Readings

- Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1-14.
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/241115>.
- Geeta Kapur, "A Note to the Reader", "Preface", and "New Hope Chapel Hill," in *To Drink From the Well: The Struggle for Racial Equality at the Nation's Oldest Public University* (North Carolina: Blair/Carolina Wren Press, 2021), xiii-33.
<https://login.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=2628920&site=ehost-live&ebv=EK&ppid=Page--32>.
- Marian Cheek Jackson, "On her occupational history, family history, and parents", 6:41-7:42:
<https://fromtherockwall.org/oral-histories/marian-jackson-4>.
- Kemp P. Battle (UNC University President), "An Address on The History of The Buildings of The University of North Carolina," (Delivered on University Day, 1883):
<https://docsouth.unc.edu/unc/battle/battle.html>.
- Renée Ater, "The Challenge of Memorializing Slavery in North Carolina: The Unsung Founders Memorial and the North Carolina Freedom Memorial Project," in *Politics of Memory: Making*

Slavery Visible in the Public Space, ed. Ana Lucia Araujo (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), 141-156. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/lib/unc/detail.action?docID=1092792>

Readings Discussion

- In her essay, "Venus in Two Acts", Hartman coined the phrase "critical fabulations." How does she define this term? Why did she feel the need to invent this strategy?
- Geeta Kapur also engages in critical fabulation. How does she use it in her work? How does it change or inform our understanding of the official records of campus history?
- Who is missing from official campus histories and commemorations? Who or what is not represented in the archive?
- What challenges to the commemoration of enslavement does Ater highlight in her chapter? Why does she choose to focus on the Unsung Founders memorial? What can we learn about acts of memorialization from the sculpture and Ater's interpretation of it?

Small Group Work—Campus Monuments

Print 4 copies of the activity below and highlight one monument per copy. Have students break into small groups and distribute the activity. Refer to the Campus Map and Notes on Campus Monuments in the Appendix to supplement this activity

In your group, visit the site of one of the following campus monuments: **Unsung Founders, Bond and Free; Caldwell Monument; Memorial to Founding Trustees; Silent Sam** and respond to the prompts below. You can visit [The Carolina Story: The Virtual Museum of University History](#) or [DocSouth's Commemorative Landscapes](#) to learn more about each individual monument.

1. Describe the formal elements of the monument. What does it look like? What material is it made from? Notice the surface texture, size/scale, figurative or symbolic elements.
2. What is the subject matter of the monument? Who or what is being commemorated?
3. Is there any text on or near the monument? How is it displayed (inscribed, additional plaque, etc.)? What does the text tell you about the purpose of the monument?
4. Where is this monument located? What effect does the surrounding landscape/built environment have on your viewing?
5. Does this monument invite participation or engagement? How?
6. How does this monument/its site relate to public memory and history (of UNC? Of North Carolina? Of the American South?)

Ask each group to share what they found and provide additional context for the monuments from the Notes on Campus Monuments.

- Silent Sam is no longer present on this campus and therefore no longer part of the built environment of the school. Can we still consider him part of the commemorative landscape? Why or why not?

- How do your observations compare to the information from Renée Ater's chapter and this information from The Carolina Story? What questions or thoughts do you have?

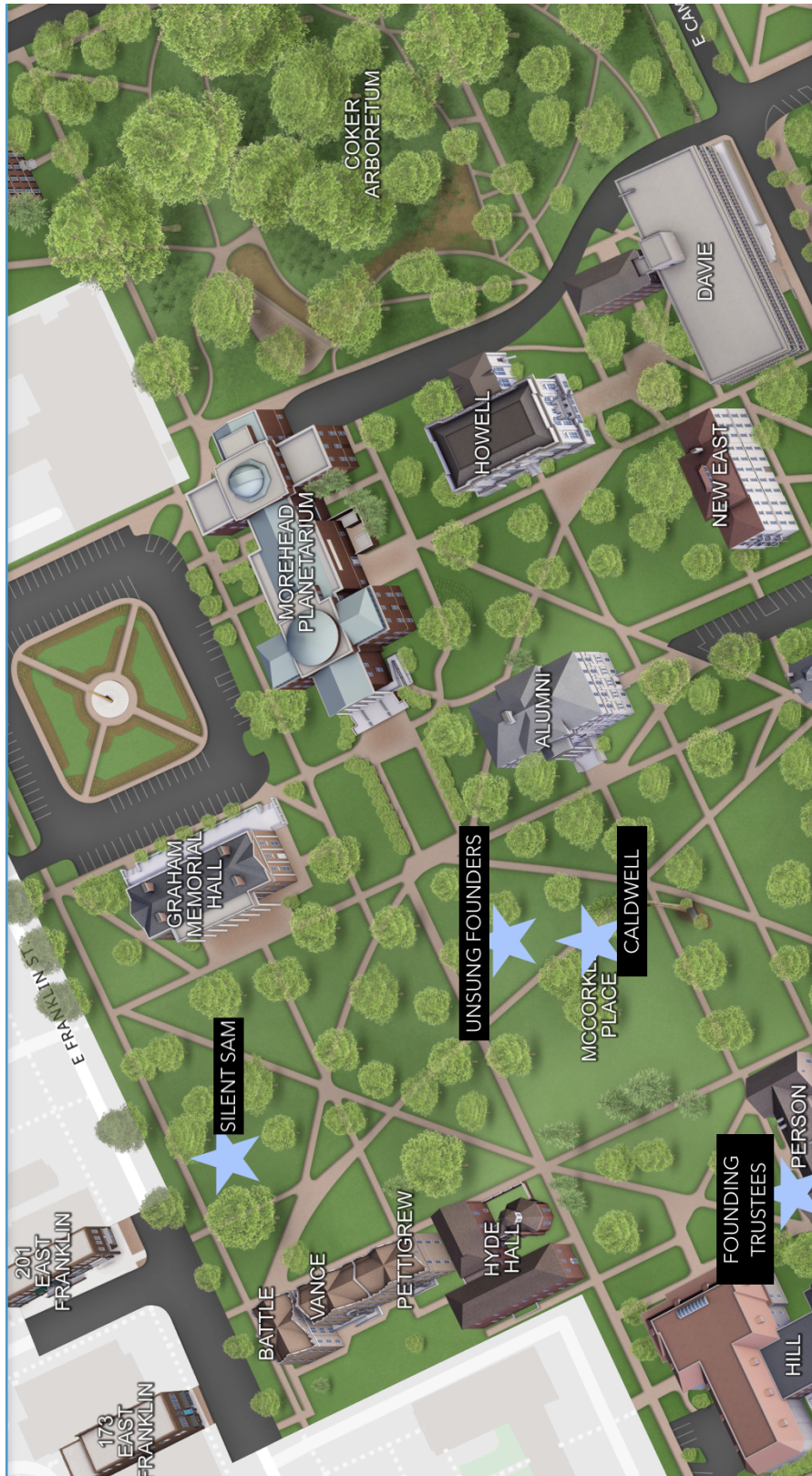
Additional Exercise

Small Group Work—Writing Interpretive Labels

Using information from this week's readings and your observations, write a short "label" (150 words) reinterpreting your given monument. Think about the following questions as you begin:

1. Who is the audience for your label? UNC students and faculty? NC residents? Campus visitors? How does this change the language you use and information you include?
2. Consider the links I have provided on the history of these monuments. How has UNC characterized this monument? What information has it made available? What new information did you learn that you think is important to include?
3. Where would you want to display this label or how would you want to make it accessible to your audience?

Appendix
Campus Map



Notes on UNC Monuments

Unsung Founders, Bond and Free Memorial

On November 5, 2005, the university dedicated this memorial to honor the countless enslaved and free African Americans who contributed their labor and service to the campus. A gift of the Class of 2002 and created by artist Do-Ho Suh, the piece features bronze figures holding a stone table surrounded by five stone seats. Suh created the work after visiting the campus and talking to students. The simple stones that mark the graves of unknown African Americans in the Old Chapel Hill Cemetery inspired him. He sought to draw people to the art with the design, saying that, "When you touch it and sit on it and use it, you become part of it symbolically and metaphorically."

The University chose to locate this artwork in McCorkle Place because of its importance to the history of the campus and the community. The inscription reads, "The Class of 2002 honors the University's unsung founders, the people of color bond and free, who helped build the Carolina that we cherish today." ([The Carolina Story](#))

Caldwell Monument

Joseph Caldwell, who came to teach at UNC in 1796 and who later served as president from 1804 to 1812 and again from 1816 to 1835, is buried with his family beneath this obelisk in the center of McCorkle Place. This is in fact the second monument designed for Caldwell. The original obelisk, made of sandstone, was moved to the Old Chapel Hill Cemetery and rededicated to Wilson Caldwell, November Caldwell, David Barham, and Henry Smith, four African American slaves who served the University. The relative obscurity of that rededicated monument was one of the factors that led to the creation of Do-Ho Suh's "Unsung Founders" memorial in 2005. ([The Carolina Story](#))

Original Caldwell Monument

This sandstone obelisk, completed in 1837, was the first monument built for UNC president Joseph Caldwell. In 1904, when the current monument in McCorkle Place was erected, the Class of 1891 placed this monument on Wilson Caldwell's grave in the Old Chapel Hill Cemetery and rededicated it to three other slaves who worked for the University. It stands in the section reserved for African Americans in honor of Wilson Caldwell (whom university president David Swain owned), his father November Caldwell (whom Joseph Caldwell owned), and two other men, all longtime servants of the university. Thomas A. Waitt, the designer and builder, also finished Gerrard Hall on campus after William Nichols left the building unfinished. ([The Carolina Story](#))

Memorial to Founding Trustees

This 19-foot monument on the north side of Person Hall honors the 55 members of UNC's first Board of Trustees, listed on a bronze plaque, who governed the University from 1789 to 1795. A bronze profile of William Richardson Davie tops the marble obelisk, which is flanked by blocks of marble that serve as benches. The monument was conceived and funded by Thomas S. Kenan III and family members in memory of their ancestor General James Kenan. It was dedicated during UNC's bicentennial celebration in 1995. ([The Carolina Story](#))

Silent Sam

The North Carolina division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the University erected this monument in 1913 in honor of the UNC alumni who "answered the call of duty" as Confederate soldiers in the Civil War. The monument depicts a young soldier grasping his rifle firmly in both hands. The relief beneath the statue depicts a woman (representing the state of North Carolina) exhorting a student to drop his books and join the cause. The soldier lacks a cartridge box for ammunition, which led to the nickname "Silent Sam."

Created by sculptor John Wilson in Boston, Massachusetts, the monument was due to be installed in 1911, when the University awarded degrees to the students of 1861-1865, who left for the war. A lack of funds delayed the plans, however, until commencement exercises in 1913. This project came in the midst of a wave of Confederate monuments erected in public spaces across the South in the years after white supremacy campaigns disfranchised African American voters and installed legal segregation. Students first began to protest the monument during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.

Julian Carr spoke at the dedication of the monument in 1913. His speech recounted the heroic efforts of the men the monument honored as well as the women on the home front. The speech also spoke to the racialized nature of the commemoration as Carr tells this story: "100 yards from where we stand, less than 90 days perhaps after my return from Appomattox, I horse-whipped a negro wench, until her skirts hung in shreds, because upon the streets of this quiet village she had publicly insulted and maligned a Southern lady."

Following a white supremacy rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017, during which a counter-protestor was killed by a white supremacist, activists began a sustained campaign for the removal of the Confederate Memorial from public display on the university campus. The protests included extended vigils at the monument, campaigns to raise public awareness about the monuments' origins, and public calls for its removal. While Gov. Roy Cooper publicly endorsed removing the monument, university leaders insisted that the 2015 Heritage Protection Act prevented the university from removing the monument without legislative approval.

Throughout the academic year of 2017-2018 the monument remained the focus of protest, but no meaningful steps, other than a few public forums, were taken to reinterpret the monument or to petition the legislature for its removal. On the evening of August 20, 2018, an estimated 250 protesters gathered around the monument, and, despite the presence of campus police, the statue was pulled down from its base at around 9:20 PM. The monument subsequently was moved to an undisclosed location by campus authorities. The future disposition of the monument remains unclear.

As of February 2020, the UNC System Board of Governors did not make any immediate decisions on what to do with the Silent Sam monument, while waiting for the Sons of Confederate Veterans to return the Silent Sam statue to the University of North Carolina. UNC System Interim President Bill Roper said he will seek a "lasting, legal solution" for the future of the statue torn down by protesters, but that it will not return to its former location at UNC Chapel Hill. "It will not go back on campus," Roper told reporters on February 21, 2020. ([The Carolina Story](#) and [DocSouth Commemorative Landscapes](#))

In November 2019, over a year after Silent Sam was toppled, the University entered into two settlements surrounding the statue. The first settlement gave \$74,999 to the SCV and was meant to limit the group's activities on UNC's campus, though it's evident that the SCV spent some of those funds buying the rights to Silent Sam from the United Daughters of the Confederacy. The amount of money paid by the UNC System in this settlement is just \$1 below the amount that would prompt review by North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein. The second one was the \$2.5 million settlement made with the SCV.

The second settlement was ruled void by Judge Allen Baddour in February 2020, following an amicus brief filed by a group of UNC students and faculty represented by the North Carolina Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. The UNC Black Pioneers also filed an amicus brief. The DTH Media Corp v. UNC System lawsuit regarding violation of North Carolina Open Meetings Law in the Silent Sam deals was settled in February 2020. Money from the previous \$74,999 settlement was also never returned to the system. ([Daily TarHeel](#))