



December 13, 2018

NCPH Statement on the UNC Board of Trustees' *Recommendation for the Disposition and Preservation of the Confederate Monument*.

NCPH does not typically weigh in on local- or campus-level issues, but we have been monitoring the situation surrounding the Confederate monument known as “Silent Sam” at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) with increasing concern. With the December 5, 2018 release of the Chapel Hill Board of Trustees' [Recommendation for the Disposition and Preservation of the Confederate Monument](#), and subsequent protests against its proposal by graduate students, faculty, staff, and many within our organization, we feel we must speak to this developing situation.

The mission of NCPH includes fostering critical reflection on historical practice as well as advocating on behalf of history and historians. It is in this capacity that we wish to address events unfolding at UNC. [NCPH promotes](#) sound, [ethical public history practice](#) that incorporates thorough research and current scholarship and responds meaningfully and honestly to the concerns and perspectives of involved communities. We support open dialogue and informed discussion about history's relationship to contemporary debates and oppose policies, positions, practices, or actions that hinder or suppress that practice. The process and resulting proposal from the UNC Board of Trustees shows little evidence of such critical reflection; what's more, it threatens to discourage open dialogue about the white supremacist history of the “Silent Sam” monument and the negative effects of its continued presence on members of the UNC community.

Despite the rich public history expertise present across North Carolina and among UNC's alumni—talented professionals and a number of public history degree programs within the UNC system itself—the Trustees' process and proposal does not appear to have adequately tapped those substantial assets. The insights and concerns of significant campus constituencies appear unaddressed, and largely unengaged. Absent evidence of genuine respect for and critical consideration of the substantial, scholarly, and evidence-based arguments against the monument's restoration, the Trustees' vision for what is effectively a “museum” anchored by this monument seems unlikely to produce a credible public history institution that can help the university move towards greater justice and inclusion. Going forward, we urge campus and system leadership to consult and collaborate with the state's public historians and scholars, whose expertise is necessary to this challenging work.

As professionals committed to open engagement in the process of reckoning with these fraught symbols and their capacity to inspire racist violence, we affirm as legitimate parts of this dialogue the principled and historically informed anti-racist protests of the monument that we have observed among the UNC student body, including many history graduate students. We therefore object in the strongest possible

terms to any retaliation against the students, faculty, and staff currently urging the university to make a clear and unambiguous stand against white supremacy, both in the past and in the present. Moreover, we find the [Trustees' proposal](#) to create a "system-wide mobile [police] force" that could be deployed to "prevent or respond to civil disorder and violence at future campus events" a particularly ominous effort to suppress debate. We fear the chilling effect such a unit would have on the exercise of free speech by students, faculty, staff, and residents alike.

In our [August 16, 2017 statement in response to the violence in Charlottesville, VA](#), NCPH said, "We condemn racism, white supremacy, antisemitism, and white nationalism unequivocally.... As professional public historians, we have studied how notions of heritage are distorted to support racism, white supremacy, antisemitism, and white nationalism. We understand and condemn the uses to which that selective history can be put by those who wish to misrepresent its meaning through either explicit articulation...or through the implicit refusal to acknowledge the role that white supremacy played in the creation of the US." We stand by those principles, and we reiterate our opposition to the misuse of history in the service of white supremacy. As such, we urge the UNC Board of Governors to reject this flawed proposal and any other potential proposal that is implicitly or explicitly aligned with white supremacy.