



UNC
COLLEGE OF
ARTS & SCIENCES

THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL

DEPARTMENT OF ART & ART HISTORY

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Chancellor Carol Folt
103 South Building, Campus
Via electronic mail

18 September 2017

Dear Chancellor Folt:

We the undersigned faculty members of the UNC Department of Art and Art History wish to express our strong belief that the UNC Confederate Memorial known as Silent Sam should be removed at the earliest possible time. Recent events have made clear and unavoidable what many members of the UNC community, including students who have studied with us, have known for some time: that Silent Sam was built to express an ideology, and a version of history, that are at odds with the university's stated values and that we find abhorrent. The ideology, openly espoused at the time of the monument's dedication in 1913, is that of white supremacy, as embodied by the Confederacy whose "daughters" claim credit for it. The unacceptable version of history to which Silent Sam gives voice claims that those who fought for the Confederacy did so in the name of regional loyalty alone, rather than, as historians have long concluded, to preserve the institution of slavery as the core of the economy, society, and polity of the south. Silent Sam is a monument to a systemic moral perversion, all the more insidious in proffering its meaning as subtext, rather than proclaiming it as viciously as many of its contemporary supporters.

Members of the Department of Art and Art History include practitioners in a wide range of media whose work explores, questions, challenges, and upends prevailing ideas about identity of all kinds, including race, gender, and national origin, about the way people relate to each other in society, and about our past and present. Among the art historians, many are concerned with, and have published and taught on, issues of memory, public space, and power. A number of us, artists and art historians, have been teaching about Silent Sam and monuments like it for years, and we will continue to do so. We of course understand the importance and value of studying works of art and visual culture, even those we find morally objectionable, as windows into both the past and the present, and we do not lightly call for their removal. But whatever artistic merit the monument might claim (and most of us feel it is in fact slight) does not justify its continued prominent placement in a position that calls, in the terms recently used by New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu, for veneration. Removing Silent Sam from its current setting will in no way diminish its pedagogical value. As experienced professionals in the field of visual representation, we can offer you our advice, insights, and creativity in developing alternative uses for the site after the statue's removal that will promote the knowledge, collegiality, and diversity for which Carolina, at its best, stands.

Acknowledging that interpretations of the university's legal options may differ, we call on you, as a first step in the prompt removal of this objectionable object, to state publicly and unequivocally your position on the ideology and version of history with which it is associated. We also urge you in the strongest possible terms to work to ensure the health and safety of the students, faculty, and staff involved in the active protest movement that has arisen around the monument, and to work with the protesters to achieve the goal we all share. In the meantime, we intend to publicize this statement, and to continue our efforts toward removal. We do this as as teachers committed to educating our students and as members of the university community committed to Carolina's reputation and good name.

Department of Art and Art History faculty to Chancellor Carol Folt-2-

Sincerely yours,

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Department of Art and Art History faculty to Chancellor Carol Folt-3-

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