

Classics Graduate Student Statement of Support for Defendants of Silent Sam Toppling

As individual graduate students in the Department of Classics at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, we stand in solidarity with the defendants charged with toppling Silent Sam. We find it abhorrent that the Orange County District Attorney decided last week to bring additional charges against the toppling defendants, and we state in the strongest possible terms that nobody should be charged with any crime for taking a principled stand against white supremacy.

Silent Sam was installed during the Jim Crow era for the express purpose of racial intimidation. Up to the day it was toppled, the monument continued to serve this purpose. For years, it contributed to a racially hostile environment and consistently reflected institutional disregard for the safety and wellbeing of people of color on our campus. The toppling of the monument came as a moral and necessary response to the University's refusal to confront or even acknowledge its own institutional white supremacy - a refusal that has spanned decades of POC-led protests.

We also reject Chancellor Guskiewicz's reckless characterization of the desecration of the Unsung Founders monument as "lawless behavior." As students of philology, we assert that language matters. The vandalizing of this monument was a white supremacist act of intimidation and should be characterized as such. Additionally, Jeff McCracken's claim that the police cannot "pick sides" between neo-Confederates and community activists is equally indefensible. These statements reflect the University's immoral likening of racist intimidation to activism that challenges white supremacist laws and policies. The history we study as Classicists clearly demonstrates that not all laws are just and not all "lawless" acts are equivalent. We firmly believe that legality does not have any fundamental correlation to justice and, in that vein, the administration's comments on campus events should not be couched in the language of legality.

Finally, it is important to us to model our dedication to anti-racism through action. We have therefore taken the following steps to support anti-racist work on campus and begin the process of grappling with institutionalized white supremacy in our own department:

1. We have started a fundraiser for the Anti-racist Activist Fund to show monetary support to all current and future anti-racist defendants targeted by the university administration, UNC Police, and the District Attorney's office. We will donate these funds on April 24th.
2. We plan to encourage members of our faculty to release a statement condemning the actions of UNC Police, who use excessive force, consistently lie to justify the arrest of activists, and embolden white supremacists under the guise of supporting "free speech." We will continue to have conversations about our department's response to police violence and the administration's suppression of campus activism.
3. We will seek to work with our faculty to release a statement outlining future goals for our department, particularly noting how we aim to center anti-racism in our pedagogy and departmental culture. We hope our faculty, who have been working toward greater accessibility for our graduate program, will also work with us to overhaul the undergraduate Latin program and make it more accessible to students of color. We affirm that the reallocation of our labor for this purpose is absolutely necessary.

Moving forward, we will dedicate as much time as possible to supporting anti-racist causes and organizations on campus, including Take Action Chapel Hill, Defend UNC, Unsafe @ UNC, Black Congress, and Black Student Movement. We encourage others to organize anti-racist work within their own departments and support the #StrikeBackUNC action planned for April 24th at 1:30pm on the steps of Wilson Library. We also ask members of our community to come to the Orange County Courthouse in Hillsborough for support on April 25th, as the trial for the toppling defendants begins. If we wish to make our university a place that is welcoming to and supportive of all students, it is imperative that we take meaningful action against white supremacy.

In solidarity,

Amanda Ball
Emma Buckingham
Sarah Eisenlohr
Andrew Ficklin
Melanie Godsey
Sarah Hilker
Everett Lang

Emily Lime
Bryanna Lloyd
Kelly McArdle
Katelin McCullough
Brian McPhee
Jackson Miller
Keith Penich

Matthew Schueller
Nathan Israel Smolin
Hannah Sorscher
Katie Tardio
Rachael Tobin-Dodd
Emma Warhover
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