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## 'Silent Sam' Confederate rally draws outcry from students

Katie Jansen Oct 25, 2015



The Herald-Sun | Katie Jansen

A man protesting against Silent Sam, left, argues with a Confederate supporter during Sunday's rally on UNC's campus, with officer standing close by.

CHAPEL HILL – Confederate supporters who said they came to UNC's campus Sunday to defend their heritage were met with jeers, middle fingers and profanity from a counter-protest that had assembled.

Two Confederate groups – Alamance County Taking Back Alamance County and Orange County Taking Back Orange County – drove down Franklin Street in pickup trucks and other vehicles, waving Confederate flags and blaring country music.

The groups came to UNC in the wake of two separate vandalism cases that have left a Confederate monument known as Silent Sam covered in graffiti. They staged a similar rally in Hillsborough in August as the Hillsborough Town Board considered whether to remove Confederate signage from the Orange County Historical Museum.



The monument in question Sunday, erected on UNC's McCorkle Place in 1913, is dedicated to students of the University who fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War.

"They're American veterans," said Victor Ray of Alamance County. "They deserve honor just as much as the rest."

But some students and other community members say the statue is a continuation of long-endured racism and should be removed from campus.

"To me, it stands for 400 years of various kinds of racial oppression," said Dick Paddock of the Southern Anti-Racism Network.

Paddock added that he couldn't see the point behind the Confederate supporters' argument.

"I find it difficult to understand why their message resonates with them," he said. "I feel we need to be getting beyond what we fought about a century and a half ago."

Paddock said he was encouraged to see so many students mobilized to support the cause.

Leah Osae, one of the student leaders for the movement, said the students learned of plans for a Confederate rally recently, right before last weekend's fall break. Many of the students spent their break planning a counter-protest.

It isn't the first time this year the students have mobilized. Many wore shirts or held signs bearing the phrase #HurstonHall.

Earlier this year, students called for Saunders Hall, named after a KKK leader, to be renamed Hurston Hall in honor of black author Zora Neale Hurston.

In May, the UNC Board of Trustees renamed the academic building "Carolina Hall" and placed a 16-year moratorium on other renaming proposals. Many students have said they don't see the change as progress.

Osae said the students' ability to mobilize is "a sign that change is going to come sooner rather than later. Students are too powerful, too angry, too motivated... We will get what we want."

Osae expressed dissatisfaction with the response from UNC administration, publicly announcing that Chancellor Carol Folt had allowed "genocidal pro-Confederate terrorists" to assemble on campus.

Folt sent out a campus-wide email on Friday, emphasizing the importance of safety for all involved. The email read in part: "We want to do everything possible to make sure that such debate takes place in a safe and democratic fashion as has been the tradition on our campus for decades."

Osae said that if Folt and other administrators weren't going to defend the University's students, they'd have to defend themselves.

Orange County Commissioner Mark Dorosin, who joined Sunday's protest against Silent Sam, agreed, saying he'd like to see more elected officials and university administrators out supporting the cause.

"The struggle against racism is the defining struggle of our society," he said. "We all need to take every opportunity to stand against racism."

Sunday's protest areas were separated by temporary fencing, and the monument itself was also blocked off by temporary fencing.

As the Confederate supporters marched in from Morehead Planetarium, the counter-protesters followed with taunts and chants until police officers established a blockade.



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Some Silent Sam protesters did make it to the other side, yelling at those who stood holding Confederate and U.S. flags.

"Stop talking. You're wasting your time. Go home," one man continued to repeat as a Confederate supporter argued with him.

Verbal threats were tossed around.

"I guarantee that everyone here could take out this university if it wasn't for these wonderful police officers here protecting you," said William Allen, a Confederate supporter from Chapel Hill.

Allen said he made the comment in response to a verbal threat from the other side.

Ray of Alamance County said that many of the Silent Sam protesters didn't know the history of the monument or the university.

"We're going to talk history and show we're not here for hate," he said.

But Osae said she saw the University's history as one of continuous oppression.

She gestured to the Unsung Founders' Memorial, dedicated to the African-Americans who helped build the University and mere yards from Silent Sam.

The memorial resembles a table, leading people to eat and sit at it without knowing the meaning of the memorial.

Osae said that although the memorial's meaning is sacred, she finds the format it has taken disrespectful.

"Black people deserve more," she said. "They deserve better. They deserve the equivalent of Silent Sam."



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