

**UNC Board of Trustee - Public Comment Session,  
Confederate Monument**

*November 15, 2017*

My name's O.J. McGhee and I'm a staff member in the School of Public Health and the current chair of the Carolina Black Caucus. I'd like to thank the Board of Trustees for this opportunity and more importantly our Chancellor for her support of our institution in this process. As the nation's oldest public university, we've witnessed generations of progress for Black faculty, staff, and students. However, the statue of Silent Sam is a reminder of the continued pain that still consumes many of us. The statue has become, and has always been more than just stone and metal to innocently memorialize Confederate soldiers. Yet, it was erected purposefully to remind all who walked in its shadow, that no matter our advancements as a people, we would always be viewed as not equal and unwelcomed. You need look no further than Julian Carr's speech at the statues dedication in 1913, crediting Confederate soldiers for "saving the very life of the Anglo-Saxon race" as well as bragging that just steps from the statue he had "horsed-whipped a Negro woman until her skirt hung in shreds." The majority of Confederate monuments and statues like Silent Sam were constructed well after the Civil War to relay messages of hate, violence, and intolerance to oppose the creation of the nation that we're still struggling to become.

The Caucus was founded to celebrate our community and advocate for a more inclusive campus, which is counter to the very existence of Silent Sam. Meanwhile, we stand encouraged by the outpouring of voices for the statues eventual removal. Maybe one day in the distant future, my daughter and I will return to this campus and we'll enter a building named after UNC's first Black faculty member Mrs. Hortense McClinton, or possibly buy reading materials from the George Moses Horton Bookstore, named after the poet and first African-American from the South to have a book published, who was a slave on this very campus. We may even stop to take pictures under a magnificent statue of Wilson Caldwell, also named after a former slave, who helped prevent Union troops from burning down the University; he'd later serve as the town's Justice of the Peace; become the campus' curator; and open a grade school for African American children.

Until then, we'll continue working alongside the Chancellor and university partners to petition for the statue's removal and challenge the state legislature to repeal such an elusive law that keeps such a divisive symbol on our grounds. Let me be clear, there's absolutely nothing silent about Sam. The statue screams racism and white supremacy. In fact, its silence on freedom, equality, and justice, has been down right deafening. We recognize that our past will forever differ on ones idea of "noble causes," but we should all agree that the pain of one's oppression should have NEVER been placed on a pedestal to be celebrated. In my remaining seconds, I leave you with words President George W. Bush spoke at the opening of the National Museum of African American History & Culture. He said, "*A great nation does not hide its history. It faces its flaws and corrects them.*" Here's hoping that proceedings such as today are laying the foundation to do just that.

O.J. McGhee - Carolina Black Caucus, Chair