

## **Faculty Council Meeting, December 6, 2019**

Opening Comments

Lloyd Kramer

Professor of History and Chair of the Faculty

Welcome to the December meeting of the UNC Faculty Council; today we're going to discuss issues that have generated lots of recent faculty concern, including the Board of Governor's agreement for the transfer of Silent Sam.

But first I want to note that we've come to the end of another very busy semester and that we work in a constantly flowing, creative stream of great teaching, imaginative research and enduring service to people outside the University. It may seem that controversies and conflicts dominate the life of the University, but we know that every day the great work of the University flows onward, reshaping lives and generating creative new ideas. I mention this mighty stream of University work, because we should celebrate it as we conclude our fall semester classes and as we continue our discussions of difficult issues.

At last month's Faculty Council meeting I called attention to the upcoming Symposium on the Collective Memories and Legacies of 1619, when the first enslaved Africans arrived in Virginia. This Symposium took place on November 11 and provided an excellent example of the hard historical and cultural work that is needed to honestly confront the history of slavery and racism in American society. I congratulate Joseph Jordan and all of our Colleagues at the Sonya Haynes Stone Center for their great work on that important Symposium.

But many complex issues continue to flow through our University, creating their own streams of conflict and calling for new kinds of creative work. For example, we recently received the disturbing Clery Review from the Department of Education, describing campus security issues during the period between 2009 and 2016. This review criticized UNC's under-reporting of some serious crime statistics (including our handling of sexual assaults) and our failure to describe some campus sites in our crime reports as well as our failure to issue timely warnings about security threats. We've invited our new Police chief David Perry to today's meeting, so that he might provide some updates on current approaches to campus security and safety.

The University has also reached a new agreement with the US Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights in response to complaints about last spring's conference on "Conflict Over Gaza: People, Politics, and Possibilities." We've agreed to give closer attention to intolerance, with a particular emphasis on the dangers and harassment of anti-Semitism. As I understand the agreement, we have not stated any specific wrongdoing at the conference, but some faculty are still concerned about the details of this agreement and its implications for academic freedom. Chancellor Guskiewicz may want to provide further clarification about what this agreement says we will do in the future, and how the agreement also protects our commitment to academic freedom.

But the biggest new issue since last month is the recently announced BOG agreement to transfer the Silent Sam statue to the NC "Sons of Confederate Veterans," and to set up a Trust Fund of \$2.5 million that the SCV can use to house and protect the monument in one of the 86 NC counties where there is no UNC system university. I stressed in last month's discussion of

the 1619 Symposium that the legacies of slavery have continued throughout the centuries to 1719, 1819, 1919 and 2019. And now we're facing another example of this legacy with the BOG agreement that transfers Silent Sam and obliges UNC to give the Sons of Confederate Veterans millions of dollars for a trust fund—which strikes many faculty as a kind of “reparations payment” to a group that claims it was somehow damaged by the removal of Silent Sam from our campus.

As Chair of the Faculty I want to briefly summarize why so many faculty colleagues have good reasons to be angry about the finances of this Agreement. This anger comes partly from frustrations about spending such money when faculty, staff, and students face ongoing funding and salary needs. But I want to refer mainly to the broader concerns I've heard.

Although our faculty, staff, administrative leaders, and students overwhelmingly agree that Silent Sam should not be returned to our campus (as the Agreement ensures), people are angered to see our much-needed University money go to an organization that tells lies about the Civil War and promotes the legacy of White Supremacy in our state.

The SCV's website turns history upside down by stating that the “preservation of liberty and freedom was the motivating factor in the South's Decision to fight” what it calls the “Second American Revolution.” The Confederacy was actually established to preserve racist oppression and the continuing enslavement of millions of people; and historians have been explaining this historical reality with clear evidence for generations.

Yet the lies of groups like the SCV have long influenced public opinion; and a recent poll at Elon University found that 49% of North Carolinians still believe the Civil War was mainly about states' rights; only 44% said the Civil War was about slavery and the defense or destruction of the slave system.

The University is thus giving Trust Fund money to an Organization that lies about history and describes the Confederacy's defense of a white supremacy slave system as a campaign for the “preservation of freedom.” Our University is committed to the systematic pursuit of truth and knowledge through the careful examination of empirical evidence. *Giving money to the SCV thus goes against our own core values.*

Many North Carolinians may share the SCV's views of the Civil War, just as there are people who deny the historical truth of the Holocaust or the scientific evidence for climate change. There are also people who believe the earth is flat. But the University would never set up a \$2.5 million trust fund for the Flat Earth Society or for a group that denies the Holocaust.

This trust fund becomes all the more problematic when we read a letter from the “Commander” of the SCV, Kevin Stone that says: “What we have accomplished is something that I never dreamed we could accomplish in a thousand years, and all at the expense of the University itself.”

I'm pretty sure that the Commander is referring to the University's financial expense, but faculty are angered that the cost of this agreement goes far beyond the 2.5 million dollars. It also carries a steep cost to our respect for knowledge and the search for empirical truth; and it contradicts our own strongly avowed rejection of racism and white supremacist ideas and groups.

The BOG must have never consulted with historians or others who could explain that we are giving money to a group that lies about the past and still defends the racist Confederate lost cause in the present.

So this is our challenge as a University: how do we find a constructive way forward? How do we honor and support and promote the work of those who are challenging the racist legacies of 1619 and the slave system and the Confederacy?

In November, I noted the great work of people like this year's Distinguished Alumni Award recipient Nikole Hannah-Jones and our well-informed historians, including my colleagues *William Sturkey* and *Jim Leloudis* who interpret history for both public audiences and our University; and I noted Chancellor Guskiewicz's plan to develop a UNC commission on "History, Race, and a Way Forward."

As we examine the implications of the BOG's Agreement with the SCV, this work becomes all the more urgent. Silent Sam is like the Zombie of our University: it carries the legacy of the Confederacy, and it keeps reappearing as a symbolic expression of slave-system armies and of the pervasive racism in Jim Crow-era NC. So our challenge for the New Year is this: How can we escape this awful Zombie that haunts UNC, even as we try to get rid of it forever?

There are no simple answers or solutions, but the discussion and the search for a different future must continue through bold actions. Colleagues on the Faculty Council want to introduce a Resolution on this issue for our consideration today; and we'll continue to discuss faculty views as we consider this proposal.

But first I would like to pass the mic to Kevin Guskiewicz, so that he can offer further explanations of our current situation; and I should note that the Faculty Executive Committee has developed a list of questions that has already been given to him as a way to launch today's discussion.