

THE CHRONICLE

of Higher Education

May 19, 2000

Loud Debate Over Silent Symbol

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While South Carolina is consumed by a debate over whether to remove the Confederate battle flag from its State House, a bronze statue has sparked a similar controversy at the University of North Carolina.

"Silent Sam," an eight-foot-high statue of a Confederate soldier on the university's Chapel Hill campus, has been under attack for three months.

"There is no better example of 'racial separatism' than the Confederacy and the statues that honor it," wrote Gerald Horne, a professor of African and African-American studies and director of the university's black cultural center, in *The Chapel Hill News*, a local newspaper.

Mr. Horne says the statue has "less to do with heritage than reaffirming racism."

He thinks "Silent Sam" should be moved to a historical society or a museum -- where, he says, "it rightfully belongs" -- and that the university should plant in its place a tree "symbolizing racial tolerance."

Although Sam has only recently come under fire, he's been around for a while.

The statue, whose nickname has murky origins, was erected in 1913 by the North Carolina chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy to honor the 321 graduates of the university who died in the Civil War, along with other Confederate dead. A plaque explains that the statue is a tribute to the dead soldiers.

Mr. Horne's words have sparked a crossfire in the editorial pages of the local papers.

"Obliterating the past in the interest of even a just cause brings to mind the chilling warnings of Aldous Huxley and George Orwell," responded Robert Moats Miller, a professor emeritus of history at the university, in The Chapel Hill News.

Barry Saunders, a columnist for the Raleigh News & Observer, wrote: "Honoring dead soldiers, Professor Horne, is not the same thing as honoring their cause."

Mr. Horne was not without his defenders. Yonni Chapman, a local resident, told the News & Observer that preserving "Silent Sam," as a marker, represented "complicity" with racism.

University officials, however, say the statue is likely to remain. "We are a Southern university, and we have to come to terms with that history," says Nancy Davis, the associate vice chancellor for university relations. "This sculpture tells people where we have been."

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