"I am not indifferent to the claims of a generous forgiveness, but whatever else I may forget, I shall never forget the difference between those who fought for liberty and those who fought for slavery."
—Frederick Douglass, “Decoration Day Speech,” (1894)

Abstract

When student protestors at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill toppled a Confederate sculpture in the center of campus, they threw fuel on a fraught hundred and fifty year old argument concerning the meaning of the American Civil War. The statue in question, “Silent Sam,” became the crux of the debate about the removal of Confederate monuments—at stake are questions of history, factuality, and collective memory: Where did all these monuments come from? What were they meant to symbolize, and how has that symbolism changed over time? Who built them, and for whom were they intended? How does one differentiate between American history and American mythology? What should be done with these monuments?

The intent of this syllabus is to marshal Silent Sam to the service of teaching history, methodology, and informed political engagement. How do historians establish history, and why are we still debating the Civil War? Are there objective facts about the past that inform the present, or are all facts subject to interpretation and reframing? Silent Sam can be used as a case study for teaching so-called “fake news”—not only how to recognize it as such, but also to see how very real something fake can become when enough people believe it. Silent Sam serves as a model for teaching historical empathy: what does such an object mean to different audiences in the present, as well as past audiences? Are there better ways to engage in political debate than the shallow, Twitter-style discourse that saturates the internet? Finally, Silent Sam serves as an example of civil disobedience, nonviolent intervention, and the wider question of effective political engagement: at what point do, and should, citizens take nonviolent intervention?
Following the genre of the Trump Syllabus and the revised Trump Syllabus 2.0 (and 3.0), and the Charlottesville Syllabus, this document is meant to be a crowd-sourced example of how historians and scholars can dynamically respond to emergent controversies, not simply within the narrow context of their respective fields, but also in the classroom, and for the wider public. One goal of this syllabus is to demonstrate the growing role of the humanities in public discourse to address current events rapidly, but also wisely. Another goal is to identify the most relevant materials that are publicly accessible. A study of Confederate monumentality is a study of all monumentality, about what it means to choose to commemorate a particular history. The skills and materials necessary to informed discussion of this topic apply broadly, to nationalism, to myth-making, and to individual self-construction. At the core of this syllabus is the question of why we choose to tell the stories we tell about ourselves.

Finally, the Silent Sam Syllabus is intended to be a first draft. And it will always be a draft. Nor does this syllabus claim to be exhaustive. As this controversy unravels in the months and years to come, as it is recontextualized with the next monument that is removed, it will be necessary to update it. We here at Monument Lab welcome submission of additional readings, teaching tools, comments, concerns, or ideas in the spirit of improving this syllabus. If you have any suggested materials to share, please email monumentlab@gmail.com with the subject line “Silent Sam Syllabus Suggestion” or use the hashtag #SilentSamSyllabus.

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SUGGESTED BOOKS


RELATED RESOURCES

- UNC Libraries Exhibit on Silent Sam.
- UNC Libraries Guide to Silent Sam.
- UNC History Department Statement and Bibliography on Silent Sam.
- Southern Poverty Law Center.
- David Blight’s Yale Open Course, The Civil War and Reconstruction Era.
- Monument Lab.
- Atlanta History Center Confederate Monument Interpretation Guide.
- AHA: Historians on the Confederate Monument Debate.
INTRODUCING SILENT SAM
Who is Silent Sam?
● Web Essay: “‘Silent Sam’ The Confederate Monument at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill,” by James L. Leloudis and Cecelia Moore. Online.
● Catalogue Entry: “Confederate Monument, UNC (Chapel Hill),” Documenting the American South, University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Online.
● Images: Wikimedia Commons archive. Online.

CONFEDERATE MONUMENTS: SITUATING SILENT SAM
Silent Sam is, but one of many Confederate monuments. Why has this issue come to a boil now?
● Map: ‘Whose Heritage?’ Southern Poverty Law Center, Online.

INVENTING SILENT SAM: THE LOST CAUSE MYTH
The Civil War ended in 1865. Why was it fought, and what did it mean?
● Video: Jeffrey Robinson, “When Heritage = Hate” Online. (especially: 56:00-61:00)

DIXIE’S DAUGHTERS
Who erected Silent Sam? What is at stake with claiming Confederate lineage?
● Archival Video: ‘What Did the Rebel Yell Sound Like?’ Smithsonian Magazine, Online.
REPORTING SILENT SAM
There has been mountains of reporting on Silent Sam. How and why do liberal and conservative media outlets differ in their rhetoric?

- Interview: ‘Meet Maya Little, UNC Student Whose Protest Ignited the Movement to Topple a Racist Confederate Statue’, Democracy Now! August 22, 2018. Online (two parts).

SAM, MYTH & MISOGNY
How do conventions of masculinity inform the Silent Sam narrative? Why does Julian Carr lean so heavily on classical allusion?

- Dedication Speech: Julian Carr, “Unveiling of Confederate Monument at University,” June 2, 1913, series 2.2, folder 26, Julian Shakespeare Carr Papers, Southern Historical Collection #00141. Online.
- Timeline: Silent Sam. (Focus on May 11, 1937). Online.

REMEMBERING THE FUTURE
Confederate monuments not only commemorate, they anticipate—what sort of future do Confederate monuments imagine?

- Article: Evander Price – Confederate Future Monumentality (forthcoming on Monument Lab).

SUPPORTING SAM
Who supports Sam? How do they construct their arguments?

CURRENT EVENTS: NOW WHAT SAM?
Hundreds of suggestions have been made for what to do about Silent Sam. Are some solutions better or worse, and why?

- “Report: Data from Faculty Workshops on the Disposition of the Confederate Statue Compiled by the Office of Faculty Governance” October 26, 2018 Format revised on November 2, 2018. Online.
- “Executive Summary: College of Arts & Sciences Faculty and Staff Survey on Silent Sam.” Online.
- Twitter: @now_what_Sam
- [Place holder for latest article, developments; i.e., Chancellor Folt’s resignation]

CONCLUSIONS: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
What are the best means for responding to Confederate monuments?


POSSIBLE ASSIGNMENTS:
The following prompts are meant to be flexible starting points for building assignments that can be adapted to the site and circumstances of the course.

Identify & Research ~ Find a Confederate monument, or a controversial monument nearby to research, and put into conversation with these readings. Use Loewen’s List of questions for monuments to analyze a monument relevant to you.

Imagine & Empathize ~ Write a speech from the perspective of the monument—if the monument were “alive,” what would it say to modern audiences?

Read & Assess ~ choose two of the articles listed in AHA Monument Debates bibliography, and put them into conversation with one another, and the rest of the course readings.

Archival Research ~ UNC Libraries catalogued 50,000+ tweets related to Silent Sam. What can you learn from this archive, and how might one go about using Twitter as a tool in studying history?

The Confederates won with the pen (and the noose) what they could not win on the battlefield: the cause of white supremacy and the dominant understanding of what the war was all about. We are still digging ourselves out from under the misinformation they spread, which has manifested in our public monuments and our history books. —James W. Loewen