The past is the key of the present and the mirror of the future.

– July 26, 1867, Robert G. Fitzgerald, a black Union soldier and Freedmen’s Bureau school teacher in Orange County
SILENT SAM
The Confederate Monument at the University of North Carolina
There were two waves of Confederate memorialization after the Civil War. In the first, which began in the late 1860s and stretched into the 1880s, communities put up monuments to mourn the dead. Most were located in cemeteries.
In 1883-85, near the end of that era, UNC built Memorial Hall, an auditorium dedicated to the memory of university president David Lowry Swain; alumni who “fell in the service of the Confederate states”; and “others connected with the university” who deserved commemoration.
Marble tablets bearing the names of the university’s Confederate dead were mounted above the rostrum, at the end of the building’s center aisle.
Today, the tablets (one of which is shown here) flank the stage in the new Memorial Hall, built in 1930-31 to replace the original structure.
UNC erected “Silent Sam” during the second wave of memorialization, which took place in the early decades of the 20th century. At that time, civic leaders raised statues of Confederate soldiers in courthouse squares and similarly prominent public spaces.
Construction of these new monuments occurred at the end of a long struggle over the freedom and citizenship rights of former slaves and their descendants. That conflict began with emancipation and stretched through the closing years of the 1890s.
In North Carolina, the racial strife culminated in violent political campaigns for white supremacy in 1898 and 1900. The victors secured white rule by stripping the right to vote from men of color and imposing the oppressive system of racial apartheid known as Jim Crow.
The erection of soldier monuments followed in quick succession. By 1926, 53 of them stood in public spaces across the state. Only two had been built before 1900.
ERECTED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE
NORTH CAROLINA DIVISION OF THE UNITED DAUGHTERS OF
THE CONFEDERACY
AIDED BY THE ALUMNI OF
THE UNIVERSITY
TO THE SONS OF THE UNIVERSITY WHO ENTERED THE WAR OF 1861-65 IN ANSWER TO THE CALL OF THEIR COUNTRY AND WHOSE LIVES TAUGHT THE LESSON OF THEIR GREAT COMMANDER THAT DUTY IS THE SUBLIMEST WORD IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
Those students were not poor boys drafted into military service, Craig noted. "They came from homes of plenty and culture." They were the sons of a slaveholding elite, heirs to "the highest places of honor and power." Robert E. Lee was their Great Commander, and their Country was the Confederate States of America.
At the beginning of the Civil War, Confederate vice president Alexander H. Stephens said of that new nation: “its foundations are laid ... upon the great truth, that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery – subordination to the superior race – is his natural and normal condition.”
UNC's soldier monument honored the "chivalry and devotion" of university men who fought for Confederate principles, Governor Craig declared. "We unveil and dedicate [it] as a covenant that we too will do our task with fidelity and courage."

Unveiling of the Confederate Monument

AT THE

University of North Carolina

JUNE 2, 1913, 3:30 P. M.

Music—Dixie

Introduction of Governor Locke Craig and Major Henry A. London
That covenant was the foundation stone of Craig's own political career. In 1898, he had launched the Democratic Party's campaign for white rule alongside UNC classmate Charles Brantley Aycock. Newspapers reported that "with burning words" the "young apostles ... pleaded for the return of white supremacy."
Mary Lyde Williams, president of the North Carolina Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, spoke for the women who helped to plan and finance UNC's monument. She described it as one of more than 700 sentinels "to the Southern Cause" that the UDC had erected throughout the former Confederate states.
Banner used by the Ku-Klux.

Original now in North Carolina Room, Confederate Museum, Richmond, Virginia.
Alumnus Julian S. Carr – a Confederate veteran, leading industrialist, and university trustee – followed Mary Williams in the dedication program. Today, he is remembered for the cruel story he told of whipping a black woman in Chapel Hill.
Carr linked his story to the purpose that distinguished UNC’s new Confederate monument from memorials erected decades earlier as expressions of mourning.
The monument honored all university men who fought for the Confederacy – the living as well as the dead, and most especially the veterans who waged the postwar campaign to restore white rule. For those veterans, as for Carr, service to the Confederate cause "did not end at Appomattox." In peacetime, they answered racial equality with acts of terror. They "saved the very life of the Anglo-Saxon race," Carr declared. "Praise God."
In 1909, at the laying of the cornerstone of Granville County’s monument, Governor William W. Kitchin described white supremacy and the violence that sustained it as simple facts of Nature.
“We have seen the white man come in contact with the brown man of the tropics, and the brown man went down,” Kitchin observed. “We have seen him knock at the gates of the yellow man in the East, and they opened at his will.”
“We have seen him face the black man in his native African home, and the black man gave him the path. We have seen him press the red man, and the red man is disappearing from the face of the earth.” The white man’s “march has sometimes been cruel,” Kitchin conceded, but his right to rule was undeniable.
Kitchin believed that Confederate veterans understood that truth better than others. He spoke to them directly and praised their wisdom: "You see what the whole country is beginning to recognize, that it is not in the power of all the armies ever drilled or of all the constitutions ever written to make the white and black races equal."
Confederate veteran and UNC alumnus John C. McLauchlin sounded a similar theme in 1906 at the dedication of the monument in Anson County. He reminded his audience that "our Anglo-Saxon ancestors wrested this land from the savages, built its homes, its cities and towns, its schools and colleges, its churches and asylums."
McLauchlin recalled that even in defeat he and fellow veterans refused to surrender that heritage to an “inferior and numerous race” of former slaves. They instead took up the “heroic task of redeeming their State ... and committing her destinies into the hands of her native white citizens.”
THE KU KLUX KLAN
OR
INVISIBLE EMPIRE

BY

MRS. S. E. F. ROSE

Author of
"The U. D. C.—Its Object and Mission"
"The Confederate Picture Gallery"
"Arlington—Its Past and Present"

Published by
S. GRAHAM CO., LTD.,
NEW ORLEANS, LA.
1914.
"The record of the Ku Klux Klan teaches ... the grandeur of the 'Men who wore the Gray,' the Confederate soldiers, the real Ku Klux. They were not only great in war, but great in peace, and great in the performance of every Duty, which Robert E. Lee, the mightiest military chieftain the world ever saw, pronounced, 'The sublimest word in the English language.'"
These were the ideas that university president Francis Venable and trustee Julian Carr invoked when they described UNC’s Confederate monument as a "brilliant lesson in bronze and granite to all coming generations of students." It stood, they said, for "courage and steadfastness" in fulfilling the duties of white manhood.
That lesson’s appeal reached well beyond the boundaries of a single campus, state, or region. It spoke to people throughout the nation who thought of the United States as a white man’s country and longed for the reconciliation of North and South on that basis.
In 1915, D. W. Griffith captured that racial desire in his epic film, "The Birth of a Nation." He adapted the screenplay from historical novels written by Thomas F. Dixon Jr., a Southern Baptist preacher, North Carolina legislator, lawyer, playwright, and champion of white supremacy.
“The Birth of a Nation” cast the battle for racial dominion as a heroic tale of Confederate veterans-turned-Ku Klux Klansmen who saved white womanhood and white civilization from the supposed evils of ‘negro domination.’
Shortly before his death in 1895, abolitionist and statesman Frederick Douglass warned against reconciliation on those terms. "I am not indifferent to the claims of a generous forgiveness," he declared, "but whatever else I may forget, I shall never forget the difference between those who fought for liberty and those who fought for slavery."
Douglass urged Americans to heal the nation and safeguard its democratic principles by venerating the patriots who "saved their country to peace, to union, and to liberty."
Today, we live with Confederate monuments that, whatever else they may represent, bear the stain of white supremacy. For more than a century they have dominated the public square and crowded out the stories of people who stood for a more just and equitable future.
Those people included enslaved men and women who set themselves free amid the turmoil of war; southerners – black, white, and American Indian – who took up arms to defend the United States against the Confederacy; and citizens of good conscience, North and South, who strove to create an inclusive democracy in the post-Civil War years.
Their voices call to us from the past. What might they teach us about the meaning of the Civil War for our lives today? And how might those lessons inform the future we choose for the generations who will follow us here? To know the answers, we must make room to listen and to learn.
Silent Sam

silentsam.online