

Confederate Monuments Vandalized At 4 Southern Colleges



Silent Sam at UNC Chapel Hill

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Jenny Horne's emotional speech to the South Carolina's House of Representatives about voting to remove the Confederate battle flag from the statehouse grounds stirred the hearts of many - but students have been expressing their feelings about America's Confederate past at different historic locations: colleges.

Spray painted on the base of a statue of a Confederate soldier, called "Silent Sam" at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, are the words "KKK," "Black Lives Matter" and "Murderer."

Since April, UNC Chapel Hill is just one of four universities that have had monuments, buildings, and paintings representing Confederate leaders vandalized by students, according to Inside Higher Ed.

At the University of Texas Austin, a statue of Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederacy, was smeared with red graffiti, reading: ""Davis Must Fall."

At Winthrop University in South Carolina, someone also used red paint to write "violent racist" on a painting of Benjamin Tillman - located in Tillman Hall. In the 19th century, Tillman "was a powerful South Carolina politician and a participant and supporter in violent attacks on black people," the publication reports.

Tillman also has a deep history with Winthrop University: he helped secure state funds for the university, explaining why the main administration building, Tillman Hall, is named after him.

Tillman's legacy also reaches Clemson University in the same state, where a building is also named after Tillman. Someone splattered the words, "Tillman Was a Violent Racist" on a wall at Tillman Hall. Many at Clemson have been pushing for the university to rename the building, but the board has rejected their requests, the publication reports.

"While vandalism is clearly inappropriate, I hope that we focus on some of the broader issues," Benjamin D. Reese Jr., vice president for institutional equity at Duke University and president of the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education, told Insider Higher Ed via email. "There is a growing dialogue, surely to increase when our students return, about the symbolism of various statues, plaques and named building on our campuses. For me, it's not an issue of rewriting history, rather it's an appropriate discussion about the impact of certain symbolic representations, as our nation grapples with overt racism, subtle bias and microaggressions. Recent vandalism, although clearly inappropriate, is sometimes the light that shines on an issue, too long unspoken and ignored."

Kevin Kruger, president of NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, predicted that campuses would see more students voicing out against the names of buildings and statues linked to Confederate leaders.

He said that the past six months have been "transformational" for many students. They have seen "violent protests in Baltimore," "the most horrific racially fueled violence in Charleston... followed by a sudden spate of decisions to step away from the Confederate flag after years of contentious debate."

He said that this series of "very public" events "is causing students to take a closer look at their own communities and to take action where they see names or artifacts that represent values they don't agree with."

And in the age of social media and digital technology, every student can make their actions seen and heard, spurring more students to join the movement.