

Solomon Lowry

He/Him

Geography Major

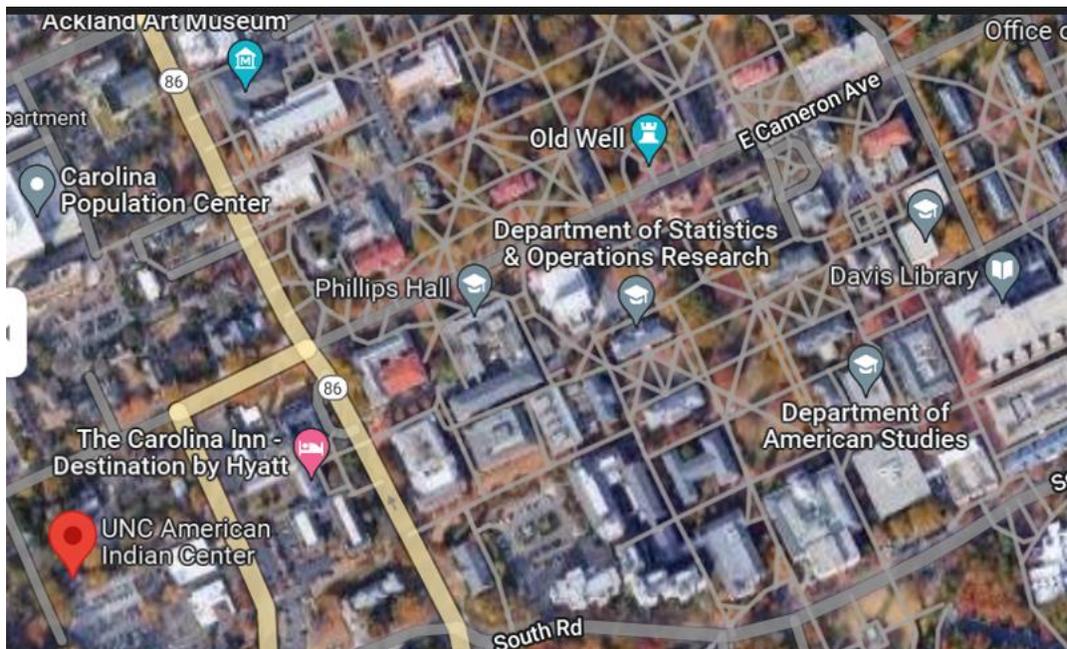
Senior

Foreword

The term “Decolonization” is growing in popularity within online activist movements. What exactly this term means and how the act of decolonization is carried out has been intensely debated, with no clear answer being discernable. Individual experiences drastically alter the meaning of decolonization on a personal level as many perceive decolonization as being the infiltration of traditionally non-persons of color spaces, while others feel the only way to achieve true decolonization is through the dismantling of existing institutions and the direct restitution of indigenous lands to their respective peoples. I am more convinced that the latter interpretation leads to effective decolonization and am interested in examining how institutions go about this process. I particularly feel that institutions are by design uninterested in the dismantling of existing exploitation and any attempt to do so is only a performance in an attempt to appease those who are easily appeased. The fiasco that ensued at UNC-Chapel Hill with the hiring and firing of Nikole Hannah-Jones is a great example of how educational institutions claim to be progressive but when proposed with real change, shy away from the right thing and side with the ruling, conservative class. UNC symbolically supports socially important causes while lobbying aggressively behind the scenes to disrupt any important structural change. UNC renames buildings but will not construct actual culturally important buildings, such as the American Indian Center (AIC), in a visible location within the main campus. They will remove a horrendous statue, but instead of constructing an elaborate monument to those who built this campus, will build a barely discernable table which lies on unstable land. They do seemingly grasp the idea of decolonization with “The Gift” which is an artwork done by Senora Lynch, a Haliwa-Saponi artist who is widely known and respected throughout North Carolina. This piece of art, which is located next to the student union and consists of intricate brickwork inlaid into the existing bricks of the Carolina grounds, reclaims space for native artwork and physically removes existing traces of colonization present in this area. This is how decolonization is effectively achieved, with the upheaval of existing institutions, spaces, and structures that contribute to the exploitation of the working class. This process of decolonization is not likely to be pursued by the upper echelons at UNC but real change might be brought as the awareness of “Colonial” spaces within the university is heightened. Real change happens realistically on the timescale of decades perhaps, but without a solid foundation, will crumble or never be able to materialize in the first place. As the beneficiaries of a collapsing reality, we have to have an earlier start than previous generations on the regenerative practices that will hopefully lay the important groundwork for future generations. Although rather nihilistic, I can conceivably imagine we will not see any of the benefit of our actions in our lifetime, but we have to leave our houses clean for the next occupants. These themes are what I wish to convey with my exhibit.

How might institutions go about decolonization and are their practices even effective or are they done symbolically. Finally, how might these selections affect the spaces they inhabit and do they work for the further dismantling of systematic inequalities or operate in favor of them. These questions are what I wish the observer to consider and carry these perspectives into their daily lives.

Image #1



This image is a google maps rendering of the American Indian Center (AIC) in relation to UNC's main campus. This geographic representation lets us know the places in which Indigenous peoples are prohibited a permanent space. The image raises questions of whether the Indigenous students of UNC feel welcome when we know our presence is pushed out of view. The physical separation further solidifies our feelings of being ignored at this institution. This is but one reason why we do not feel at home on our land. Is this effective decolonization?

Image #2



This is the former Carr building, newly renamed to the Henry Owl building, the first person of color to attend UNC and a member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI). The individual that this was formerly named after was a member of the confederate cavalry and a white supremacist. By taking his name off of the building and replacing it with Henry Owl, UNC wrestles with the idea of decolonization, but only symbolically. The threatening removal of the American Indian and Indigenous Studies (AIIS) program reveals their true intentions towards Indigenous peoples who inhabit this campus. Effective decolonization?

<https://chapelboro.com/news/unc/unc-announces-new-names-for-two-campus-buildings/attachment/image-from-ios-1-10>

Image #3



This image is of the memorial to the confederate soldiers who had attended UNC-CH. This obvious message of reverence and honor to despicable causes was not lost on any sane person that inhabited this space. Now that it is removed and replaced by a memorial to the enslaved peoples who built this campus, UNC considers this issue forgotten. However, we can observe the marked size difference between the memorials, leaving us to wonder if they put the same effort into the new monument than the previous architects of silent sam.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silent_Sam#/media/File:Silent_Sam.jpg

Image #4



This image is of the new memorial constructed in place of the silent sam statue. Although this is a great first step, this memorial was placed on unstable land and pales in comparison to the size of the previous Silent Sam statue. Instead of constructing a grand statue that represents the enslaved peoples who built this institution, they are relegated a table that people eat on rather than admire. Barely noticeable on the campus, this should be an unacceptable solution and should be replaced by an important African-American figure within the community, constructed even bigger than silent sam. Effective decolonization?

<https://blackandblue.web.unc.edu/stops-on-the-tour/unsung-founders/>

Image #5



This beautiful image is of the grand artwork created by the Haliwa-Saponi artist, Senora Lynch. By physically removing bricks which represent the colonial legacies of UNC-CH and replacing them with those placed by Indigenous hands, she has effectively reclaimed this space for our people. This represents the symbolic upheaval of existing institutions while leaving the original stewards of this land to reclaim our spaces. Physical reminders like this are most effective in combatting systematic injustices. One example of effective decolonization.

<https://americanindiancenter.unc.edu/resources/the-gift/>