**The Historical Evolution of the University of North Carolina**

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English settlers arrived on the coast of the Carolinas around 1587 with an English charter from the queen and under the command of Sir Walter Raleigh (Padget, 1997). Upon their arrival English settlers encountered harsh winter conditions (Padget, 1997). Some settlers perished during the winter, while other settlers arrived later in the spring and befriended indigenous people. As English settlers continued to populate ‘unclaimed territories’ indigenous people migrated throughout the eastern coast to avoid contact with English settlers (Padget, 1997). Indigenous people of the Carolinas faced the invasion of multiple groups of European immigrants (Padget, 1997). There is speculation that some Cherokee, Siouan, Cheraw, and other indigenous tribes settled throughout the Carolinas. These groups, said to be of white and indigenous backgrounds, migrated accordingly along the Lumber River, as well as neighboring swamps during the 1711-1713 Tuscarora War (Padget, 1997). English settlers divided territories around the river to distinguish their growing settlements from lands occupied by the Lumbee tribes (Padget, 1997).

Inaccurate record keeping and spotty evidence has drawn scholars to speculate about the origins of the Lumbee people and any associated tribes who settled in the Carolinas (Padget, 1997). Indigenous people of the Carolinas faced the invasion of multiple groups of European immigrants (Padget, 1997). Even though indigenous peoples in North Carolina were declared free people, there were accounts of enslavement, violence, and forced migration against Lumbee tribes (Padget, 2007). Records show that the government of North Carolina granted the Lumbee people land ownership deeds and patents (Padget, 1977). Given their lighter skin tone, and similarity to the English way of life, the Lumbee were not perceived as indigenous savages (Padget, 1977). These different traits did not exempt the Lumbee from discriminatory practices and segregation. It is important to note that partial land recognition does not justify the displacement, murder, enslavement, and oppression of the indigenous tribes who occupied territories in which the universities of the University of North Carolina System were built.

The North Carolina government chartered for the creation of a university in 1789 (Brabham, 1980). The first university of the North Carolina system, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill opened its doors in 1795 (Brabham, 1980). It is the only public institution to have graduated students in the 18th century, making it one of the first operational public universities in the country (Brabham, 1980). In 1821 the government of North Carolina conducted a general assembly to appoint a board of trustees for the college under direction of the governor of the state acting as the board of trustee president (UNC-Chapel Hill, 2005). The general assembly legally delineated the role of the board of the trustees; established the student admission process; created university laws of governance and conduct; formed specialized university committees; and outlined the collection of payments (UNC-Chapel Hill, 2005). University funds greatly depended on student fees and donations. The Morrill Federal Land Act of 1862 allowed senators of the state to donate and sell federal land which could be appointed to the University of North Carolina (Brabham, 1980; Spillman, 2007). The state qualified for 30,000 acres of land per senator in congress (Brabham, 1980). The state of North Carolina also deferred unclaimed properties of deceased persons to the college (Brabham, 1980). Even though the university was deemed public, the state did not legalize the procurement of public funds to the college until 1881 (Brabham, 1980).

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill was originally created to educate future ministers and teachers. The university catered to young white men in southern territories. The university curriculum focused on studying classical languages and literature, while dedicating little time to the sciences (Brabham, 1980). Many of the early colleges and universities in the colonial era were modeled after European universities. Thereby, designing a curriculum in which young white males were to be educated in Latin, Greek, grammar, proverbial literature, and Christianity to evoke colonial British-like morale. Social, political, and economic factors have greatly influenced the evolution of the university curriculum. After the release of The Yale Report in 1828, students across university campuses, Chapel Hill included, called for the evolution of university curriculums (Spillman, 2007). In addition, the Morrill Federal Land Act, called for the addition of the study of agriculture and mechanical arts. Even though the act was not passed until 1862, the act helped solidify Chapel Hill’s School for the Application of Arts and Sciences as the university drifted away from the classic education model (Spillman, 2007). This shift diversified the curriculum to fit the national need for professionals versed in engineering and food cultivation. The university’s mission began to evolve from molding exemplary ministers and teachers of the colonial era to satisfy a growing need for merchants, and men proficient in agricultural practices.

During the reconstruction era the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill closed from 1871 to 1875 (Brabham, 1980). The institution was under great financial and political strain following the Civil War. The University was originally designed to educate future ministers and teachers, but it now needed to shift its curriculum to educate North Carolina’s workforce (Brabham, 1980). After the Civil War, southern scholars and legislators pushed for curriculums that would engulf a variety of professions. After opening in 1875, the university wanted to reinvent its curriculum to provide a practical education which would be useful in helping the south advance economically (Spillman, 2007). During the Antebellum and Reconstruction eras, the university’s mission was to educate young men who could advance their cities socioeconomically.

In the beginning of the 1900s the university eliminated the classical language requirement from the Bachelor of Arts degree curriculum, while enlarging the Bachelor of Science curriculum (Spillman, 2007). By 1918 the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill instituted general education requirements in its curriculum (Spillman, 2007). Students were now to be educated in basic history, math, science, and English courses much like today. Curriculums were again revised coinciding with the end of WWI and the Great Depression. By 1930 the university curriculum created basic courses which would be the foundation of specialized studies or independent studies as students progressed through their degrees (Spillman, 2007). This new curriculum prompted freshmen and sophomores to receive a general education, while juniors and seniors focused on specific majors. This new curriculum, designed and implemented after 1934, added a language requirement for freshmen and sophomores (Spillman, 2007). The college’s mission during this time was to educate young men that could understand the past, look towards the future, set goals, understand science, and apply basic math, while understanding society and the world around them (Spillman, 2007). This curriculum would allow the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to educate well-rounded young men. The modern curriculum that was proposed in 1934 was said to be the new foundation for Chapel Hill’s education model.

It is important to note that in the 1900s the University of North Carolina started to become a system. In addition to Chapel Hill, the University of North Carolina added the Women’s College at Greensboro, and North Carolina State College at Raleigh, in 1931 (at Chapel Hill). The Consolidated University of North Carolina was governed under a president and board of trustees (Graham, n.d.). Thus, it became more challenging to establish a functioning educational curriculum. The development of the UNC system continued in 1969 and was composed of 16 campuses in 1971 (Graham, n.d.).

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has a dense and eventful history since it was founded. It is important to understand this extensive history from multiple perspectives. UNC at Chapel Hill does not include an accurate depiction of indigenous and African American populations on its campus. Moreover, when looking through UNC at Chapel Hill history and library archives one can find historical accounts narrated by white voices for a white audience who completely disregard the existence of oppressed individuals. There is evidence elsewhere that UNC at Chapel Hill was built and serviced by slave labor (Henkel, 2021). This explains the hardships faced by the institution during and following the Civil War. It is disturbing to see such lack of acknowledgement for the experiences and narratives of enslaved populations. Given that without the land of indigenous peoples and slave labor, the UNC institutional system would cease to exist.

In 1951, the first African American students attended UNC Chapel Hill under pressure from the United State Court of Appeals (Graham, n.d.). The institution deemed itself progressive even though it admitted African American students under legislative pressure. During the 1950s and 1960s, with the uptick of the Civil Rights Movement, the student body at UNC Chapel Hill was addressed by Malcom X and Martin Luther King Jr. (Graham, n.d.). To address the racism surrounding the college, students, faculty, and staff picketed local businesses in 1963 because they refused to serve African American individuals. In 1964, students and some faculty marched from Durnham, North Carolina to Chapel Hill to again protest racially segregated businesses (Graham, n.d.). Students continued to challenge racist notions within the institution and surrounding areas. Student activism was a large part of UNC at Chapel Hill history throughout the 1950s-1990s and still is today, as students continue to protest for equity and racial justice.

The amount of progress made by UNC at Chapel Hill and the UNC System as a whole, regarding racial and social equity is questionable. Since 2015, students at Chapel Hill have manifested and filed reports against structural racism. The most recent student protests challenge campus racial inequity as the UNC system upholds confederate monuments on UNC campuses. In 2015 students manifested and advocated for the renaming of Saunders Hall to Carolina Hall (Graham, n.d.). Willian Laurence Saunders, who Saunders Hall was named after, was a Chapel Hill alumnus and the leader of the North Carolina Klu Klux Klan (UNC University Libraries, 2021). Students protested having a building at UNC Chapel Hill associated with white supremacy and racist ideals. The university’s board of trustees agreed to change the building name to Carolina Hall but instituted a sixteen-year ban on the renaming of campus monuments (UNC University Libraries, 2021). Even though the building was renamed, the administration of the institution is overtly limiting the possibility of renaming confederate monuments throughout UNC campuses. Students at Chapel Hill created a #SilentSam movement in August of 2017, to remove the statue of a confederate soldier (Farzan, 2019). The confederate monument was a site of demonstrations, protests, and vandalism during the academic year until the statue was toppled by protestors in August of 2018 (Farzan, 2019). The UNC system did not respond or acknowledge the situation until the statue was toppled (Farzan, 2019). Through lack of acknowledgement or appropriate action during protests and student demonstrations against structural racism, it is evident that the UNC System does not prioritize the narratives of historically marginalized student populations.

Lack of action in part of the administrative body of the UNC System has prompted many alumni and scholars to critique the racial history of institutions like UNC at Chapel Hill. The UNC System Libraries archive, and the Chapel Hill library contains a plethora of essays and dissertations critiquing the UNC System’s conflicting racial past and present. Geeta Kapur wrote a book in which she acknowledges the history of enslaved African Americans at UNC Chapel Hill (Henkel, 2021). Kapur immerses herself in the racial narrative and history of the institution to debunk the progressive image of the UNC System. Kapur investigates the systemic racism of UNC Chapel Hill from its physical structure and foundation to present day racial issues (Henkel, 2021). The University of North Carolina System is currently being investigated for multiple claims of systemic racism and political influence (Flaherty, 2021). The American Association of University Professors has composed a committee to investigate ‘structural racism’ and ‘egregious violations of principles of academic governance’, along with the mishandling of a tenure case against a renown African American journalist (American Association of University Professors, 2021). It is evident that the UNC System is not committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion, for its students, faculty, or staff.

It is important to study the historical foundation of institutions of higher education like the University of North Carolina systems and UNC at Chapel Hill, to understand the circumstances in which institutional philosophies were founded. Institutional values, missions, and philosophies shape the evolution of these institutions, as well as their response to student related issues. Administrators, students, faculty, and staff need to analyze the history of their institution and how it shapes their institution today. Many institutions fail to acknowledge their involvement in the displacement of indigenous groups and their active role in enabling slavery. Now that students of oppressed and historically marginalized populations are attending institutions like UNC at Chapel Hill, they are challenging oppressive narratives so that their institutions can be agents of social change. Students hope their institutions work towards positive change while acknowledging their historical wrongdoing. Analyzing history can allow an institution to reflect on their foundational values and can help institutions determine how they want to move forward in the future.

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