



Memories of Activism

Julia Straight, Department of Geography, Advised by Dr. Sara Smith

Research Question

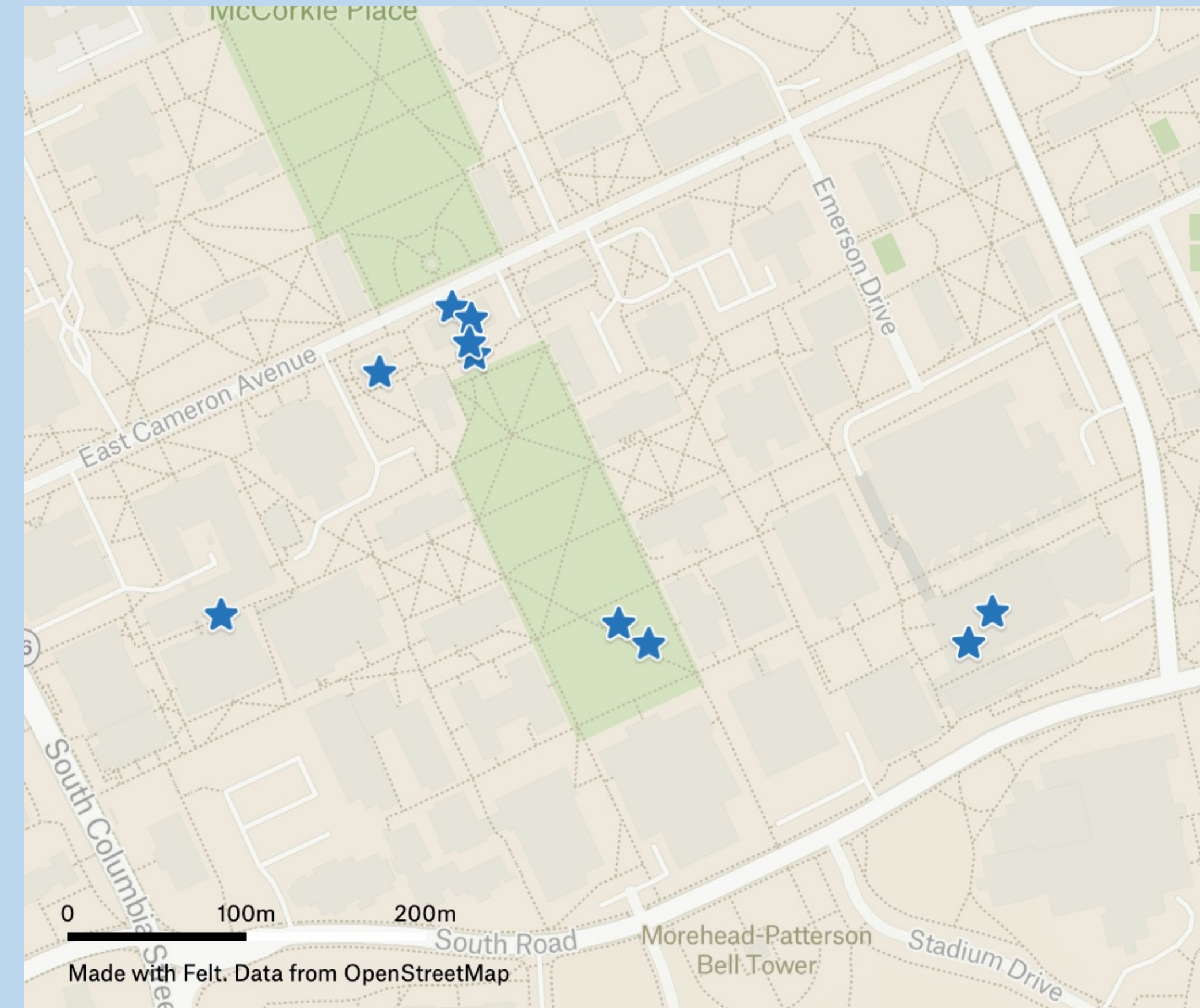
How do memories of student activism shape UNC's campus landscape?

Activist Event Examples

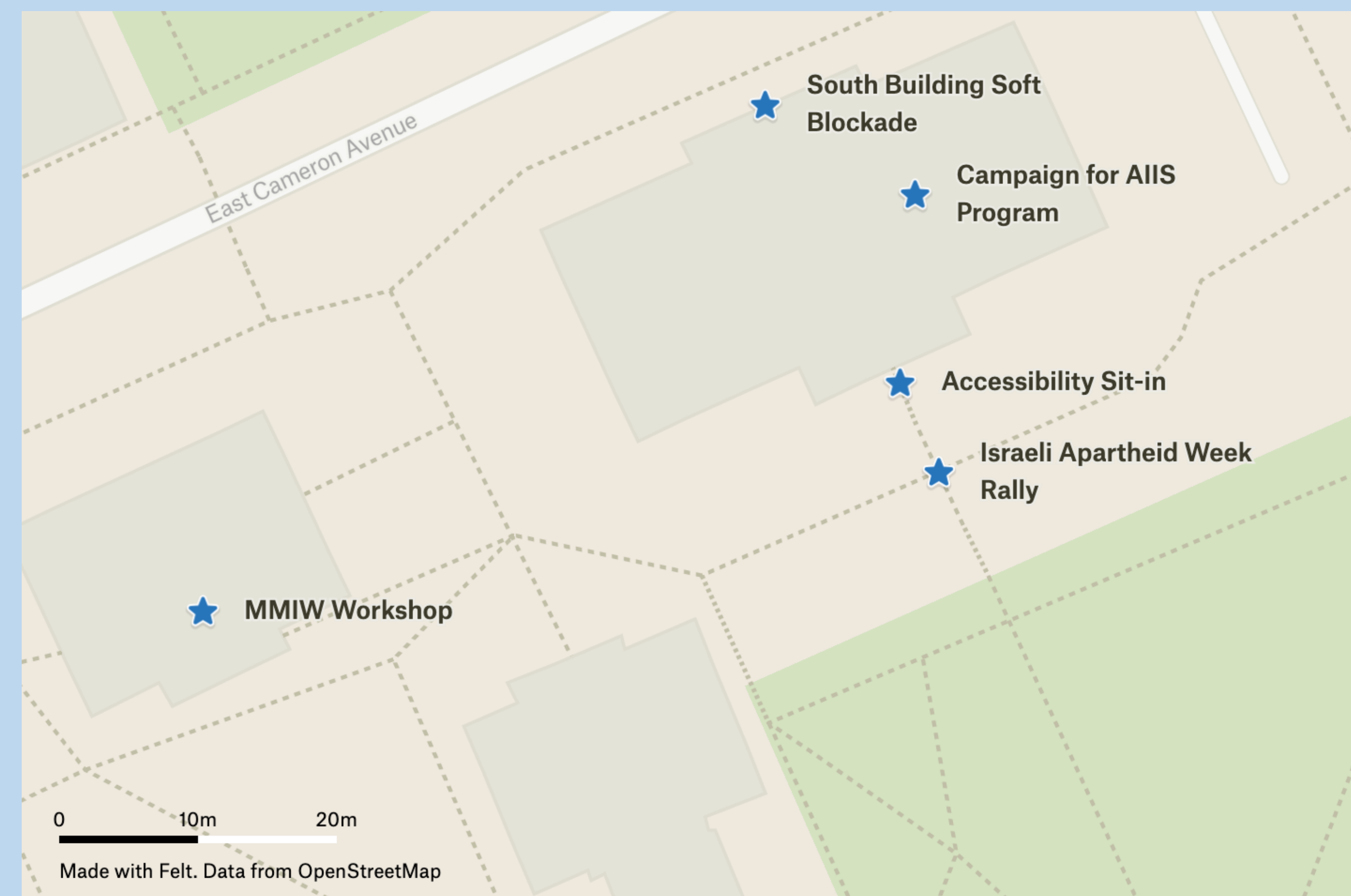
South Building Soft Blockade: This event showed Laura Saavedra Forero and other disabled students how much support for campus accessibility there is within the student body at UNC. The sit-in created community within the students who participated and momentum to take the movement forward. Saavedra Forero shared: "I'm grateful to all the folks that showed up and showed their support in different ways and we definitely have plans to keep going."

Missing, Murdered, and Indigenous Women Workshop: Tia Hunt, a member of the Carolina Indian Circle, described this workshop as a stepping stone for further Native activism. Hunt believes that sharing the perspective of CIC members and hearing the perspectives of other campus groups would build connections and community on campus. Hunt explained that the workshop "helped remind other students on campus that [Native students] are still here and [Native students] are still advocating for [them]selves." According to Hunt, many people on campus did not realize how rampant the MMIW issue is in Native communities, and students who attended the workshop displayed a noticeable difference in how they spoke about their activism.

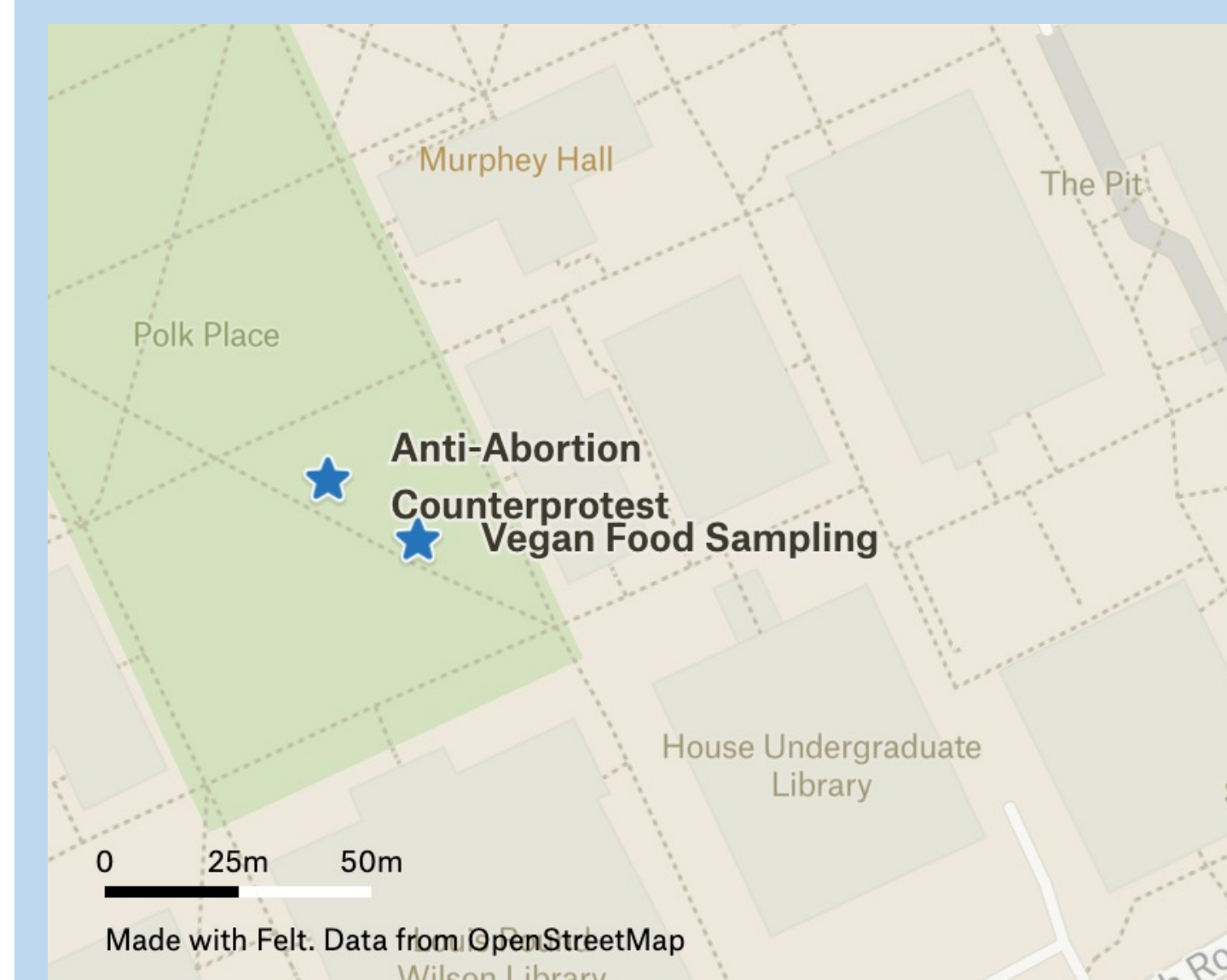
Vegan Food Sampling: Ruth Jeffers, a member of Vegans for Peace, shared that most people she spoke to while tabling cared about animals and the environment, and that was encouraging to hear: "it's always important to connect with people ... where you have a shared value; that wasn't too hard to do because a lot of people already care." People with a variety of diets regarding animal products were open to talking about animals and were interested in hearing about veganism. Through those conversations, Jeffers shared the idea that vegan food is regular food, is accessible, and tastes good.



Overview of interactive student activism map

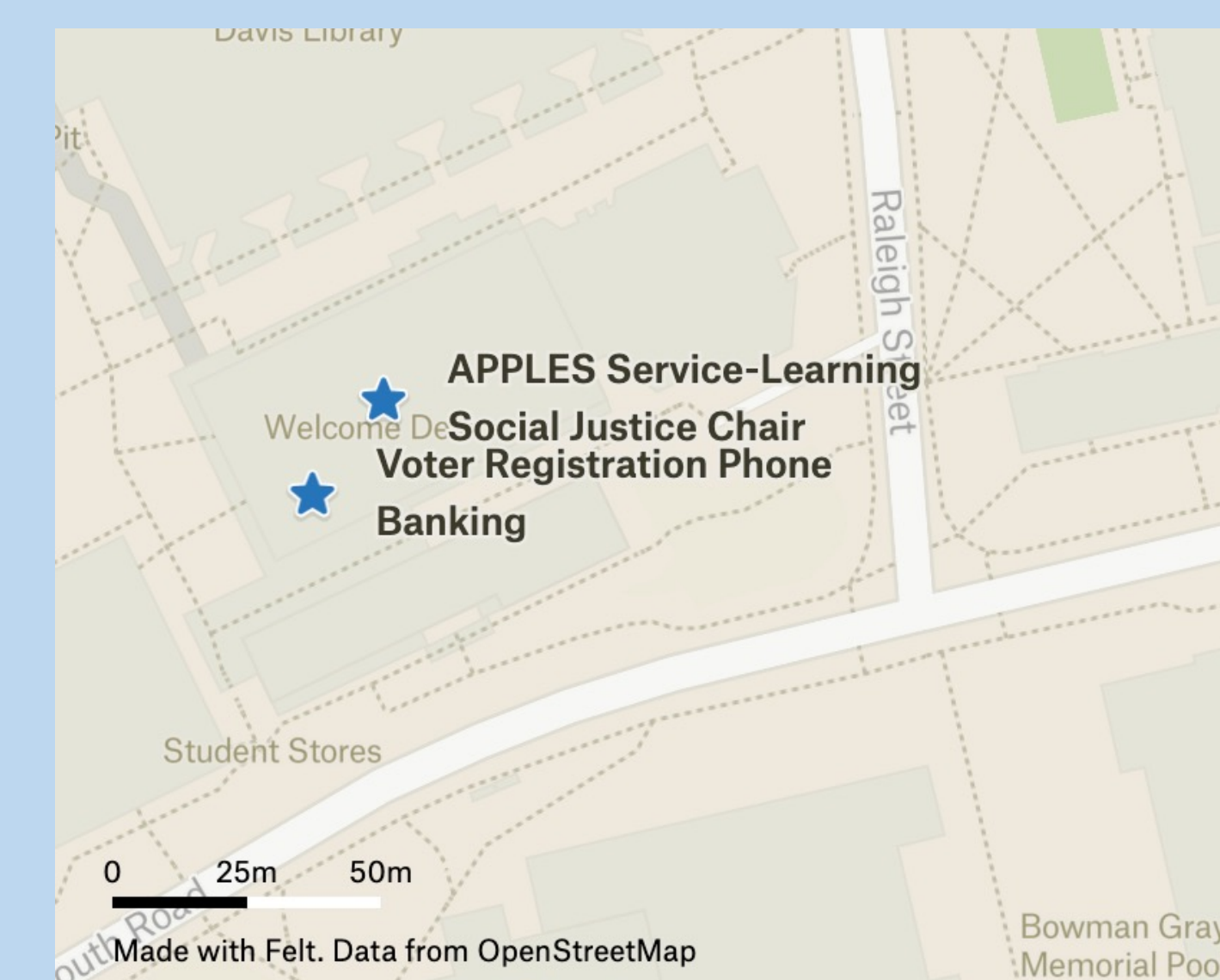


Student activism events at South Building and the Campus Y



Student activism events on Polk Place (above)

Student activism events in Carolina Union (below)



Methods

For this research project, I conducted oral history interviews with student activists on UNC's campus. In each interview, we discussed the inspiration for their activism and the activist event as well as the goals and resulting impacts of each event. I then used these interviews to create 10 activist event profiles that each describe an activist event on campus and how the memory of it shaped UNC's campus landscape. To spatially represent these activist event profiles, I created an interactive map of UNC's campus, marking the location of each event with blue stars. This interactive map is displayed on a publicly accessible website, allowing anyone interested to learn more about student activism on UNC's campus.

Conclusion

Activist events on UNC's campus have a variety of impacts on the campus landscape: protection of student safety, increased voter turnout, expanded awareness of injustices. The establishment and strengthening of community bonds were common themes throughout these 10 student activist events. Through many of these events, students with common passions and goals were able to find a platform to connect with each other. These community bonds allow students to feel better supported on campus, enabling a greater capacity for activism and bolstering quality of life.

"Signs of community happened in a way which we hadn't seen before"

Student activist Laura Saavedra Forero on the impacts of a sit-in protesting the inaccessibility of campus

This project was created based on Summer 2023 interviews with UNC student activists Tia Hunt, Laura Saavedra Forero, Ruth Jeffers, Matthew, Nicole Cummings, Brigitte, and Peyton Lindogan.