

Tracing The Travails of Our Next-Door Neighbor

23 October 2022

For years, these pages have sought to report objectively about the recurring onslaught on the history, values and traditions of Washington and Lee University. We believe the ongoing attempt to expunge its legacy will have profound effects on its ability to survive as the extraordinary liberal arts college and law school it became over the 150+ years since Robert E. Lee was its president. Lee, as educational innovator and moral values steward of Washington College's relaunch after the Civil War, inspired his successors over many decades to create an iconic and highly sought-after destination.

In 1839, thanks to the work of the Franklin Society with the Virginia General Assembly, the land next to Washington College occupied by the Virginia Arsenal became the home of the Virginia Military Institute. As you will read in the accompanying document, it made amazing contributions to America's extraordinary evolution as a constitutional republic. The fact that millions of people (legally and non-legally) from around the globe are making extreme sacrifices to come to America is a testament to America's drawing power. The immigrants' actions override the widespread and false narrative that America is a place with embedded institutional or structural racism. Those who make the trek here, particularly through Mexico and across our wide-open southern border, are not coming here to become entangled in a racist morass. America is still sought as a land of opportunity, one built on a foundation of meritocracy and human achievement.

VMI and Washington and Lee both share a similar educational goal, one that aims to produce graduates who can create and nurture value focused and thriving families, if they so choose, and to become leaders in their professions, cities/towns, state, other chosen communities and nation. VMI utilizes a military-centric education model to achieve its goals, one of a half dozen or so institutions that excel in this role. Washington and Lee rely on a time-honored model built upon the liberal arts, sciences and law that has been in place since the 1600's at Harvard and in Virginia at The College of William and Mary, once it started its transition in its earlier years from exclusively training clergy to serve the Anglican Church in the Colony of Virginia.

Despite these differences, there are many ties between the two schools, particularly through alumni who have mutual respect for and close friendships with one another's

graduates. Similarly, both have been under attack with false narrative charges of institutional racism.

The formal process for the denigration of Washington and Lee began in 2017 with the appointment of a Commission on Institutional History and Community. It planted the seeds for many of the tradition destroying actions we have reported and commented upon over the past few years. VMI's assault started a little later, driven by then Virginia Governor Ralph Northam's letter of October 19, 2020, calling for an investigation of racism at VMI and making an unsubstantiated claim concerning "horrifying new revelations of threats (plural) about lynching..." which proved to be untrue.

The above quotation is found in an article entitled VMI Two Years After Ralph Northam's October 19, 2020 letter that appeared in the Roanoke Star-News on October 17, 2022. This document will soon be posted on our website. We urge you to seek it out. It is a highly useful review of what transpired at VMI after the summer of 2020 and the unfortunate death of George Floyd that triggered widespread rioting, looting and fire-bombing around the nation. It was written by VMI alumni members Forrest L. Marion, 1980; Carmen D. Villani, Jr., 1976; and Henry J. Rogers, 1979.

Our purpose here is to ask that you review the attached paper, which is entitled VMI Graduate Sounds Alarm: "Enough Is Enough!" It appeared in the Roanoke Star-News on August 31, 2022. It was written by Mike Staso, VMI Class of '79 who lives in Manila, Philippines. Mr. Staso's piece contains a helpful analysis of the findings reported by the consultants who carried out the investigation of racism as ordered by then Governor Northam. It focuses on key issues in the institutional and student life of VMI, such as attempts to rework the way the Honor Court functions, the erasure of Stonewall Jackson and honoring of and activities surrounding the fallen Cadets at New Market, the recasting of the history of VMI in the Civil War, the looming presence of the CRT-DIE bureaucratic forces, etc. You will get the drift, as these citations are of Cancel Culture working its way through the history and traditions of the institution. There is much of interest to read and think about. At the end, Mr. Staso's piece calls for the need to eliminate the accumulated damage that has resulted over the past two years.

I close with a quote from the previous article I cited by Messrs. Marion, Villani and Rogers: "During Finals week in 1848, each of the Institute's 24 graduates received a class ring. It was the first year for a VMI class ring. The class chose one word, 'Mizpah' in Hebrew – from the Book of Genesis – to be inscribed in Old English script on the ring's face. Translated, it means, 'May the LORD watch between you

and me when we are absent from one another.’ From VMI’s early years, it was a sign of the tangible brotherhood that traditionally existed among Brother Rats, which was extended to all graduates. It is that traditional, coveted VMI bond that the last two years of divisive, CRT-DEI-based ideology threatens to destroy.”

Respectfully submitted,

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Tom Rideout

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VMI Graduate Sounds Alarm: “Enough Is Enough!” The Roanoke Star-News August 31, 2022

VMI has existed as an institution for over 180 years, producing citizen soldiers in a time-honored and tested fashion, using proven methods that provide measurable results. It has undeniably made an outsized impact on this Nation and the wider

world. VMI, as a crucible of character development, has produced 7 Medal of Honor winners; 11 Rhodes Scholars; the senior US Military Officer during WWII; a Noble Peace Prize holder; a US Secretary of State, George C. Marshall, who almost singlehandedly resuscitated Europe following WWII with the Marshall Plan; almost 300 General or Flag rank Officers; and many other leaders in both civilian and military circles.

VMI advertises itself as a place where you can come and “don’t do ordinary.” Notwithstanding that message, VMI is on a direct path to not being anything special amongst places of higher learning with the course it is currently aggressively pursuing. If its present course isn’t corrected soon, at some point before we know it, the only difference between VMI and any “normal” college might well be only the wearing of a uniform, if even that persists going forward.

The VMI that has existed in the past and successfully met its goal of producing Citizen Soldiers is dying a death by 1,000 cuts.

Stories relayed to me, originating principally from current Cadets, are, as a VMI alumnus, quite disturbing. Recently, I was told that a senior leader of the Administration made a direct statement to rising Cadet leaders that “if you’re doing something because of tradition, you’re wrong!”

I posit that traditions and reverence to one’s past is very important, yet the VMI Administration is on what appears to be an accelerated path to eliminating any reference to the Institute’s involvement in the Civil War, while also changing aspects of Cadet culture and life that are deemed “offensive,” using subjective criteria and modern-day sensitivities.

One has to question the quality of academic staff the Institute has been hiring when a senior professor makes statements that VMI isn’t really a military school as the place more closely resembles the University of Maryland than a true military school

in their mind. Unfortunately, this mind set is more common within the teaching staff than it ever has been before. Historically, actually, until not that long ago, a significant percentage of the teaching staff at the Institute were themselves VMI graduates, carrying forth the traditions and culture that they themselves experienced firsthand. (In my academic department when I was a Cadet in the late 70s, a majority of the faculty were graduates.) Today, in the ranks of over 700 staff of the Institute, less than 30 are former Cadets. This change in academic leadership is reflective of a failure of VMI's Academic Dean and other senior Administration staff to adequately vet the quality and background of staff that the Institute has been hiring, nor making hiring former graduates a priority. This slow evolution of the "liberalization" of the faculty has monumental impact on the dilution of the culture of the Corps which won't fully be felt until one day it is evident that VMI is no longer holds the values of duty, honor, and individual sacrifice as sacred as it used to be. The new mantra will be "self over self-sacrifice and others!"

Nothing at VMI is held more sacred than the Corps' Honor Code. A dozen changes to the VMI Honor Court process are currently being undertaken by the Administration. These changes that modify the composition and processes of the Honor Court appear to be motivated by complete and total acceptance of the Barnes and Thornburg (B&T) report and react to baseless charges of alleged prejudicial persecution and prosecution of minority (and athletic scholarship) Cadets. It would appear that the Administration is making a lot to do over nothing and is directly responding to a false narrative. If one looks past the "fluff" in the B&T report on VMI, one sees that there is no basis on this conjecture of prejudice in applying the code of Honor.

Quotes from the B&T report prove this out. "At the same time, the data VMI produced does not suggest impropriety or unfair treatment among the 91 cases that resulted in a finding of guilty. To the contrary, overall, the cases appeared to be well-documented and justified." (Found on page 76 of the report). "The investigation found no evidence of overt bias in Honor Court proceedings." (Page 82.) "As stated

at length above, the Team's review of the 2015–2020 Honor Court files does not lead the Team to conclude that any one adjustment would change the outcome of past Honor Court proceedings. (Page 90.) It is as if no one looked past the Executive Summary and into the details of what is essentially a report based on hearsay and conjecture, not facts. Changes include measures that pursue a desire to force the desired “mix” of jurors in a hearing. One of the changes specifically states, “In instances where it is deemed beneficial by the Superintendent’s Representatives to the Honor Court, a member(s) of the jury pool not selected as a juror(s) may be invited to observe select trial proceedings.

These rare instances might occur if the seated, randomized jury did not yield the desired diversity mix or the case is particularly contentious.” Is the Administration presupposing that race and/or gender diversity is required in those chosen to participate in an Honor Court jury, and the absence of such leads to false, biased outcomes? Challenges to the “single sanction” Honor system may continue as well.

One has to only look to the US Military Service Academies to see what happens when compromises of honor occur, with the recent resultant widespread cheating scandals at West Point and the Air Force Academy. The VMI honor code is quite simple, “I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor tolerate those that do.” Considering these findings, I ask, why the rush to change Honor Court processes and procedures on the part of the Administration. The Honor Court belongs to the Corps and should only be changed in response to “real issues.”

Issues with the Honor Court do exist though, particularly one disturbing report recently received concerning undue interference in the process by a VMI Athletic Staff member. Reports have surfaced from several individuals that the senior football coach approached an Honor Court prosecutor during a recess in an ongoing Honor Court hearing, where the coach was not participating in the trial, verbally attacking the prosecutor with the charge “How can you sleep at night,” in reference to an Honor Court investigation of an athlete, which should not have been any of the

coach's business, and was clearly outside of his realm of influence or concern. If we truly hold honor above self and above football, this behavior must not be tolerated. Such actions on the part of this football coach are irregular, reprehensible, and shameful, and should be punished once an investigation by the VMI Administration substantiates the facts. Dismissal would not be too harsh of a punishment in my mind. I won't hold my breath though.

I have heard that the VMI Superintendent demanded, and received, as a condition of his employment, modification of previous policies that identified the VMI Board of Visitors as the final arbitrator of VMI Honor Court decisions (and for issues of disciplinary conduct as well), establishing himself unilaterally as the ultimate, supreme authority over these proceedings, without any oversight. What justifies this change?

We are all familiar at this point with the removal of the Stonewall Jackson statue that used to exist on the VMI Parade Field, outside of barracks. It appeared at first that this statue was "sacrificed" in an effort to appease those who desired to attack and condemn VMI because of the perceived, unwarranted by many, reverence that VMI held for Jackson, who was obviously a "bad" actor due to his owning slaves in the last century. Ignoring the fact that he was considered around the world in his time and later, up until this century, as being one of five military geniuses in world history, those who follow the woke and liberal narrative wanted him erased. There was "hope" on the part of many VMI alumni that his removal would appease those beating at the door of VMI to tear it down. As we've learned many times in the past, appeasement generally doesn't work, and it only emboldens and even at times accelerates additional conflict. Once the flood gate was metaphorically opened, the advocates for cultural elimination have come out in force, endorsed, and encouraged by almost all organs of the present VMI Administration.

Rather than contextualize VMI's past, the current choice is to change it or completely remove it. One doesn't have to look hard to find a multitude of examples.

Most, if not all, artwork depicting VMI alumni who participated in the Civil War have been removed from display from VMI buildings, to include those portraits of VMI luminaries commissioned by the VMI Board of Visitors in 1883, and later hung in a gallery within Preston Library. Jackson's name was literally erased (chiseled) from the main entrance into barracks. The remark attributed to Jackson, "You may be whatever you resolve to be," historically inscribed inside the arch, has been reattributed to others, and no reference is made to Jackson using the phrase at all, even though we were told that was to be the case.

The annual parade honoring the fallen Cadets at New Market has been changed to now pay reverence to all former alumni who lost their lives, in all conflicts. I would wholeheartedly acknowledge that such commemoration is warranted, but not at the expense of changing what has existed as a special event to honor those members of the VMI Corp of Cadets who acted bravely and with courage under fire, and ended their young lives, in what is the only example in US history of an entire student body engaging in combat as a singular entity. A separate event should have been established to honor other losses. Though VMI has a nearby memorial garden to honor its fallen brothers (and sisters), the statue created by the renowned sculpture Moses Ezekiel, VMI's first Jewish Cadet, who entered VMI in 1862, a particularly eventful matriculation considering norms of the time, has been changed in its meaning. Rather than being a specific memorial to his fellow Cadets who perished during the Civil War, in what I am certain had to have been a very personal token of his loss and their sacrifice, VMI has seen fit to redefine its purpose as well. Now the function of the statue has been morphed into being a memorial to all fallen alumni, regardless of time or place. Gone is the direct connection between Ezekiel and his fellow participants in the Battle of New Market, as was intended in 1903 when the statue was dedicated. One only has to read a quote from Moses himself to understand how he felt regarding his creation of the statue, and its intended meaning: "It was...one of the most sacred duties of my life to remodel my bronze statue...to be placed on the parade grounds of the V.M.I., overlooking the graves of my dead

comrades so that their memory may go on in imperishable bronze, sounding their heroism and Virginia's memory down through all ages and forever."

In what one might easily consider to be disrespectful of past cadet sacrifices, the names of the 10 Cadets killed in the New Market battle have recently been removed from the "Rat Bible". Do they no longer warrant our respect? Books discussing VMI's involvement in the Civil War were directed to be removed from the VMI bookstore by the VMI Administration. The Cadet Civil War Roundtable was disestablished. The Hall of Valor at New Market, now renamed the Virginia Museum of the Civil War, has officially terminated any future reenactments of the "Field of Lost Shoes" charge.

Jackson Memorial (JM) Hall has been recast as only Memorial Hall, and even references to the benign use of the term JM Hall in the VMI Alumni Review class notes sections are edited out by Alumni Association staff. A senior Staff Faculty member recently directed (ordered) a Cadet, giving a tour of Post to a group of family members attending a commemorative function for an alumnus that had passed, to not mention anything of VMI's history as it relates to the Civil War nor to point out any statues or other iconography on Post that was related (not that there's much left to comment on). Two medals, historically bestowed at VMI by the United Daughters of the Confederacy, a non-political entity, the "Stonewall Jackson Award" for physics and the "Sir Moses Ezekiel Award" for creative endeavors, are being prohibiting from being given at future VMI sponsored awards ceremonies. Who loses out in such circumstances? Even the current Virginia Historic Landmark plaques describing VMI are being rewritten "to provide context." When and where does it stop?

I shudder in anticipation at night of waking up to hear of the latest news that the famous Clinedinst picture of the Cadets charging at New Market, which currently hangs in the VMI Chapel within the building formerly known as "Jackson Memorial Hall," is being removed and relegated to the basement "closet," and that the four

brass cannons positioned outside of barracks used by the Rockbridge Artillery during the Civil War (christened Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), are found to be of offense as well, and are being sent to the foundry to be melted down and recast as DEI or CRT “Challenge Coins.” How much longer will the wearing of uniforms be mandatory, as surely the mandate for such is indicative of a warrior instilled culture, offensive to passivists and others of like leanings, or the elimination of class specific privileges as it clearly discriminates against “younger” students, that should be treated the same in the name of equality (equity). Who really knows what’s next in the current haste to placate?

VMI has not historically been an easy place to “survive,” nor should it be if it is to continue producing graduates that are able to handle the stresses, time demands, and challenges of being Leaders in military and civilian service. With all the pressures of cultural liberation and change, legal concerns, and appeasements to NCAA athletics, the challenges it presents lessens each year. Reports are that this situation has also developed in response to criticisms from professors that rats were not adequately focused on academics, and by coaches that rat athletes got worked out too much. New entrants to VMI are still required to participate in the “rat line,” which has the intent of removing all aspects of who you were or where you came from prior to coming to VMI, making all new entrants equal, and rebuilding and fashioning the “whole man” and character of a VMI graduate as an end product, though it barely resembles the past experience, even today.

New social experiments being actively pursued by the current VMI Administration are at risk of derailing and mortally wounding the process. I’m told that Rats can’t even be disciplined except in the presence of Cadets who are members of the Cadet Equity and Affairs Committee. The responsibility for enforcement of the rat line rests with the upper classes, but historically it has been most actively policed by the 3rd Class, who itself has just passed through that process. In today’s world, I’m told, the 1st Class is essentially the only rigorous enforcer, an extreme dilution of the environment that I believe is quite important for success. Current DEI training being

conducted at VMI attempts to show how “we” are all different, coming from different backgrounds and experiences, in direct contravention to VMI’s historical position that all new entrants are equal, with no privileges or special considerations being afforded. VMI’s Class system, with tiered privileges, is under attack as well, if not already completely broken.

These changes are often being justified as being necessary to respond to accusations of systemic racism at the Institute, which I, and others, strongly contend is a false narrative.

Major General Wins, the recently appointed VMI Superintendent, has defined what the concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion mean to him. “Diversity and inclusion at VMI mean integrating qualified cadets, faculty, and staff of all races, ethnicities, genders, religions, nationality, and socioeconomic status in proportions reflective of the commonwealth and the nation.” Sounds like another attempt to instill a quota system in regard to hiring staff and admitting perspective Cadets, rather than a merit-based approach, which results in the best candidate being chosen on objective criteria, rather than race, sex, orientation, etc. Actually, to me, this sounds a lot like reverse discrimination.

While MIT has just recently announced that it will be reinstating the use of SAT and ACT tests as a part of the evaluation of applicants, VMI is moving in the opposite direction, removing the requirement for such testing in what appears to be an endorsement of woke philosophies that such testing is racist in nature as it discriminates against certain classes of disadvantaged individuals.

If one dives into the details of the DEI status reports coming out of VMI, one learns of an effort currently underway in a joint Administration and Alumni Association cooperative venture to modify the procedures used to prioritize and award alumni donated funds via needs-based scholarships to cadets in a manner that essentially make it extremely challenging or nearly impossible for non-minority individuals to

receive the level of required financial assistance. This adjusting of financial awards will be done by moving all minority cadets to the front of the awards list, based solely on race, and not financial situation, at the expense of non-minority individuals.

Though the current leadership of the state of Virginia was elected in large part due to dissatisfaction in the direction of the state regarding education, parental rights, and the imposition of DEI/CRT indoctrination, VMI has not wavered in its efforts to implement DEI/CRT indoctrination within the Corps (and significantly increasing DEI related staff and awarding contracts for DEI related training). In fact, VMI's Director of Communications has mocked the efforts of the Governor to roll back such efforts by publicly asking why VMI should be expected to reevaluate its DEI plans based upon the results of just an election. VMI's recent funding request to the state to enhance its spending on DEI related initiatives, though explicitly rebuffed in the state's budget allocations, have been directed to continue by the VMI Administration, with other funding sources being identified to carry out these initiatives, such as thru increased tuition and fee charges being levied on Cadets.

The VMI Administration and the VMI Board of Visitors have fully embraced the results of what many consider to be a statistically faulty and unprofessionally conducted audit by Barnes and Thornburg, and have aggressively and with haste made efforts to implement all but one of its recommendations. The sole recommendation discounted by VMI and its Administration is the one that calls out the detrimental efforts of VMI participating in Division I athletics, recommending that VMI compete in athletics at a different level. The continuance of VMI's participation in Division I athletics was recognized as being extremely damaging to the "health" of the Institute and the fostering of divisiveness within the Corps.

It was acknowledged in the report that the conflicts between Cadets that exist within VMI can more easily be attributed to one of athlete versus non-athlete than any association or conflict between races and/or sexes. Frankly put, the pedestal that

athletics has been placed upon by the VMI Administration has fostered an environment where athletic requirements trump academics, and even more so, the military aspect of VMI. VMI's foundation is described as a three-legged stool, with academics, athletics, and military being the basis upon which VMI operates. The unbalanced support and overly impacting influence of Division I athletics at VMI, most specifically basketball and football, has created an environment where individuals are often entering VMI not to be a part of a greater body of Cadets operating within a formal Military structure, but rather functioning as individuals who are pursuing their own self-interests of playing sports above all else, and secondarily gaining a means to an education at someone else's expense. Often, participating in the Military aspects of VMI are deemed a nuisance to be avoided at all costs, as facilitated by the rules and dual standards of the Institute. Many of the recently constructed athletic facilities, or portions therein, are "off limits" to anyone other than NCAA athletes. This is but one reason why there is a sense of institutional favoritism towards NCAA athletes, and tensions exist between athletes and non-athletes. Players socialize with and associate themselves with other sports participants at the expense of being fully functioning members of a VMI Class. A recent Division I athlete graduate, upon being asked about his experience at VMI, related that he appreciated most the support of his fellow teammates, never acknowledging any appreciation of his fellow academic classmates or company cohorts.

During MG Wins' comments to new Cadets at this year's matriculation, he highlights the fact that 120 of the entering mass (future class of 2026) were recruited NCAA athletes, representing almost a third of the entire entering body. (Why isn't the same level of effort exerted to recruit high quality new cadets that are not athletes?) To me, this situation doesn't bode well for the future when a significant percentage of Cadets don't materially participate in the Military aspects of being as member of the Corps of Cadets a good portion of the class year. I'm fully convinced that if the athletic professionalism continues and increases at VMI (as MG Wins wants), then all will only get worse and "... VMI will fade from existence. One

cannot ignore the fact that the majority of individuals that have been complaining of their biased treatment at the hands of VMI have predominantly, if not 100%, been NCAA athletes. Is the problem potentially not one of race but rather one of spoiled, coddled high school kids not getting their way at VMI, as they have been allowed in their past, and revolting against a culture that at its core states that no individual is above or better than another, that all are created equal, and are equally broken down to be remolded into a better individual as a result of the VMI experience?

A good measure of the damage that is being caused to VMI and its ability to mold young men and women into the Leaders of tomorrow is the drastic reduction in the number of new entrants into the Institute at the start of the current academic year. Admissions are dramatically down from historical levels, numbering in the mid-300s this year in contrast to an average of over 500 in most recent years, even at the height of covid and online classes. Reports are that a large number of formerly enrolled Cadets will also not be returning to VMI, adding additional concern to the enrollment numbers issue, and adding credence to concerns that something is “rotten in Denmark.” Unlike VMI, according to a recent article in US News and World Report, other colleges in the state are experiencing higher than normal enrollment numbers, to include Virginia Tech (9%), George Mason (8%), Norfolk State (7%), UVA (4%), and William & Mary (4%). One has to question whether or not all the negative reporting in the public press which has not be effectively countered by the VMI Alumni Association, the Board of Visitors, or the VMI Administration, in addition to the embracing of woke indoctrination and the gutting of tradition and history is fully having effect by destroying VMI from within and turning potentially interested young men and women elsewhere for their academic training.

As we move forward, we, those that care about the Institute and its future, need to focus on ensuring that the Honor Code stands unscathed, and that VMI maintains a challenging rat system that breaks down and rebuilds character for all VMI Cadets, and doesn't exempt athletes from the process by bowing down to NCAA requirements that are damaging to the experience, as it currently does. We also need

to ensure that equality means eliminating any favoritism or benefits within the system that might exist, and that the system isn't perverted in a rush to react to outside forces. We need to firmly acknowledge and defend that VMI rewards behavior and outcomes based upon merit, and not race, sex, etc., counter to what is the message being perpetuated by many liberal press outlets, without verification and/or with bias.

All of this institutional modification and erasure has to stop. Concerned alumni, staff, family members, and friends of VMI need to add their voices to the call "Enough is Enough!" As is the mantra of the VMI political action committee (PAC), "VMI is Good." We need to aggressively counter the damaging efforts of anyone who professes otherwise, and, more importantly, those in the current VMI Administration, and Virginia Legislature, who would propose and pursue actions otherwise. The actions of these "bad" characters threaten the future viability and worthiness of what VMI represents to the State and the Nation.

We need to call upon the Governor of Virginia to formally express his vote of "no confidence" in the current leadership of the Institute and demand either a "righting of the ship" or their resignations so that others willing to comply with his mandates to eliminate all forms of wokism and damaging infusion of DEI/CRT training at VMI are allowed to take over.

Continued silence on our part is not the answer, nor is appeasement.

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