

“W&L: A Place Like No Every Other”

Dear Members of the Washington and Lee Community
and Supporters of The Generals Redoubt,

Many of you are lucky enough to be counted among the graduates of this wonderful University. I am not an alumnus but I am the proud parent of a Washington and Lee graduate.

Although my son graduated in 2016, I remain committed to the preservation of the history, traditions, and ideals at the school. “General Lee’s College” is so special that it inspires that level of loyalty and commitment from many in the community.

When my son arrived at Washington and Lee in 2012, we were struck by how open-minded his classmates were. They appreciated that they were studying at a place with an amazing history and that this was a golden opportunity to learn from that history. Many students that we met at orientation noted that they had turned down offers of admission from schools like Harvard, Yale, and Williams to study at this small Southern school. Undoubtedly there were many reasons for this including the beautiful campus, the rich history, the generous financial aid packages, and the reputation for academic excellence. Perhaps most importantly for me, there was diversity of a kind rarely seen on college campuses: diversity of opinion.

Students were independent thinkers and were respectful when listening to the views of others. George Washington and Robert E. Lee were properly recognized for their contributions to the school and to society. It was alright to express your opinions about these historical figures without fear of being ostracized by your peers or penalized by your professors. Any disagreements about Lee and Washington could be discussed in a civil manner by students who were well read on their history. Before my son even got to school, incoming students were posting pictures with “George and Bob” from their hometowns. This was a fun and unifying activity that would be viewed with horror by the current cancel culture scolds.

I knew I had made the right choice to send my son to this school rather than to my alma mater, Harvard University. By the time my son was looking at colleges, I was becoming disillusioned by Harvard’s increasingly leftist student body and educational philosophy. There was a dramatic shift away from learning the classics in literature and toward a social justice inspired curriculum. Harvard University was also well on its way to being voted last in the nation in encouraging free speech.

Sadly, Washington and Lee has undergone a radical and unwelcome change since my son matriculated in 2012. Little did I know that, in a mere ten year period, Washington and Lee would be emulating the failing “Harvard model”. Why is this happening and what can we do about it?

Part of the blame lies with the general societal trend toward political correctness but some of the problem lies within the school admissions process and its hiring of professors, staff, and the school president. Most Washington and Lee students appreciate the College experience and educational experience that they are receiving in Lexington.

Unfortunately there is a small contingent of students who arrive in Lexington with the intention of tearing down many of the things that make Washington and Lee so special. They take the school’s generous financial aid and complain that Lee Chapel is named after the man who built it. They are adamant about tearing down any pictures of George Washington and Robert E. Lee and about renaming everything in sight. They are horrified that a plaque mentions that Traveller was Robert E. Lee’s horse. They are not the majority of students but they know that loud and persistent complaining will facilitate their goals.

These students are overly indulged by a school administration that has little regard for the school’s history as well. When you observe President Dudley’s tenure at the school, it becomes readily apparent that he took the job with the intention of making major changes to the school. The Washington and Lee web page notes that, during his very first year, he embarked on a “comprehensive”

plan to make Washington and Lee “a national model for liberal arts education in the 21st century”. This implies that President Dudley was intent on instituting some innovative plan to transform the school and that the measures that he planned to undertake would make Washington and Lee admired in its uniqueness and in the example it would set. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. President Dudley is simply transforming this school into a carbon copy of every other woke educational indoctrination factory in the country. Washington and Lee is being transformed from “a place like no other” to a “place like every other”.

As an alumnus of Harvard University and a resident of the “progressive” state of Massachusetts, I am particularly sensitive to the decline in quality of education and learning environment that accompanies policies like Dudley’s. Harvard was once an elite institution yet is quickly losing applicants and donor revenue. Harvard even lost its President as a result of her failure to condemn threats against Jewish students as well as her tendency to plagiarize. The latest news out of Cambridge is that the school’s DEI officer has also been caught plagiarizing. If that isn’t the definition of irony, I don’t know what is.

Concerned alumni are seeking change in leadership and on the Harvard Board of Overseers. Having a Harvard diploma is not nearly as prestigious as it was and that affects all graduates. This is the future of Washington and Lee University if the current emphasis on revising and erasing history and promoting DEI continues to be a primary focus of the administration.

As misplaced as Dudley’s actions are, they are symptomatic of the educational rot that has overtaken many of our schools. The Board of Trustees is also to blame for abrogating their duties and allowing the destruction of an institution to which they owe a great deal. It may be too late for schools like Harvard and Williams which have been careening ever leftward for years but it is my fervent hope that we can yet save Washington and Lee.

Many students are turning down admissions to Harvard, Brown, and other “elite” institutions. They are seeking a more merit-based educational experience where they won’t be swept away by the tide of political correctness. This administration is ensuring that Washington and Lee will no longer be seen as a refreshing alternative to these schools.

It is amazing that so many people who want to cancel Lee, Washington, and Jefferson have so little knowledge about them and the times in which they lived. It is ironic that many institutions of higher learning neglect their principal mission which is to educate. One of the missions of The Generals Redoubt is to remedy this educational oversight.

I implore all those who love history and who love Washington and Lee to support The Generals Redoubt in their mission to save all the wonderful traditions and the amazing history at this special school.

Sincerely,

Judith Conlon, Washington and Lee Parent