

LET'S HAVE A DEBATE ON ROBERT E. LEE AT WASHINGTON AND LEE

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On July 15, W&L Professor, Denny Garvis, sent a letter to the editor criticizing Robert E. Lee and the Lee family. He argued that the Lees built walls because they were slave owners, yet so were many other prominent families at the time, including the families of Washington and Jefferson and Northerners, Benjamin Franklin and Ulysses S. Grant. Is slaveholding to be the sole metric by which we measure individuals and their life achievements?

Among the Lees were signers of the Declaration of Independence, ratifiers of the Constitution, a governor of Virginia, and military heroes of the War of American Independence. Robert E. Lee's wife, Mary Lee, and her mother educated slaves, their own and others. Lee supported them in this undertaking which was against the laws of Virginia, at the time.

From Appomattox until his death, Robert E. Lee was a nationally recognized figure of reconciliation between North and South. As an employee of W&L, Professor Garvis surely knows Lee rescued Washington College from financial ruin and laid the foundation for today's modern university. It is for these accomplishments and endeavors that Lee is celebrated and left unshielded from the view of all who visit the chapel he built.

It is obvious Professor Garvis and many of his faculty colleagues do not support Lee's legacy. That is fine. However, we propose a formatted campus debate that examines the legacy of Robert E. Lee. Let the audience be a full spectrum of the W&L and local communities. The Generals Redoubt will gladly support such a program. We would support the same debate format for George Washington, whose legacy has also been deliberately tarnished. We have previously made, to no avail, such proposals to individual faculty and administration members, including the Director of Institutional History, Lynn Rainville, and President Dudley.

We believe that viewpoint diversity is clearly needed at Washington and Lee. Other topics that could be addressed are what true diversity and inclusion should look like, what is the difference between equity and equality, etc. Let us make a beginning to promote true freedom of speech and viewpoint diversity by allowing the discussion of different perspectives on Robert E. Lee. What say you Professors Garvis, Rainville, and other faculty members? And what say you, President Dudley?

Thomas P. Rideout, President

Tom Rideout

The Generals Redoubt