

To the Washington and Lee Community

The Generals Redoubt responds to the letter sent to the Board by "Not Unmindful"

We have read the letter sent to the Board by the group identifying themselves as "Not Unmindful." We can say that we support many of the goals and proposals, at least in a general sense, in the first three sections of their letter. For example, we are supportive of all kinds of diversity, including ideological diversity, and wish to see Washington and Lee be as inclusive and welcoming as possible. Like "Not Unmindful", The Generals Redoubt wishes to be a partner not only with the university but with all individuals and groups who love W&L as we do. This includes the "Not Unmindful" group.

We are also pleased with the more accommodating tone of the letter as contrasted with earlier "demands" from members of the group. Still, we are somewhat wary of the group's ultimate purposes in light of previous statements made by members of the group. For example, the author of the original petition "Demanding Accountability" who is also listed as an administrator by "Not Unmindful" has publicly stated that "I want to get rid of Washington now. . . As soon as that door is cracked to remove Lee, we 'unleash the anti-Washington kraken' . . . That's when they should go ahead and get rid of Washington while we're at it." Similar sentiments regarding Washington have been expressed by other members of the group as well as by some of the professors supporting the goals of the group. Other demands/suggestions by members of the group have included:

- 1) Removing the recumbent statue of Lee from the Lee Chapel
- 2) Renaming the Lee Chapel and the Lee House
- 3) Removing Lee family members from their graves in the chapel.
- 4) Removing the entire Board of Trustees

In the past, there have been many other "demands" of this sort, but we are hopeful that "Not Unmindful" is now taking a different direction and truly wishes to engage in dialogue with all interested parties. The first three sections of their paper indicate that this may be the case.

However, when we arrive at the fourth section of the letter regarding the removal of Lee's name, we find many problematic ideas and assertions which we feel we must address. We begin with the more general comments and proceed to the more specific ones. The authors state that Lee's contributions have been "embellished" by proponents of the Lost Cause myth, including the university itself. They do not demonstrate how the university has supported/promoted, embellished the Lost Cause myth in any way. The university and its alums have certainly shown honor and respect towards our namesakes, but this is not the same thing as supporting the Lost Cause. The authors then state that the University's perception of Lee has been "clouded by apologist sentiments and misinformation". This is a clever trick; they do not directly say that the university has been guilty of "apologist sentiments and misinformation", but they imply that it has been. Of course, they do not demonstrate this in any way. The authors then talk about how "the rest of the world" views Lee. We do not know how the authors have determined how "the

rest of the world" views things, but we do know that, once again, they have offered no evidence for these claims. Indeed, at least regarding Robert E. Lee, if misinformation is a mark of anyone it is of some of the proponents of changing the university's name. We shall demonstrate this when we address some of the authors' bullet points.

The authors then state that removing the name of Lee will help the "university [to] objectively and credibly examine both Lee and its history." But could not logic lead us to the opposite conclusion, i.e. that we can continue to honor Lee and his contributions to our school and to the country as a whole during the post-war period and still have a thorough examination of Lee and our history? We believe this is the better path, and that simply removing Lee's name is a merely symbolic gesture which will really accomplish nothing.

Regarding Lee' behavior before and during the Civil War, it is well documented that Lee's personal decision to resign his Army commission and, later, to accept command of Virginia's troops had nothing to do with slavery but rather with the defense of the state of Virginia against an invasion of Union forces. It is also well documented that, ;throughout the war, Lee tried to convince Jefferson Davis to develop and implement a plan for the emancipation of the slaves. Lee did fight for the Confederacy, and the Confederacy did defend slavery. Lee's decision to fight for the Confederacy was a fatal error, but he redeemed himself in the post-war period. If there is no redemption in life, then we are all doomed.

The idea that Lee committed war crimes is certainly one which some have tried to make, but it is by no means a universal point of view. Lee was certainly responsible for the actions of those under his command and must take responsibility for his subordinates' misdeeds. However, in both of the cases listed by the authors- recapturing of slaves in Pennsylvania and the massacre of black soldiers at the Crater- Lee neither ordered, initiated, or even knew of these actions until after they occurred. Further, if such charges are to be lodged against Lee, they must also be lodged against Union commanders, such as William Sherman and Philip Sheridan, who carried out such actions very intentionally and on a much larger scale.

To say, as the authors do, that Lee was an unreformed white supremacist is a charge which can easily be made about a vast number of public and political figures at the time, both North and South, including Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant, William Sherman, etc. [For more on this subject, see the recent essay by Dr. Al Eekes, "Defending Lee" with an addendum by Dr. Neely Young]. Generally speaking, attitudes toward blacks in the country during the mid-19th century were vastly different from today. Here, the authors are guilty of the sin of "presentism."

We shall now address the bullet points put forth by the authors and attributed to Lee:

1) Black people have less intellectual capacity than white people- By reading the whole of Lee's writings, we can see Lee argued that a lack of education and their long condition of servitude, not innate intelligence, was the problem. In other words, they currently lacked the necessary intellectual capacity, but this was not necessarily a permanent condition.

2) Black people did not have the ambition to work hard . . . - This trait Lee attributed almost entirely to their previous condition of servitude. He said that blacks had not been allowed to

develop independence, a work ethic, or a drive for success. He was hopeful that they might do so moving forward.

3) Black men should not be allowed to vote- Lee did say this, but he said the same thing about white people who were not sufficiently educated. This is admittedly an old fashioned, aristocratic view, but not necessarily a racist one. Many Northern states did not allow free blacks to vote prior to the Civil War, and some of these states did not do so until the passage of the 15th Amendment. The attitude toward blacks throughout the country at the time was similar to the attitude toward women, who were not allowed to vote until the early 20th century.

4) Virginia would be better off if black people would leave the state- Again, many people, North and South, held similar views at the time. Both Lee and Lincoln supported the colonization movement before and during the war. This movement called for the removal of blacks from the United States and their settlement in a different country of continent. Lincoln's primary argument for keeping slavery out of the territories was to make the area available for white men and to keep slavery and black people confined to the areas where they already lived. When Horace Greeley, the publisher of *The New York Herald*, said "Go West, young man, go west", he was not talking about young black men.

The last set of bullet points have to do with Lee's role at Washington College:

1) Other Southern colleges also experienced robust enrollments after the Civil War- This is true as far as it goes. Some colleges did, but most did not and none on the scale of Washington College. During Lee's Presidency, Washington College had higher average enrollment than any Southern College, including L.S.U., University of Georgia, University of North Carolina, the University of Virginia, and William and Mary. In fact, from a survey of colleges and universities from Maine to Louisiana during the period, there were only two institutions of higher education which had higher enrollment- Harvard and Yale.

2) Lee did not start the Law School- This has never been claimed by anyone as far as we are aware. The Lexington Law School was started independently of the college by Judge John Brockenborough, who incidentally was one of those who convinced Lee to accept the Presidency of the college. It was Lee and Brockenborough who worked to bring the college and law school together and create the university.

3) Lee dealt ambiguously with students who started a Ku Klux Klan chapter, harassed Black residents, raped Black women, and participated in attempted lynchings- This statement is so replete with errors and inaccurate research that it is hard to know where to begin. Again, I refer the reader to the Eckes/Young essay where we refute many of these points. On the subject of the Klan, there is absolutely no evidence that a chapter was ever established at the college. This conclusion is based on a personal search of the W&L archives by Dr. Young and consultation with the archivists. It is apparent that the authors of the letter relied on second hand information which has not been confirmed. There was some Ku Klux Klan activity in the area for a short period after the war, but the information on this is very sketchy and limited.

4) Lee did not create the Honor System. In fact, Lee provided evasive and dishonest testimony to

Congress . . - Once again, a perusal of the Eckes/Young essay will demonstrate that Lee's testimony before Congress was not evasive or dishonest and that, although Lee did not create the Honor System, the system which we practice today is almost entirely the legacy of Lee.

By almost every measure- enrollment, innovative curriculum, fund raising, and character education- Lee was the preeminent college President in the South, if not in the nation, in the post war period. [On this subject see Charles Bracelen Flood's *Lee's Last Years*]

Finally, in the conclusion of their paper, the authors state that retaining Lee's name endangers the future of the university, but, once again, offer no proof for this assertion. By contrast, the letter of the emeritus trustees to the Board, published earlier, amply demonstrates how the name and branding of the university has been and continues to be successful and that there is absolutely no need, based on current statistical information, to change the name. The authors are certainly correct that the name divides the university community. Unfortunately, that community is likely to continue divided regardless of the Board's decision. We, as the "Not Unmindful" group, recognize that the Board should do the "right thing", that their decision will not be easy, and that they must act in accordance with their stated vision of the University's future. We believe that the best way to accomplish all of this is to openly and honestly address all of the issues and challenges facing the university while retaining the name of our beloved alma mater, Washington and Lee. If the name of the university is retained, The Generals Redoubt stands ready to work with any and all individuals and groups to assure that Washington and Lee moves boldly, honestly, and charitably into the future.

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