

February 2, 2021

To the Board of Trustees of Washington and Lee University:

We are a group of current and past Washington and Lee parents who wish to retain the University's name. We appreciate the Washington and Lee experience, and would like to preserve its unique character and history for future generations of students and families. There are ways for the school to evolve without destroying all that has come before.

We feel that the Board of Trustees should neither sanitize the multi-faceted truths of the school; nor erase the incredible contributions of its founders. The current effort to remove Lee's name is based on the false notion somehow connecting the school to the Confederacy and the "Lost Cause" myth. We see this as a dangerous position because, not only is it historically incorrect, but it means that an individual's flaws of judgement preempt all other attributes of one's life.

In the case of the board's current decision, removing Lee's name is to deny the uniquely American value of redemption. It is well known that Lee was instrumental in reviving the school after the Civil War. Many of the most honored traditions of the school were initiated by President Lee. His prior actions, though historically relevant, are not why the school was renamed in his honor. The school became Washington and Lee University to recognize Lee's contributions to the school while he was President of Washington College. There is so much history on the campus, and while we don't have to agree with it all, we should appreciate our past, protect it and seek to learn from it.

We realize that many institutions are feeling enormous pressure to sanitize their histories, but they do so at the peril of erasing what makes their character unique. Don't let this happen to Washington and Lee. Stop the deleterious name change movement now, and don't allow it to gain further traction as other universities and institutions might look to your decision as a model. It is notable that other prestigious schools like Yale and Brown are

not seeking a name change because they realize that the consequences of a name change would be severe and injurious to their schools.

Please consider the impact on future recruitment. There are so many colleges that students and their parents can select when the time comes. Many of these colleges have adopted a philosophy that discourages open dialogue and shuts down opposing points of view. Consequently, there is often nothing that makes one college especially distinctive. What makes Washington and Lee special and different is its combination of traditions, values, and history. It truly is “a place like no other.” We would like to see it remain that way. Let us continue to make that true by rejecting the prevailing trend of the last few years to erase history.

Enormous numbers of alumni are proud to say they graduated from Washington and Lee, and they know it as a name that will be met with recognition and great respect. Changing the name threatens to undermine the reputation and identity or brand of the University. Changing the name is a threat to current financial support and to untold future contributions. Show the world that alumni contributions, if accepted by the university, will always be honored.

Alumni should never fear that some future aspect of their lives then deemed inappropriate would cancel out the good they do for the school. As parents, we are well aware that there are many current students who do not wish the school to change its name. Many students are forced into silence and afraid to share their opinions. Other students have been coerced into expressing their support for the name change to avoid being ostracized. Make no mistake about it; they are there. Such is the prevailing culture. Colleges are supposed to be places for the free and open exchange of ideas and not places where selected viewpoints can be dismissed through shaming tactics.

Many parents of Washington and Lee students are also alumni of the school. Continue to seek and honor these alumni, whose contributions have made Washington and Lee a more inclusive place. Without them, the school would have fewer resources to admit students with financial need and thus be able to offer merit and need based scholarships. Another way of saying this is that alumni are helping make the school more diverse, always with merit as the core value for admission. Changing the name risks alienating many parents

and alumni from making further contributions, resulting in a student population less reflective of the fabric of our world.

At a time when the school is dealing with controversy surrounding the COVID pandemic as well as issues involving Rush Week, spring break scheduling, and student and parent dissatisfaction, perhaps a decision this momentous should not be added to the mix. Students and others who are in favor of the name change are planning to protest whatever the Board of Trustees decides. They will not stop until they have taken away everything that makes Washington and Lee unique.

We believe the Board of Trustees needs to make a bold and courageous stand to retain the name and reputation of our beloved Washington and Lee University.

We ask that the Board keep the identities of those who have endorsed this letter confidential.

Sincerely,

Concerned Parents of Washington and Lee University