

21 July 2021

Members of the Board of Trustees Washington and Lee University  
Lexington, Virginia 24450

As a graduate of Washington and Lee in the 1960's, an era in which the school was unabashedly proud of its namesakes, I have always felt enormously blessed to have passed my formative college years in the ambiance of the towering examples of Robert E. Lee and George Washington, who, for me and countless fellow students, were models of honorable personal conduct and unimpeachable probity of character, after which we could confidently pattern our lives. We strived to be the "gentlemen" that President Lee enjoined the Washington College students of his own day to become. Remarkably, in retrospect, I never heard during my four years at W&L a single disrespectful or irreverent word directed at Lee or Washington by either a student, a faculty member, or an administrator. The two men were revered alike as great Americans and were uniformly respected as such, although then as now it was recognized that they were ineluctably men of their own times and shared in some of the errors of those times. But we of my generation knew how to understand and how to forgive, while retaining before us the inestimable treasures of Lee's and Washington's virtues as a source of inspiration and transformative influence in our lives.

Understandably, then, I was elated at the Board of Trustees' recent announcement that the name of the university would be retained. But that welcomed decision immediately began to ring hollow with me when in the same Trustees' announcement came their further decision to strip Lee's name from Lee Chapel and to implement additional measures meant to efface his connections with the building -- despite the facts that while president of Washington College Lee conceived the idea of a campus chapel, raised the money for it, and directed its construction; that he and his family were buried therein; that for its Lee connections the building is currently designated a national historic site by the federal government; and that, until now, it was the only general-use building on campus bearing Lee's name, an honor he richly deserves, as much now as in the past.

I have watched with concerned but patient detachment the fractious controversy that has embroiled the W&L community over the last few years,

but with the Trustees' action on Lee Chapel, something in me snapped. I consider the chapel decision as inexcusable, an errant disgrace upon the Trustees and upon the university. Appearances indeed suggest that under cover of the distracting glare of the headline issue of the name change, the Board, in stealth, took the opportunity to advance an obviously ongoing campaign to expunge from the campus all things relating to Lee, in this instance taking the step of removing Lee's name from the chapel building -- in preparation, it would seem, for revisiting the name change issue at a later date, after protest has died down, more older alumni have either passed off the scene or become inured to "inevitable" change, and after a more thoroughly "cleansed" campus has had its effect of dulling sensibilities.

In even the most generous appraisal of the Trustees' action on Lee Chapel, they, to all appearances, betray a telling ambivalence by retaining Lee's name in the name of the university while, at the very same time, stripping it from the chapel. Either the Board has no clear and settled posture on Lee, or its posture is as noted above, one of deliberately expunging all things Lee from the campus by calculated degrees, as opportunity arises and as resistance softens with time and with forgetfulness of the enormities of previous purgings.

I was, and remain, struck with disbelief at the Trustees' action on the chapel, an action rising in my own mind to a level of viciousness not to be palliated by any arguments of expediency. The action shocked me for the first time into the full realization that W&L, in its fundamental essence, is now no longer the school I knew and loved as a student, but rather has become alien to me in direction and values, and been transmogrified into an institution with which I can no longer identify. With lingering reluctance, and with unabated sorrow and sickness of heart, I am therefore eliminating all mention of W&L from my will, where it was formerly designated as the sole beneficiary of my estate. I will also be requesting that for the foreseeable future no further solicitations for financial support of W&L be addressed to me, although I have liberally supported the school in the past.

Respectfully,

Kenneth G. Everett      W&L Class of 1964