

January 2021

## Open Letter to the Washington and Lee Board and Community

### I. Introduction

As the Washington and Lee Board of Trustees considers changing the name of the university, The Generals Redoubt (TGR) wishes to share statistical information and other research findings to aid them in their decision-making.

In August 2020, The Generals Redoubt commissioned a poll of our email list of c. 9,300 followers. Approximately 2,000 individuals or 22% of those contacted responded. Our email list consists largely of alums, but it also includes current students, parents, faculty, administration, and other friends of the university. The majority of those on our email list support TGR's general goals and objectives. We refer to this survey below as "TGR Poll." In June 2020, the vast majority of emeritus trustees sent a letter to the W&L Board in support of maintaining the name of the university. We refer to this letter below as "ETL." Our conclusions are drawn from the emeritus trustee letter, the survey, various published rankings of colleges and universities, and other research we reviewed.

### II. Findings Supporting the Retention of the Name Washington and Lee University – It Conveys a High Quality Educational Experience

Over the last several years, Washington and Lee has continued to attract an ever larger and diverse number of qualified applicants and enrollees. Applications to the undergraduate school have increased each of the last three years. And it has been reported that current applications to the law school are up about 40% over the same time last year.

College Consensus, which brings together data from reputable college ranking sites and student review sites, ranked Washington and Lee #4 among national liberal arts colleges and universities in 2020. Only two colleges on this list have a higher student consensus review ranking than W&L.

Forbes magazine ranked W&L 13th for return on investment among all private colleges and universities and 12th among liberal arts colleges based on student outcomes.

Pay Scale ranks Washington and Lee at 21st among all private and public colleges with the highest paid graduates and 17th among private schools. Forbes notes similar results.

Significant majorities of students and alums (78% or greater) believe W&L provides leadership in the community, is principled, and lives up to its honor code (TGR Poll). Washington Monthly ranked W&L 7th among liberal arts colleges and universities in its "Contribution to the Common Good."

In 2019, Kiplinger magazine ranked W&L 6th among all private and public colleges on its "Best Value" list and 5th on its list of private colleges and universities. In arriving at this ranking, Kiplinger notes Washington and Lee's abundant financial aid and low graduate debt. Money magazine ranked W&L 12th in its "Best College" ranking. Money included both the quality of education and various financial factors. The magazine reported that about 2/3rds of undergraduates graduated without any debt. College Choice, which ranked W&L 9th overall among private colleges and universities in 2020, noted that among this top tier of colleges Washington and Lee had the 5th lowest tuition and fees.

Endowment provides for a great deal of financial health of any college or university and helps support scholarships and financial aid. For 2021, College Raptor ranked W&L at 15th in endowment per student among colleges and universities. Among national liberal arts colleges, it was 6th in endowment per student. The vast majority of the W&L endowment has come from the gifts of alumni and other individual donors to the school.

Washington and Lee consistently ranks in the top ten of liberal arts colleges and universities overall. U.S. News and World Report ranked W&L 9th among private colleges and universities in 2020. College Factual ranked W&L as the #1 college or university in Virginia and #3 in the Southeast in that same year. Kiplinger notes that Washington and Lee is highly selective and accepted 21% of its applicants in 2019. In 2020, Niche listed W&L at

16th among national liberal arts college and universities for its low acceptance rate.

Washington and Lee enjoys an excellent relationship with graduate schools and a high acceptance rate among them.

Over the last several years, Washington and Lee has attracted a more diverse applicant pool, and the percentage of minority students has increased significantly. Domestic students of color increased by 50% from June, 2016-June, 2020. In the fall of 2020, 20% of the incoming undergraduate classes were domestic students of color (W&L statistics and ETL). College Factual, which uses not only ethnicity but also gender balance and geographic location of origin in determining diversity, rates W&L very high with an overall diversity of 94.2% out of 100%.

Minority students decide to attend a college or university based on a variety of factors- academic, athletic, financial, social, etc. - not because of a person or persons for whom a college is named (ETL). There is no empirical evidence that the name of Washington and Lee has inhibited minority students from applying to the university. The rural location of the school, the lack of a local diverse community population, and costs are likely more important factors.

Robust fund raising to support need-blind admissions will do more to attract a diverse student body than will a name change. The money for such a program would come largely from alumni who, for the most part, are in favor of retaining the name of the university. In remarks President Dudley made to alumni in the fall of 2020, he reported that 57% of incoming correspondence was opposed to a name change, while 43% favored it. Adding this finding to the TGR Poll, we estimate that c. 60% or more of all alums are in favor of maintaining the name while c. 40% or less support a name change or are undecided. Other internal sources indicate that a significant majority of major donors to the university are in favor of retaining the name - Washington and Lee University.

Washington and Lee is rapidly diversifying its faculty. 45% of the tenure track hires over the last four years are faculty of color and 20% are African-Americans (ETL).

Washington and Lee has created a longstanding, powerful alumni network which not only supports the school financially, but also assists with admissions, job placement, etc. In 2017, Forbes listed W&L at 12th nationally among all colleges and universities in its "Grateful Grad" index, which tracks 10 year median donation per student and three year average alumni participation rate. In 2017, W&L was 8th among national liberal arts colleges in 10-year median donation per student. In 2019, U.S. News and World Report ranked W&L 8th for the prior two year years with an average participation percentage of 47.5% of alums.

Over the last three years, the percentage of alums that have donated and the amount they have donated has declined as a result of the various controversies surrounding the university and the negative publicity associated with these issues. But there is every indication that donations will rebound in short order if the name of the university is strongly reaffirmed.

The Alumni Factor, which bases its college rankings on surveys and interviews of 42,000 alums from 450 colleges, rated W&L #2 behind only Princeton University among all colleges and universities in 2014.

Washington and Lee ranked #1 among national liberal arts colleges that year. This is the only college ranking system that is based totally on alumni satisfaction and success.

The brand of Washington and Lee has proven very durable over the last 150 years. A valuable brand should not be abandoned. Rather, it should be enhanced. There are no examples in the 20th or 21st century of an institution of Washington and Lee's caliber that has changed its name and flourished afterward (ETL).

In 2019 and again in February 2020, the Board of Trustees considered and rejected calls for the university to distance itself from Lee, stating its "abiding conviction that the university is rightly named for two men who made transformative contributions to this institution and to education in the United States." Nothing has changed in the intervening period to support a contrary opinion. (ETL).

Maintaining the name of the school will allow Washington and Lee to refresh the legacy of its namesakes and also to present them in the historical context of the times in which they lived.

### III. Findings Related to a Name Change of the University

A significant majority of alumni donors are less likely to donate to the school if the name is changed. This includes many major donors to the school. In the TGR survey of 2,000 alums and friends of the school, c 70% indicated that they would not contribute to the university if the name were changed. Some alumni may seek refunds of prior gifts, contending that their gifts were intended to benefit an institution named Washington and Lee. (ETL). The TGR Poll also indicates that if the name is changed, many alums will cease to support the university in other ways such as sending their own children to the school, supporting admissions recruitment, and helping with career advice and job placement.

There is a possible loss of income from foundations, such as the Lettie Pate Evans Foundation, which controls a large endowment from which it dispenses c. \$22-23 million a year to Washington and Lee.

The costs of rebranding the university are significant, with no certain outcome. Money spent on rebranding could be better deployed in need-blind admissions and in making Washington and Lee a welcoming community for all. In the near term, the university would lose brand identification as it sought to establish a new brand to replace a historically successful one. (TGR Poll). All of the above potential losses of revenue and increased costs would harm economically disadvantaged students and undermine diversity efforts (ETL).

Changing the name will really do nothing to solve the challenges of diversity and race. It would be simply an empty and symbolic gesture, one that prevents leveraging the university's strong, national reputation.

By removing the name of Lee, you strike the name of the man who was responsible for the school's academic and financial success after the Civil War and laid the foundation for its flourishing national reputation today.

Robert E. Lee essentially turned a destitute and struggling college into a modern university.

By removing Lee, you erase the name of the man who was most responsible for our honor code and our values of duty, service, and civility. The practice of civility is already under attack from some students, faculty, and alums. Can the honor code be far behind?

By removing the name of Lee, you would tarnish the Judeo-Christian belief in the concept of personal redemption. Lee was one of the nation's leading advocates for reconciliation between North and South after the Civil War and helped to create the conditions for the "New South" movement that flourishes 150 years later.

Removing the name of Lee from the university is an attempt to protect students from considering "uncomfortable" ideas, rather than letting them confront the complexities of history and make sense of them for themselves. This would tarnish the university's endorsement of The Chicago Principles on Free Expression and help restrict the development of students' critical thinking skills, balanced judgment and resilience. Today's cultural movement is not education, but indoctrination in a new orthodoxy that allows only one interpretation of history, that being a diatribe against American ideals.

#### IV. Conclusions

The General Redoubt strongly supports all forms of diversity. Not only ethnic diversity, but also socio-economic diversity and greater ideological diversity among its students, faculty and administrators. It is clear that Washington and Lee has further work to do to increase ethnic diversity. However, no conclusive evidence has been presented to demonstrate that changing the name of the university will further this goal.

The idea that changing the name will increase diversity is based on some vague notion that a name change will cause the interested public to feel more "comfortable" and less "threatened." If the name is changed, alumni, who provide the vast majority of financial support to the school, may withhold or withdraw funds. It is the financial support of alums that provides for the

endowment and many other forms of financial and career oriented aid. Re-branding the university will also be costly. It poses a significant risk of diverting money from scholarships and other forms of student financial support and may restrict faculty hiring and compensation options.

In all other areas, both students and alumni indicate that they are very satisfied with the Washington and Lee experience and with the opportunities that it affords them after graduation. The stellar brand of Washington and Lee clearly conveys this level of satisfaction. There is no indication that any other brand will be as successful. This strength is also due to the robust alumni donor network, which will be significantly weakened if the name of the university is changed.

Washington and Lee has been very successful in the last few years in attracting more student and faculty ethnic diversity. We are hopeful that this trend will continue. Greater ethnic diversity can best be achieved through better recruitment and strong fund raising directed toward a totally need-blind admission policy and more resources for salaries, student scholarships and loans. Much of this money will necessarily come from alumni, who indicate by a significant majority that they wish to retain the name of our university and continue to honor our namesakes (TGR Poll).

Tom Rideout, President, The Generals Redoubt  
Neely Young, Vice President, The Generals Redoubt  
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