

April 23, 2021

Who Is "The Generals Redoubt"?

Response to a student/faculty demonstration regarding changing the name of Washington and Lee.

On April 2nd, 2021, I attended an on-campus demonstration sponsored by students and faculty who demanded that the university change its name. I estimated that there were about 150-160 individuals in attendance, a much smaller number than those who attended a rally about a week earlier. Of those in attendance, it seemed that about 25 or so were faculty, staff, other non-student supporters, and onlookers such as myself. If my numbers are correct, the number of students in attendance were about 5-6% of the entire student body. This figure is interesting in light of the fact that recently College Consensus ranked W&L as the 5th best college and university in the country. College Consensus also revealed that Washington and Lee students gave their university the highest ratings of any of the students attending the top 100 colleges and universities. I believe the group which demonstrated on the front campus represented the hard core of individuals wanting to change the name of the school and that their numbers are really quite small. Not that this group does not have a right to express their views on issues. They are absolutely entitled to do so. Many of the students seemed sincere, if somewhat misguided, in their remarks. At one point, one of the speakers asked, "Who is The Generals Redoubt?" I have to admit that I was tempted to step up to the microphone and proclaim, "I am The Generals Redoubt, and this is who we are." However, I realized that this was their demonstration, and I should not interrupt or disrupt it.

But now, three weeks later, I would like to answer the question of "Who is The Generals Redoubt?", not just for those who asked the question but for the many others who would like to know more about us and what we believe. We are 9,400 strong followers on email. We are largely alums, but we also include students, parents, emeritus trustees, current and former faculty and staff, and other friends of the university. We are individuals who have supported Washington and Lee with our time and our treasure over

generations. Members of our group have helped to pay for and endow many of the scholarships being received by students. We have served as alumni chapter officers, class agents, reunion committee members, members of the Alumni Board and the Board of Trustees. Perhaps more importantly, we have entrusted W&L with the education of our children and grandchildren, and many of us have paid the full cost of that education and at some sacrifice. We are of every age and gender and various ethnicities. We want everyone to feel comfortable and a part of the Washington and Lee community. This includes not only those students who feel "uncomfortable" or "threatened" by the culture and history of the university, but students who are afraid or concerned about expressing their point of view for fear that they will be attacked in an uncivil way by their liberal classmates or have their grades affected by their liberal professors. It also includes those members of the Greek system who, rightly or wrongly, feel that the administration and faculty have targeted them during the covid crisis and even earlier to advance an anti-Greek agenda.

Unfortunately, it appears that there is a fair amount of distrust and anger on both sides of the current issue. The Generals Redoubt has made it clear that we will not accept a name change for the university. I believe we have also made it clear why we hold this view, and why this is something which we are not willing to negotiate. Nevertheless, should the Board decide to retain the name of Washington and Lee, The Generals Redoubt would be pleased to work with any individuals or groups to prepare W&L for the challenges of the future and, at the same time, to honor and respect its namesakes and history. We believe it is possible to achieve both goals. One of the major problems in our political system these days is gridlock and a lack of compromise. The Generals Redoubt has its principles, but we also believe in compromise, balance, and diversity of all kinds. In the words of Lyndon Johnson, "Come, let us reason together." Or, perhaps, in the words of Stonewall Jackson, "Let us cross over the river [together] and rest [together] in the shade of the trees."

Neely Young

Vice President, The Generals Redoubt

P.S. About a week prior to the demonstration which I attended there was another student/faculty demonstration on campus. Elizabeth Hertzberg, a sophomore and the head of a new student group entitled Students for Historical Preservation, attended that demonstration and expressed her concerns about the rally in a letter to President Dudley. Unfortunately, President Dudley did not respond to her. We have attached Elizabeth's letter in the Letters section.