

To the Board of Trustees;

There are so many things I could say to you. But really I just want to start with one question: do you really believe that a name change is not inevitable? Or are you just kicking the can down the road for the next generation to deal with? I mean, we all know this fight is not going to end until the name is changed. I'd like to bring to your attention a quote—about climate change—but bear with me. “The greatest threat to our planet is the belief that someone else will save it” (R. Swan) I tend to think social justice works in a similar way. Pushing away issues like this name change does nothing but allow and, dare I say, encourage the continued degradation, discrimination, dehumanization of marginalized folks. Pushing this issue away permits slurs to continue being screamed at people when they're just trying to walk home. Inaction is complacency. Inaction allows for the continuation of abuses until finally someone stands up and says “enough. It's time for action.” But hey, no one wants to be the one to say it, right? So instead you leave it up to some arbitrary person in the future and wash your hands of the whole thing.

Allow me to draw your attention to the canvas behind me. This canvas came from an art project that was born out of frustration and a desire to remind people that This Foundation was Built By Slaves. How disrespectful to them and their labor to name it after someone that fought against their freedom. How sad that their descendants still have to fight against racism. But, hey Board, at least you were an inspiration for art—and the exhibit is still available online, I think it would be quite illuminating for you to see.

The truth is, W&L is a great school. It has so much to offer. But it's held back by these invisible strings. Strings that you control. There are many of us that love this place. That, dare I say, call it a home. But that which we love, we work to improve. W&L is moving forward in so many ways, except one of the most crucial—making every single person feel valued and prioritized. It's hard to thrive without that. Board, you currently have a decision to make, that—should you choose to change the name—could really propel this school into the future. Dropping Lee is a true recognition of history—because all that he represents in this day and age does not deserve to be uplifted, and more importantly, dropping Lee tells those that are suffocated by his presence that you care about them too. Don't they deserve to breathe?

My final message is for the people of W&L. And, dear Board, I challenge you to come here and say these things I'm about to say. And not just say them, but mean them.

So. Dear dear W&L community. This message is for every single one of you—those that are here gathered, those that aren't, those that have already passed through W&L, and those that are yet to come. Students, faculty, staff, everyone.

You.

Belong.

Here.

You have a place here, and are essential to this community. We don't all agree on everything, but we all walk on these Lex bricks, and every single step belongs here and contributes to the beauty of this community.

You are the reason W&L is a place worth fighting for.