

Speech by Enuma

First and foremost, I would like to extend thanks to those who helped make this event possible and especially, to those representatives of marginalized groups who pulled up a seat to the table to fight for the inclusion of our voices. My name is Enuma, and I am a junior here at W&L. Now...

It is almost unfathomable that a school who is struggling to both attain and maintain diversity, as one of the last institutions to integrate, is still trying to reconcile venerating a Confederate general and slaveholder, while purporting to be a school that welcomes all and is not unmindful of the future. The very fact that I am giving this speech is evidence of how much Black students, faculty, and staff, as well as people of color on this campus more broadly, are constantly being asked to defend or prove their humanity, to those who are dead set on attempting to justify and clarify the actions of a deceased man who explicitly took a stance to fight for the continuation of the enslavement of African people and their descendants.

I, cannot make it any clearer than this: idolizing Robert E. Lee and wanting to increase the number of Black students on your campus is irreconcilable. Where is the space for Black students and students of color to feel safe here? Is it before or after their first KKK sighting? Is it before or after they see their first Confederate flag on the corner of Main Street? Is it before or after they see Trump 2016 and 2020 signs, on and off campus? Is it before or after they or one of their friends is called the n-word as they're walking down the street?

Do you see the pattern? Do you hear how I, how we, are literally begging you to see our humanity? To care about the message that the school is sending the entire world about the kind of behavior, groups and political ideologies that it supports? To step outside of yourselves and empathize with groups who do not share the same privileges as you? And this doesn't just affect Black students on this campus but instead, has the ability to affect any student who does not fit the mold of a "typical W&L student".

Ask me how this reproduces itself on our campus. Ask me what it's like to walk around on campus everyday as a Black student and try not to be enraged that you go to a school that commemorates the Confederacy because they're paying for you to be there and you have little to no other options. I am eternally grateful for the opportunities that this school has provided me, but I won't act like it hasn't come at some costs. There are clear racial divides on our campus. A clear exclusion of minoritized groups from Greek sororities and fraternities and other spheres of social life. One white girl sends an email about a keychain and the whole system quickly shifts in her favor. A Latina girl almost has a ceiling fall on her head and suddenly Black and Brown students are fighting a, slow, uphill battle, to once again defend our humanity and prove that we are worthy of adequate and safe housing.

I could go on end for hours, but I'll leave you with this. To the board – I don't speak for all Black students, but I can say with confidence that I speak for most when I say, whether it's today or in 2040, until you decide to change the name of this institution, I can assure you that most Black students will be weary, at the very least, of committing to and staying at this school. By continuing to uphold and honor Robert E. Lee, you are showing us and the world, who and what matters to you, and it is not Black people or people of color. You are alienating us, you are leaving us unsafe, and you are ensuring that some of us leave here with a lifetime of trauma to unpack. But most of all, you are holding on to a history that denigrated, enslaved, and committed an entire genocide of a lot of our ancestors, all while trying to convince us that that's not what's important and that we should be okay with it. That has got to be the most ruthless part of it all.