

Speech by Otice C.

Good afternoon. Thank you all so much for being here.

We are here today to make our voices heard, to tell the board of trustees that pushing off a decision will not make us forget, and to call for the name of this institution to be changed.

President Dudley, I implore you to call a meeting of the board this evening, something that you and the rector have the power to do.

At the Board's last meeting, they made public that the special committee which they had created to look into these issues had finished its work in December. However, their consensus was that the Board needed more time to deliberate this issue.

How long will you take to deliberate the information already concluded from the special committee that was created? Will you wait until summer when students aren't on campus or will you call a meeting today to convene, "deliberate", and make the decision that is in the best interest of this University? Rector McAlevey, if you are watching via our livestream I also implore you to call a meeting of the Board.

Every student here has had a vastly different experience than the next, but many of these experiences share similarities in the toxic culture that surrounds this campus. A campus whose speaking tradition is only in use when the person you're addressing is white, a campus where students feel the need to remain closeted in fear of harsh treatment and judgement, a campus where low-income students feel ostracized.

You might be wondering... How will the name change fix any of these issues? And the answer is that it won't. Changing the culture that encompasses this institution will take a lot of work, but changing the name is where it starts. We can make amends to the history of this institution, stop idolizing the man who led the confederation- which solely existed to fight for the continuation of slavery, and make the change which will make this institution the best it can be.

**We want creativity. We want openness to new thought. We want intellectually curious students—students with world-wide perspectives.** And all of this is hindered by a name which repels students who would come and make this institution the best it can be, all because of its ties to racism. And to those who disagree with a name change: I recognize the internal conflict that you are facing. You want to continue tradition and maintain your sense of loyalty to this institution. We cherish and appreciate all that you give to this University, and hope that you will continue your loyalty by helping us to make the change which is truly in the best interest of the institution. We share the same sentiment: We want this institution to be the best it can be.

And you're probably thinking- who is this kid with the megaphone that set this up?

I am Otice Carder, a current sophomore from Berkeley Springs, West Virginia. The story of how I ended up here is very unique from many others, as I came here blindly-- never having had the opportunity to tour campus. My first year here was one filled with many different experiences, including a course-load that developed my ability to think critically and charitably about every issue that crossed my path. In fact, it wasn't until my first year here that I was exposed to diversity in thought and was encouraged to challenge the accuracy of my own assumptions. I owe a lot to the faculty who I have been blessed to interact with for all that they have taught me, and for encouraging me to think about issues from every perspective possible. To me, that is the goal of our institution, and any institution for that matter. I remember vividly from my first-year experience class last year that our university's mission is to provide a liberal arts education that develops students' capacity to **think freely, critically, and humanely** while preparing graduates

for **lifelong learning**, personal achievement, responsible leadership, service to others, and **engaged citizenship in a global and diverse society**. I feel as though my ability to think freely, critically, and humanely has been developed over the two years that I have been here. However, I don't feel like our university embodies the ideals to prepare us for being engaged in a global and diverse society.

It was also last year that I allowed myself to reckon with the fact that I am gay.... thoughts and feelings that I had been trying to ignore since middle school. And it was this relationship that made me realize what it truly feels like to worry constantly about how I would be treated for being "different", to constantly plan for ways in which I could try to fit in with the majority, even if I wanted to present myself in a way that was actually myself—something which I don't recommend as it drained me of everything I had. I am now no longer afraid to be my authentic self and can tell you first-hand how hard it is to feel comfortable doing so on this campus. I have had a taste of what it feels like to be "different" -- and I can't even imagine what it's like to be a student of color on this campus. Even though the name of this university mainly affects students of color, its change would take a step forward towards rectifying the racism that characterized W&L from its inception and is one of the first steps necessary towards changing the culture of this institution and making this community one that is open to diversity and eager for efforts of inclusivity.

Today we call for action from our **administration**. Today we urge **President Dudley and the Rector to call a meeting and finish the "deliberation" which has been pushed off for months** since the special committee concluded their work. Today **we call for a name change to ensure that this university sees a future with no potential left untapped**. Thank you.