



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on September 11, 2018

# Efforts to Denigrate Robert E. Lee at Washington and Lee University Fail

President William Dudley of Washington and Lee University, after reviewing a commission's 31 recommendations given to him in May, has opted to reject its suggested changes to Lee Chapel. The main recommendation was to convert Lee Chapel into a museum.



General Robert E. Lee is buried in Lee Chapel, on the campus of the college where he served as president and that now bears his name, along with fellow Virginian George Washington. With the continued agitation to knock down statues of Confederate heroes — of which there is no greater Confederate icon than Lee — many thought President Dudley would follow that pattern, and diminish Lee's status at the school.

Stefani Evans, a third-year law student and member of the Coalition for Campus Change, was highly critical of Dudley's decision to keep Lee Chapel as it is, insisting, "It's like President Dudley is saying in one sense that he supports diversity, but in the same sentence he's saying we are unwilling to change the fact that Lee is the centerpiece of campus."

This is, of course, the definition of diversity for these American Taliban who want to airbrush history to suit themselves. They believe diversity is for everyone else to accept their version of history, while others surrender their beliefs and values.

"They don't want to hear how diverse students want to be treated," she added. The truth is that Dudley did hear the recommendations from the commission, but he just did not agree with their conclusions. That is why they are known as *recommendations*.

Another recommendation Dudley rejected was the suggestion that Washington and Lee hire a genealogist to find living descendants of the 84 slaves the school owned, so they can provide them with "reparations" via scholarships. It should be noted that whatever merit there is of the idea of scholarships for descendants of slaves owned by the college, *they were owned before Lee was the school's president*. Lee did not take the job as school president until Congress passed the 13th Amendment, which officially ended slavery in the United States.

In other words, Lee had nothing to do with anything — including slaves — the school owned prior to 1865.

The Virginia Flaggers, a local Confederate group that often meets at Lee Chapel, expressed relief that Dudley had opted not to trash Lee's memory. "President Dudley and the Board of Trustees flatly rejects committee's recommendations that would shut down the Chapel and removed every trace of R.E. Lee



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from campus. #winning #GodBlessRELee.”

Washington and Lee has made some changes in the past to deal with criticisms from those who unfairly associate Lee with slavery. In 2014, they removed Confederate battle flags from Lee Chapel. In 2016, a plaque was added outside Robinson Hall, featuring the names of slaves who built it.

But, of course, it was not enough — because it never is.

Some faculty were critical of President Dudley’s response to the recommendations. English professor Lesley Wheeler said, “If we’re not willing to examine how we’re complicit in racism and think about changing our ways we’re just going to keep losing more people.”

Some faculty have expressed that they are now looking for other jobs. T.J. Tallie left the school last year. Tallie, who is black, and was a humanities professor, explained why he left. “I left because it [the school] is incapable and unwilling to reconcile its white supremacist past and make a more diverse future. I don’t want to be someone who hopes that one day it will get better. Ultimately, all of the academic rigor of the institution is not worth being at a place that makes you feel fundamentally alien.”

What is perplexing about this attitude is why Tallie ever took a job at Washington and Lee, if he did not like Robert E. Lee, or was at least not willing to tolerate his legacy? After all, Lee Chapel already existed when Tallie and other discontented faculty took their positions at the school.

Not everyone at Washington and Lee is disappointed at President Dudley’s refusal to diminish Lee. Hayden Daniel, who is the editor of *The Spectator*, a conservative newspaper at the school, expressed satisfaction at the rejection of the proposals.

When asked about Lee’s alleged role as the chief defender of slavery, and whether that supposed history should be included as part of Lee Chapel, Daniel said, “Juxtaposing the two together in that way would reignite the debate even more.... To me and most people the symbolism of Lee Chapel isn’t necessarily about slavery.”

It certainly should not be, if one is discussing Lee. Calling Lee the chief defender of slavery betrays gross historical ignorance. Such a proposition presumes that the Civil War was fought to abolish slavery. After seven states had left the Union by early 1861, eight states where slavery was still legal remained in the Union. If the war had really been fought to abolish slavery, one has to wonder why President Lincoln did not call for an invasion of those eight states, too.

Lincoln’s call for 75,000 volunteers to suppress what he termed a “rebellion” in the seven seceded states is what precipitated more states, including Lee’s Virginia to leave the Union.

Lee opposed secession, but eventually, he reluctantly resigned his position in the U.S. Army rather than participate in an invasion of his home state. Once Virginia seceded, Lee offered his services to the new Confederate government. He certainly did not join Virginia to save slavery, as he freed his own slaves, which he had inherited from his father-in-law. In fact, Lee’s “emancipation proclamation” actually freed some slaves, unlike Lincoln’s war-time measure, which freed no slaves, at least not immediately.

The truth is that Lee had denounced slavery long before the Civil War. In a letter to his wife, written from Texas in 1856, Lee described his dislike of slavery. “I believe in this enlightened age, there are few who will not acknowledge that slavery as an institution is a moral and political evil.”

After the war, Lee demonstrated kindness toward former slaves. Writing in the *Confederate Veteran* in 1905, Colonel T. L. Broun of Charleston, West Virginia recalled having been present at St. Paul’s Church in Richmond, Virginia in June of 1865. “It was communion day; and when the minister was



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ready to administer the holy communion, a negro in the church arose and advanced to the communion table.... This was a great surprise and shock to the communicants and others present. Its effect upon the communicants was startling, and for several moments they retained their seats in solemn silence."

But then, Broun noted, "General Robert E. Lee was present, and ignoring the action and presence of the negro, arose in his usual and dignified and self-possessed manner, walked up to the aisle of the chancel rail, and reverently knelt down to partake of the communion, and not far from the negro. This lofty conception of duty by General Lee under such provoking and irritating circumstances had a magical effect upon the other communicants (including the writer), who [then] went forward to the communion table."

Following the war, Lee took over the leadership of Washington College, and kept it out of bankruptcy. Had it not been for his leadership, there would not be a college existing today to even be in the news. Because of the leadership of Lee, the school did survive, and eventually was re-named Washington and Lee.

Perhaps the students and faculty at Washington and Lee need to read some history of their school, and their school's namesake, Robert E. Lee.

*Photo of interior of Lee Chapel at Washington and Lee University: wellesenterprises/iStock  
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