

C A M P A I G N
For the Rising Generation
A T W A S H I N G T O N A N D L E E U N I V E R S I T Y

“With a Sharp Eye on the Future:”

Washington and Lee

“Between Starshine and Clay”

by

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A Speech Delivered to Launch

the Public Phase of the

University's \$225,000,000 Campaign:

“For The Rising Generation”



WASHINGTON AND LEE
UNIVERSITY

Lexington, Virginia

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Lexington, Virginia

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Around 5 o'clock Thursday afternoon, July 26, John Elrod—with whom I had not talked for several years—called and asked me to come today to this solemn, cherished place to deliver what he characterized as a “pivotaly important” speech in the history of the University. Who could resist such a warm, compelling invitation? I instantly accepted, and he commented that this was his last business call of the day and then he was going home. That night President Elrod died. This presentation is dedicated to him and to the thousands who have since lost their lives when the death angel, with devastation, came suddenly, unexpectedly. We are all living our lives after death, which prompts a new way of looking at things, of acting, of deciding afresh who and what we really love, what we really care about. I hope, to paraphrase a writer friend, that I may “coax a poem for you from this rubble.”

I.

Robert Penn Warren once said, “Without the fact of the past we cannot find the present or dream the future.” “And trying to plan the future without knowledge of the past,” commented Dan Boorstin, “is like trying to plant cut flowers.” So, let's begin by reflecting on Washington and Lee's past.

For nearly a century Protestant Christians around the world have lustily sung to a rousing tune by Ralph Vaughn Williams an even older hymn that begins, “For all the saints who from their labors rest.” Each stanza ends with “Alleluia.” Today is an occasion for recalling, celebrating and giving thanks for all the saints whose labors, for more than 250 years, have made this institution great. If we started calling their names, we'd be here until well into next week. Let John Elrod stand as a marker, a symbol, for all those dedicated, persevering, generous men and women who gave so much of themselves to Washington and Lee. Alleluia. Instead of focusing then on the saints

themselves, on individuals, let's look for a moment at some of Washington and Lee's more recent achievements, a quick review of "the facts of the past" that will remind us that Washington and Lee draws a strength from its past like few institutions of higher learning can and will reassure us that this institution exists on a firm foundation. A quick examination of the University's progress over just the past

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20 years makes this overwhelmingly clear. Let me mention only four such developments:

First, coeducation of the undergraduate colleges: With an act that some called courageous and others foolhardy, the Board of Trustees made a decision in 1984 that not only changed the face of Washington and Lee, it ensured the University's future. By recognizing that a coeducational undergraduate community would ensure a sustained and, as the past 17 years have demonstrated, an increasing strength in numbers of gifted students seeking to be here, the trustees ensured an ever-improving reputation and following for the University.

Second, assuming a national responsibility: Long focused as an institution upon the Valley of Virginia, there came a moment during these last two decades when the University's leadership determined that if Washington and Lee wants to think of itself as a truly national institution then it must accept the responsibility for leadership among liberal arts colleges.

The faculty stepped up its scholarly travel both domestically and internationally to professional conferences,

and funds have been established to assist students with the presentation of research at professional meetings.

The University became more active in national consortia. And once it engaged national foundations, corporations and a new range of supporters, they have invested with confidence in the University's programs because they serve as good models for like-minded schools. Washington and Lee has become a leading national institution.

Third, depth of strength in the faculty: The beauty of the Colonnade is timeless, but the faces that teach in these historic classrooms change with time. While for decades Washington and Lee attracted and retained extraordinary, outstanding teachers, over the last 10 years particularly at the undergraduate level, but in the Law School too, Washington and Lee, like most of its peers has been involved in a continuing process of significant faculty replacement. Beginning in the early 1990s and primarily through retirement of senior faculty, approximately 35 percent of the Washington and Lee faculty have been or will be replaced during any five-to-seven-year period, a trend that will likely continue through most of the remainder of this decade.

Washington and Lee University has made a deep commitment to attract the best new faculty to succeed those who have left; scholars, teachers who, in attention to their skills, share the values of this institution and a strong vision for its future. These faculty have immensely strong educational backgrounds with degrees from the most prestigious graduate schools in the nation.

At the Williams School alone 16 faculty, or 57 percent, have international expertise—Latin America, Asia and Europe and a significant number of faculty across the undergraduate curriculum teach their Washington and Lee courses abroad.

Faculty publish for and write in the most outstanding journals.

Between 1997-2001 alone, 52 faculty were awarded by national and international grant making organizations 68 new grants in support of their scholarship, yielding more than \$2 million in direct support of their work.

Lest anyone think that Washington and Lee's faculty engage in this research to the exclusion of their teaching, it is important to recognize a growing interest and a strong emphasis on joint research between faculty and students, particularly evident in the natural sciences. Indeed, collaborative work between faculty and students has become a hallmark of Washington and Lee.

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Fourth, commitment to the best facilities: With his sharp eye on the future, John Elrod as well as John Wilson and Bob Huntley before him were all known to say that it wasn't possible to have the best programs if you did not have the best facilities. Over the past several years and through the generosity of many of the people here today, Washington and Lee's always breathtakingly beautiful campus has been reborn, ensuring that the students and faculty have the tools with which to do their important work. Within the past decade alone, a new science building has been linked with the total renovation of Howe and Parmly Halls to foster a new interdisciplinary spirit in the natural sciences. Likewise, the outstanding nature of the facilities has been a magnet, drawing students to the departments and applicants to W&L that once might have considered pursuing other majors or attending other colleges.

By providing a first-quality venue for the performing arts, the Lenfest Center has brought about a dramatic change not only for the theater department at W&L and the students it attracts to its programs, but also for the entire community. Thanks to my classmate Gerry Lenfest, and his family, the arts occupy an unprecedented place of prominence at this University and in the local community.

Over the past decade, the University has also made a concerted effort to improve and replace inadequate or aging athletic facilities displaying today an enviable collection of fields, gymnasias, sports venues and the like, and the beat goes on.

Any reflection on the past reminds us that Washington and Lee is deeply, sturdily rooted; it is solidly grounded. That's why it's going to last for more centuries to come, since nothing that really matters lasts that isn't well grounded—love, marriage, friendship, sanity, knowledge, honor, integrity, institutions, democracy. Without deep roots they perish, and Washington and Lee is deeply, sturdily rooted. It is here to stay. But how well, how fully, how effectively will Washington and Lee endure?

II.

So now we come to the present. I. A. Richards once said that, "A text without a context is a pretext." We need a context for viewing Washington and Lee today. This summer, a friend sent me a model of the earth's population shrunk to a village of precisely 100 people with all the existing human ratios remaining the same. In this earth-as-a-hundred-person village, 57 are Asians, 21 Europeans, 14 from the Western Hemisphere (north and south) and eight are Africans. Fifty-two are females, 48 males. Eighty-nine are straight. Eleven are gay. Seventy have skins of color, 30 are white. Seventy are not Christian, thirty are. Eighty of the 100 live in substandard housing. Seventy are unable to read. Fifty are suffering from malnutrition and only one in the village has a college education. Only one owns a computer and of the 100 people in our single global village, six of them possess 59% of the entire world's wealth, and all six are from the United States. I share this sketch not only as a reminder of how much demography dictates destiny but to underscore the vast extent of our privilege and that if we view the world only through the narrow prism of our privilege, we shall have a distorted view indeed. We cannot forget that to those whom much is given, much is also expected or required.

I first heard the term "noblesse oblige" 50 years ago when I was an undergraduate here, the reminder then of today's truth that nobility obligates, "to whom much is given will much be expected or required." So the question in this present moment becomes, what is expected of a noble little college of 2000 students already incredibly blessed and placed so beautifully, so bucolically, in such a gargantuan world? In this venerable hamlet of Lexington, Va., Washington and Lee literally is "at the still point of the turning world." It is this location, nevertheless, its history, tradition, the achievements of the laboring saints, its practice, the quality of its daily life, its dreams and vision that po-

sition Washington and Lee uniquely to do some things—if adequately supported—that it alone can do.

I can imagine your saying to yourself just now, "We're convinced that Washington and Lee is good; we know that it's been consistently ranked in recent years as one of the top 20 liberal arts colleges in the country; but what justifies the claim that it is unique? How does a single institution in a sea of similar ones become unique?"

It's early in the morning for German philosophy, but Hegel (as I also learned here a half-century ago), once

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declared, "You can start adding element by element, degree by degree, until suddenly at an unexpected, perhaps initially imperceptible moment, these differences in degree add up and break over into a difference in kind."

So what are these special elements—so desperately needed if our global village is to be transformed and rendered humane—that may be here at Washington and Lee in unique combination? Let me mention six.

First, human scale so that in a manageably sized setting people interact closely and frequently enough to learn friendship, intimacy, loyalty. The faculty-to-student ratio is 1:9, allowing for genuinely personal relationships between older and younger members of the community, as one pundit put it, "the indispensable intergenerational transfer of knowledge."

Second, the Honor System with its requirement of honesty, integrity, responsibility. "We're committed," John Elrod, beloved symbol of all the saints, declared, "not only to imparting knowledge to our students but preparing them morally and ethically, with a firm grounding in basic values that will guide them in their lives to come."

John Elrod modeled and embodied those values: honor, integrity, concern for those in need, fairness, decency.

Third, the ever-present awareness that there's a wider world out there that we need to know if we are to understand where we're really living and to meet its needs. "We're really not alive, we're not with it," says a friend of mine, "unless we hug, embrace the world, the real world." That's

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why there is the Shepherd Program for the Interdisciplinary Study of Poverty. That's why study abroad is becoming so central an ingredient in the Washington and Lee landscape, contributing to global knowledge and understanding, appreciation for others different from ourselves, the damping down of another reality I learned about here, ethnocentrism—the sense that the world is only and always about us, me and my kind. All of this international and global emphasis is designed to expand our minds and open our hearts, to make our learning relevant.

Fourth, the centuries-old emphasis on the kind of fungible knowledge that equips graduates to respond wherever they go in life: reading, writing, increased understanding and use of technology. It's called variously general education, the liberal arts, a core curriculum. This emphasis on the fundamental human elements, the deepest kind of knowledge, key transdisciplinary skills (witness the Program in the Environment), breeds a kind of resil-

ency, a capacity to connect and a special flexibility that are perhaps more than ever needed today.

Fifth, honoring the body side of the mind-body-spirit equation by insisting on fitness, on participation in sport, on healthiness and wholeness of body. As part of my freshman orientation in September 1949, the classical idea of "a sound mind in a sound body" was declared to be a defining element of Washington and Lee, an ideal alive and a vibrant today, witnessed in the current campaign's focus on still-needed athletic facilities.

Sixth, celebration of the imagination in the mind-body-spirit equation by making the arts and humanities central, insisting on the fundamental importance of taste, the capacity for aesthetic pleasure and ultimately spirituality. From music, art, theater through an interfaith chaplaincy, Washington and Lee nurtures the imaginative, the spiritual dimensions of the lives of people here.

Human scale, the Honor System, global awareness, commitment to core but transdisciplinary knowledge, emphasis on the body and health, honoring imagination and spirituality: These are six special elements at the heart of Washington and Lee. While none by itself is unique in American higher education, the combination practiced here—I would claim—is unique.

My claim, in a nutshell, is this:

With a solid past, the firmest of foundations, Washington and Lee does what it does uniquely well. Further, the world needs a diverse group of people educated this way, in these elements, prepared to assume leadership roles in the worldwide community in a variety of fields, particularly law, commerce and the professions, but by no means limited just to these. While not overstating, the world needs what Washington and Lee offers, what Washington and Lee has to give. Washington and Lee needs resources to continue, to amplify, to deepen this kind of educational experience and to make it available to an ever wider variety of individuals, many of whom could not come without the University's financial help.

III.

“Without the fact of the past, we cannot find the present or dream the future.” We’ve reflected on the past, we’ve looked at some signal features of Washington and Lee’s present. We now need to “dream the future” and realize that vision. Paul Valery once declared, “The trouble with our times is that the future is not what it used to be.” Things that might once have been luxuries—global experience, multiracial understanding, technological mastery, genuine wisdom—are now necessities. Are Washington and Lee’s dreams aimed squarely toward those necessities and has it the means to achieve them? The answer to the first question is a resounding “Yes.” The answer to the second is, “Not quite yet.”

Washington and Lee is poised “on the bridge between starshine and clay” (Lucille Clifton), between where it is and where it wants and needs to be. It needs now additional resources to realize and extend what it does best, indeed, uniquely. Let me highlight only a few of those needs.

“The center of a college,” said James Blaisdell, the founder of my own Claremont, California Consortium, “is in great conversation, and out of the talk of college life springs everything else.” Everything about a college or university exists ultimately for educating students, and that is done through talking—reading, reflecting, writing, talking. It involves faculty and students, scholarships, equipment and facilities.

The best education requires the best faculty in adequate numbers passionately dedicated to their work as teachers and modeling through their research what a life of increasing learning really means. Washington and Lee still needs more professors imbued with this special passion.

It also needs students committed to this kind of learning, who more accurately mirror the world of difference and color that we earlier noted. Indeed, to paraphrase General Lee, we must secure the resources to “afford the

facilities of education to worthy young people who might not otherwise obtain one.” That is why roughly one-third of the campaign about which you will be learning more is devoted to aid for students. Two features of this student aid should be underscored. One is for global education that will allow every Washington and Lee student while

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enrolled here to study abroad to gain first-hand experience of the world, to learn to see, feel, think as others in different cultures do. We see everyday disastrous practices in business and government, the result of the pursuit of policies promulgated by those who don’t understand others—their language, their perspectives, their religions, their values. The needed new global leaders will have to have experienced globalism, the real and wider world. And Washington and Lee needs more counterparts to its students from around the world studying here, meeting members of the rising generation here on this campus, forming lifelong friendships.

The other part of student aid will allow more American students of color to benefit from a Washington and Lee education. Washington and Lee students deserve the diversity of experience, of multiple perspectives, of learning how to live together amicably and to delight in each other’s company that a genuine interracial, multicultural student body provides. Human diversity is indispensable for improving and sustaining the quality and texture of a top-flight educational experience. Without resources, we’ll keep robbing our students of that vital, profoundly needed element of diversity, a mark of world-class education. The truth is that, in relation to its peers, Washington and Lee has yet to reach the enrollment of diverse students of color

that other top-flight colleges have achieved and that, to remain tops, the future will require.

The technological revolution continues to unfold with substantial financial requirements to stay abreast. The generations of technology succession come swifter and swifter.

Washington and Lee also needs new facilities and the upgrading and rehabilitation of many others. What is striking is how near perfectly the facilities goals of the University line up with the heart of its educational practices and strengths.

Finally, Washington and Lee needs to become better known. The way to do that is not through some media blitz, but through achieving the excellence that it wants to herald and celebrate. Believe me, as a world-aware, world-responsive, world-class education flourishes here, the world will come to know Washington and Lee better and better.

That, in a nutshell, is the future. We have seen it together today, and I hope your response is: It's needed. It's appropriate. It'll work. And I want to support it.

A CONCLUDING TOAST

Washington and Lee not only deserves our support, it deserves a toast. (And Washington and Lee is good at toasting!) So imagine just now that you're joining me in this toast:

As we move forward, buoyed and supported by years of ground-laying achievement ("all past is prologue"), may we do so—following the way of the saints—with eyes wide, ears pricked, hearts opened. Inspired by all who have preceded us, may we enter an era wherein the words of Seamus Haney—"Hope and history rhyme." May we mobilize memory, confidently anticipate the future and commit ourselves now—in the days and years ahead—to securing the resources required to provide the best imaginable education for a diverse, rising generation. May we realize our fondest hopes for Washington and Lee, hopes which even now we continue to dream. May we, when all is reckoned, be ourselves among Washington and Lee's saints.



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