

Duke Law School  
Durham, North Carolina  
6 April 1964

Mr. Christopher T. Chenery  
90 Broad Street  
New York 4, New York

Dear Mr. Chenery:

As an alumnus of Washington and Lee University, I am aware that the Board of Trustees rightly bears the responsibility for University policy and that the welfare of the University is the principal consideration of the Trustees in policy formation.

But although the opinions of alumni should not shape University policy, I am convinced the Board would want to know the attitudes of alumni in order to assist in the accumulation of information relating to the University's welfare.

It is in this spirit of contributing in some way to your deliberations in the best interests of our University that I venture to suggest some views which I think represent deeply held convictions on the part of a number of alumni, especially those of us who have graduated in recent years.

The absence of any statement by Washington and Lee regarding racial considerations in its admissions policy is disturbing to a number of alumni.

I think many of us feel the continuing exclusion of Negroes from the Washington and Lee student body can no longer be justified, if the University is to remain loyal to its most significant duties.

Washington and Lee achieved its national prominence because one man recognized the need for a university to be a force for reconciliation in a nation torn by internal strife. General Lee recognized that the duty of the college in those days was to encourage young men to expand their horizons beyond the bitter limits of sectional defeat. His concepts of duty and honor, which are perhaps the most valuable assets of the University, inspired him and his college not only to adjust to the reality of their changing times, but also to contribute leadership by example in those times.

If Washington and Lee is to be loyal to its best traditions, it would appear that its duty now is to expand beyond the limits of personal prejudice, and in another time of national strife, to seek reconciliation. The admission of Negroes to the University would be an affirmation of Washington and Lee's continuing loyalty to this tradition of providing an academic environment of reconciliation and national unity.

The University's duty to its past is, of course, not its only one, and perhaps not its most important duty. Every university owes a special obligation to the nation and to the South to set an example of honest and enlightened leadership in times of rapid change. Washington and Lee has already forfeited its leadership in seeking practical adjustment to the changes in race relations. Tulane, Vanderbilt, Sewanee, Davidson, Duke, Emory, Wake Forest -- every private institution of significance in the South has announced that Negroes are no longer barred. While we may have lost our claim to leadership, our duty to the nation and to the South still compels an adjustment that apparently we have been afraid to make.

Finally, by its continued exclusion of Negroes, Washington and Lee is failing in its most immediate duty--to its students. Instead of preparing its students for the real world of the latter half of the 20th Century, it appears from its failure to act that Washington and Lee is seeking to perpetuate an unrealistic and outdated view of the social order. Whether we like it or not, our society and its racial structures are swiftly adopting new forms. The absence of Negro students from the campus at Lexington limits Washington and Lee men in their acquisition of practical and unbiased attitudes by which they can contribute positively to the adoption of these new forms.

There are more practical reasons why the continuing exclusion of Negroes from Washington and Lee is harmful to the University. It is probable that the University has lost potential faculty members, good students and money from the foundations because of its racial exclusiveness. But these are essentially minor reasons.

The loyalty of the University to its three most important duties--to its best traditions, to the nation, and to its students -- compels a change in admissions policy.

I am writing to you because I suspect many expressions of opinion the Board receives express support for the status quo. As a native Southerner, I find the status quo satisfying and comfortable, and change difficult. But loyalty to the University we love requires realism, and I thought it might be helpful in your discussion of this subject if there was some indication there are alumni aware of the changes realism requires.

Mr. Christopher T. Chenery

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I have also written President Cole with these views.

Washington and Lee has been unusually fortunate throughout the years in being subject to a Board which has governed the University with vision and skill, promoting only the best interests of the institution. This type of control has not infrequently been against prevailing alumni sentiment, as in the athletic scholarship controversy of a decade ago. I hope this same conviction to act for Washington and Lee's best interests prevails in the Board's consideration of the University's racial policy.

With respect and best wishes,

Sincerely yours,



Peter Lee

W & L, Class of 1960

PL:ks

April 9, 1964

Mr. Peter Lee,  
Duke Law School,  
Durham, North Carolina.

Dear Mr. Lee:

I have received your note of April 6th about the duties and responsibilities of the Trustees of Washington and Lee University.

This is a touchy subject and I think that the whole question is proceeding to a solution slowly, gradually, and with many an uncertain step. Still, I think progress is being made and will continue to be made, but unhurriedly.

Very sincerely yours,

C. T. Chenery

CTC:dw

*cc Dr. Cole ✓*