

#14 INTERVIEW OF BLACK STUDENTS ENROLLED AT WASHINGTON AND LEE

1. *Have you decided upon a college major?*

If yes, what?

Yeah, history major.

2. *(If the answer to question 1 is no, skip #7.) What is your grade point average (GPA) in your major field?*

I would guess 3.6 maybe.

3. *What type of degree are you working toward at Washington and Lee?*

BA

4. *What is the occupation or profession you want to enter upon finishing your education?*

Legal profession.

5. *Do you plan on working toward an advanced degree at some time after finishing your undergraduate program?*

Yeah, I'd like to get a law degree and maybe later a PhD.

Do you think you'll go straight on, or do you know yet.

I think I'd like to practice law for a while, real world experience.

What I meant was right after college.

Oh, yeah, right on, right after.

6. *While growing up, did you attend or were you personally active in church? Yes / No*

If yes, please give the denomination, and the type of church activities in which you participated.

Yes. OK, my father was Catholic, I went to Catholic church, and my mother was a Baptist and so I went to Baptist church sometimes too. And just basic Sunday school activities.

How would you characterize your church involvement in Lexington?

None.

7. *How would you compare your level of participation in extra-curricular activities in high school and at Washington and Lee?*

Probably a lot more in high school because just sports and I'm not doing any sports here, so that's the difference.

What about other kinds of extra-curricular activities?

I'm doing radio here. I've done some newspaper things, and I guess that's probably the extent of it.

8. *How did you learn about Washington and Lee University?*

When you take the SATs they send out.. various schools send out brochures, and that's just one that I got, and I sent back for more information. It was completely random. I didn't know anything about it previous to that.

9. *To what extent were you assisted during the admissions process by an alumnus of Washington and Lee?*

Not very much, actually, it was mostly the admissions office.

Did you know any alums?

I think I got a letter from one, and he was having some sort of a get together, but I never ended up going to that.

10. *Did you visit the campus before you matriculated as a student?*

Um hum, I did.

If yes, under what circumstances?

It was student recruitment weekend in March or in April before my senior year.

Before your senior year?

It was during my senior year.

Please describe your reactions to this campus visit.

I liked the campus. The professors I talked to, I liked them. And generally got a good feeling about the school, the campus.

Did you do much socially that weekend?

I think I went to a party. But most of the time they kept us going from place to place, during the day at least. and was here I think four days. Three or four days. I don't remember exactly. I did go to one party.

10a. *Was W&L your...*

It was my first choice.

10b. *About how many other colleges did you apply to?...*

Maybe eight or nine.

10c. *How many other colleges accepted you?*

All except Amherst.

11. *What made you decide to attend Washington and Lee?*

Academics, plus the fact it's far away from home. Just a different experience. I'd never been south before. Just to do something new.

Were there other factors you considered in making the decision?

Financial factors, sure. I got a pretty good scholarship, and so that helped, but that wasn't the deciding factor.

12. *Once you decided to enroll at W&L, what was the reaction of friends and relatives?*

Both my parents had some apprehension about me coming south. [one of his parents is not black] And that was a big worry for them, but otherwise they were just proud that I was going to school.

Tell me about their reservations about going south.

Well, my Dad is from Texas and my Mom grew up in Arkansas, briefly, and so, especially my dad had bad experiences when he was in Texas and he knew that, or he had feelings that things might not have changed a lot, and especially I don't know, a school like Washington and Lee, associated with Robert E. Lee, the Confederacy, all that, he had worries about even my safety and things like that. But, I think that's behind him.

Were there negative images about W&L that made you think seriously about not coming?

Well, I'm - the Robert E. Lee thing, even though I don't really picture him as an evil person or anything like that, but it's just the fact that there is a lot of association with the Confederacy and there's no way of getting around that most black people do have problems with that, and so.. I think you just have to look more to the school, and don't base things on what happened 130 years ago.

13. *Once you were enrolled, did you find the University to be as you had expected?*

Um hum. I was happy. Of course, difficulties when you first get here adjusting from easy public school to difficult university.

What about that whole business about the south? Course I don't know what you personally expected. How did you feel about it. Other people had fears, what did you expect?

Well, I don't know, my feeling was that probably I'd find out that the South has got a bad rap and you're gonna find people that are prejudiced or racist anywhere you go. And so, if that's going to be the thing that determines you, it's almost like you let them win. And so, if this was the place that gave me the best education I was going to come here. In spite of, or because of, or any of those things.

So, how did your experience pan out then, when you got here?

It's been mostly extremely positive. You find a few people, but most people it hasn't been at all what stereotypes would tell you.

So in a sense it turned out as you had expected.

Yeah.

14. *Please describe what you consider to be your greatest challenge at Washington and Lee. How have you dealt with it?*

It's probably academics slash time management, because when you're in high school, I don't know, I could get decent grades probably doing an hour and a half of homework a week. You know, it was an easy public school. But here, there's - it's a pretty rare day that goes by that I don't do at least twice that, so. Just the fact that suddenly you've got a lot more responsibility.

So how do you deal with it?

Un.. just do it, I guess. There's no other tricks. You just make a schedule, prioritize, and if things have to be done, do em.

Is that one of the major reasons you're not doing sports?

That's probably the main reason. I was afraid of time. I know that right now I always feel like I'm a couple of days behind no matter what I'm doing and I thought that if I was doing sports, basketball or football, or whatever, that I would never be caught up.

15. *How has your academic performance at Washington and Lee compared with your performance in high school?*

Actually I have a better GPA in college than I do in high school. I think it's part of the fact that you really have to exert yourself here, and so you get better results out of better work, whereas in high school the motivation wasn't there.

16. *What academic resources have you used at Washington and Lee?*

The library, definitely, computers, I use those a lot. I haven't used the writing center or anythings like those, but I do study in study groups for almost all my classes. I try to set something up like that. And language lab also. I visit professors.

Do you have suggestions for the development of these or other facilities?

Not really. I find that people at the library are pretty helpful in trying help you to find what you want to find. Professors are always available, and students like to study in study groups and I've found that's helpful too.

17. *What factors contribute or contributed to your selection of a major course of study?*

Well, when you're going to the law school, I guess it doesn't really matter a whole lot what your undergraduate degree is in. So just do something that I would enjoy, so I just decided to pursue history.

18. *Have you changed majors since you have been enrolled at Washington and Lee? If yes, please describe that change.*

Yeah. I was a journalism major the first, what, about a year and a half that I was here, but I don't know, I found it kind of repetitive, so I switched.

Did you take many of those classes?

I took four, maybe five.

19. *If you saw a person or group of persons lying, stealing or cheating would you report it as an honor violation? Please elaborate.*

I don't know. I've had this discussion with people before, and I don't - honestly I don't think I would, just because I think that that's something that's between that person and their conscience. It just puts you in an awkward position where you're not really in a position of authority where you're trying to tell other students. I've never been put in that position, and I don't know that a lot of students cheat here. But I don't see how - it's kind of a lose-lose situation. If you do it, I think that - I wouldn't.

If you do it in the sense of if you report?

If you report, then.. I don't know, I almost get the, you're filled with the sense of kind of like tattling, or snitching, or something like that. I realize that these are serious things, but at the same time, I don't know - at least my conception of honor is that it's something that you need to do yourself.

Do you have reservations about the system itself?

No, I, the only thing that I don't like about the honors system is, I think that, I don't know, it's kind of along the same lines that sometimes it might be a little bit too zealous. But, because I think that if you're going to have an honor system, it should be - let people go - and I tend to find that when, if that happens most people at this school won't cheat. /you know, you can take exams home.. I've really almost never been even tempted to cheat because it's almost too easy. And you say, what's really the point.

Well, rewind a little bit. You said something about, I think you said as that happens let people go.. something like that. What did you mean? I didn't quite catch all that.

Well just, the thing about single sanction, I can understand where they want to punish people that have, that do, that violate the honor code, but at the same time I don't see how that can really fall into line with what an honor code is all about. It should be that you do these things not because you fear being punished, but just because you know that it's the right thing to do. So any time you have anything hanging over someone's head, I don't think that's really an honor code at that point. It's a penal code, kind of.

So do you think that the way it works is based on fear, on based on..

Well, I think a lot of times that maybe the EC, they try and do this. When you first come here the speech that they give you, where they really make it overly dramatic, or say, "If you can't live by the honor code then leave now." It's almost funny, but I don't think that most students see it that way. They just don't think that, they don't think about the punishments. They don't cheat because they don't think it's the right thing to do. And where the EC tries to come at it from a "You'll be punished" position, I think most students ignore that and they say "this is what I should be doing."

20. *Do you find Washington and Lee professors easy or difficult to approach? Please describe in what way they are easy or difficult.*

Very easy, actually, I've had conversations with most of my professors, and they've been very willing to help and talk with me.

Have you been able to establish close working relationships with a member or with members of the W&L faculty?

As far as on working with various projects and papers?

Probably you should define what you think this would mean for you.

Well, any time I've had a semester project or anything like that, they've helped me out as far as research goes, writing papers, just in general things to help me along. And so in that sense they've been very helpful.

21. *What has been your experience at W&L with regard to social life?*

It's very active, obviously, here, but I guess the one complaint that I'd have is that it's probably too

fraternity-centered. It's a good thing, but at the same time I think that a lot of times this school tends to be not one school, but broken down into sub-schools based on the fraternity and sorority level. You know, you can have fun with the fraternity system, but at the same time I think that there needs to be more of a sense of school.

What about your experience with social life? Is your social life very active or are you saying that the school's social life is?

The school's is and mine is probably not much different than any other Washington and Lee student's. I am not a party animal, and I try and study and keep my head above water academically. I'd say I probably go out three times a month. That's not much, I know, but...

Although you said that your isn't that much different from any other W&L student, then you went on to describe something that is probably fairly different from someone who is very involved in the fraternity. Well, just in terms of what I do, not how I find it. Because I know how often I do it. It's pretty sporadic.

Do you belong to a fraternity?

No, I don't.

How important to you is alcohol at a social event or social engagement?

Actually, I don't drink anymore, just because I was afraid of gaining weight. That's kind of a silly reason, but I found that it doesn't really affect me. If you want to have a good time, then you don't need that. Some people need to feel that they're drunk or something just to have fun.

Did you drink much at first?

Not really, because, I don't know, I think it was that the appeal wasn't there because it's something that I kinda did after my senior year in high school. So that it's I'm out of home so let's get all the beer I can syndrome was out of me.

How important to you are drugs at a social event?

I don't use drugs at all, so that's not important.

Is it obvious that it is happening or does it intrude?

Well, I think marijuana is probably the only thing that happens at any sort of regular rate, but I think that even then, most people tend to go into a room and separate themselves from what the main party is doing. It's not like, you know, wild opium parties or anything like that.

22. *What experiences, if any, have you had with Greek organizations on campus?*

I haven't had any negative experiences. The only reason I didn't join a fraternity is that I was a little greedy and I didn't want to pay the dues, plus I thought it would kind of constrict me as far as what I wanted to do socially. I didn't want to become whatever my fraternity was instead of being myself.

How would you evaluate or describe any experiences you may have had?

You can still visit the fraternities and you have friends there. So, you can hang out there. It's not a problem as far as that goes. So my experiences with them are very positive.

And you do, to some extent, go to the parties and you sometimes go visit.

Yeah.

23. *Evaluate your experiences with regards to athletic teams/athletic facilities/and physical education classes.*

I do radio for the athletic teams. The athletic facilities -- this school doesn't have as good student use facilities as most colleges that I've seen. There's one weight room and it's kind of small. The gym has a lot of different things you can do but there's not a lot of basketball courts you can play on, so it's difficult to get in. The weight room is usually full. The facilities are kind of cramped, generally. I don't have a problem with the phys ed system. I think that for a lot of people it keeps them in some semblance of shape and so I think that's a good thing.

24. *How would you characterize your opportunities for "dating" while enrolled at Washington and Lee?*

Well, I have a girlfriend at home, so I guess my opportunities for dating would be none.

Do you have any feelings about that? Or has it never come up because you've always had her?
Yeah, I would feel too bad about doing anything, so, it's not worth it.

25. *Have you ever considered transferring from Washington and Lee to another college/ university?*

No.

Why/why not?

Because the only other college I was ever interested in going was Amherst, since my brother was there, and I got wait listed and it wasn't a big deal.

If yes, what factor(s) influenced you to stay?

26. *Have you had a paid job on campus (including work-study)?*

No.

If so, has this influenced your level of satisfaction at W&L?

27. *Would you be willing to recruit other students for Washington and Lee either as a student yourself or as part of an alumni program? Please elaborate.*

I've been asked to and I said I would, but they've never asked me to do it. Someone in the Minority Office did. They sent me a letter and I said I would do it, but they didn't follow through on it. But I would be willing to.

Now we ask some background information:

28. *In what geographical location did you grow up:*

Country:

State: Eastern Oregon

*In what type of **area or community** did you spend most of your growing up years?*

Urban

Suburban

Rural Very small town.

29. *Describe the type of **high school** you attended.*

Urban

Suburban

Rural Small high school, 900-something students. Half hispanic and half white.

Predominantly

Black

White

Mixed

30. *Please give the kin relationship(s) between you and family members in your home when you were growing up.*

Two sisters, a brother, mother, step-father.

31. *What was the highest level of education achieved by your parents, guardians, or others with whom you lived when you were growing up?*

Dad had a college degree, my mother had a PhD in math.

What are the occupations or professions of your parents or guardians?

My dad is an architect and my mother is just retired, a homemaker, I guess. She taught English as a

second language.

32. *As compared to other W&L students, how would you characterize your overall social class position (based on parents' education and family income)?*

I don't know. Sometimes I have a hard time — it's difficult to gauge the socio-economic status of people here. I'd probably put myself maybe a little above the middle of the pack, because my family has never been without a lot of — I've never been poor, or anything. They're not especially rich, either.

How do you think this has affected your experience?

I don't know that it has. Maybe if this was a state school, it would be different. At least at Oregon State, I've not been to a lot of other state schools, but I know that most people that go there, they are not very wealthy. So I guess, just in terms of eastern Oregon, I guess my family would be fairly wealthy. But at this school, no.

33. *In general how do you think about yourself first at Washington and Lee -- as a member of a particular racial/ethnic/national/gender group, or as a student?*

Probably just as a student. I prefer not to set those boundaries for myself.

Please explain.

34. *How homogeneous do you believe black students are on this campus? In answering please consider racial identification, political perspective, and/or social class position.*

I think very, just because a lot of black students are uncomfortable in a lot of social settings, so they tend to stay within themselves.

Are they homogeneous in the sense of being similar to each other?

I doubt it. I know that there are some black students who are here that are fairly poor and some that have a lot of money. I guess that just like everyone else at this school, there is probably a decent mix. I would probably tend to say that they are more liberal than most, as a group.

What about racial identification?

That's difficult to answer, just because I think that a lot of blacks that see themselves as — that their racial identity is very important to them, they tend to go to predominantly black schools a lot of times, like larger universities that offer them the types of chances where they can be with other black students in large numbers. So the fact that they are here, and I don't know if that's a bad judgment to use, would tend to tell me that that might not be as important to them as just getting an education and trying to further themselves.

35. *How similar or different do you believe blacks and whites are on this campus? Consider the same categories that are mentioned in number 34 above and add any other factors that you deem important.*

The only differences being those that you would find between blacks and whites anywhere. This being America as it is right now, blacks and whites come to the table with very different experiences as far as just various difficulties that they have had growing up, or whatever. So I think those are just differences that you would see in society in general is what you would see as differences on campus.

36. *Do you believe the size of the black student enrollment at Washington and Lee is adequate or inadequate?*

Obviously, if you go from size of population vs. the percentage here, I think you'd have to say it is inadequate. But at the same time I know that Washington and Lee has made quite an effort to bring blacks here, but a lot of them aren't interested for the reasons that we talked about before. Because this is kind of seen as a school that is too conservative for their tastes, and so they tend to go elsewhere.

Do you believe the number of black professors is adequate or inadequate?

There's one black professor?

One tenure-track professor and two this year who are single-year appointments while they are doing

their dissertations.

I don't know, because I think you'd have to look at that in the context of how many black PhDs there are and what type of political slant they have, versus the basic current that this school has. I think the easy answer would be to say Yes. But I don't know. I wouldn't say that it's inadequate but at the same time, it's kind of a grey area, I would say.

What would be the benefits of having more black presence, as you see it?

Well, obviously, I think that a lot of students here do need to know, to say it simplistically, the black side of the story. And so maybe, if there were more black professors, that could be a source of understanding, maybe. Because I don't know that black students need that, because it is kind of preaching to the choir.

Do you believe the number of black administrators is adequate or inadequate? Explain.

It's kind of the same. I know that they're here and, at least in my experience, that they've been active in trying to recruit blacks, etcetera. But, given that there aren't very many black people here, I don't think there is a need for a large minority department or things like that. I would probably say it is adequate, but it is small, just the same.

37. *Should the university offer activities designed to bring new black students together?*

If not, why not?

Well, I think they do this already. But I don't really know that it is necessary because these are things that tend to happen anyway, without the school catalyst. I don't have a preference (of their happening on their own). If it's something that the school wants to do, I think that's good, just in the sense that they recognize it and try and promote some sort of happiness at the school or well-being or cohesiveness, or whatever.

If yes...do you have suggestions?...

Has the Chavis House played a role in your life at W&L? Please describe.

Neither the Chavis House or the Minority Student Association really has because those just aren't organizations that I have been very much involved with for whatever reason. I don't know. Maybe it's just the general stigma of minority associations or something along those lines. But I have a lot of black student friends, and I know it is not the membership, it's just those aren't really goals as far as what I am after right now.

Tell me what you mean by the stigma of minority organizations.

I think in general at a lot of schools, I don't know necessarily at this school because the population is too small, but it's a kind of counter-productive concentration where they tend to just eat together, they tend to do all their activities together, and it kind of defeats the purpose of going to a university and going out and, at least for me, I think it is much more interesting to meet people that's kind of the anti-me — go out and find people who have different opinions or different backgrounds. From that you can learn as much as from any class.

Has the Minority Student Association played a role in your life at W&L? Please describe.

38. *Do you believe that it is important that courses in the humanities/social sciences include recognition or study of works by persons of color?*

Yes, but, at the same time, I think it should be dealt within the context of how really significant are they. I know a lot of times people tend to get carried away, like Black History Month and things like that, where they bring up people that really aren't important in the larger scheme of things. If it's someone big, like a King or Malcolm X or DuBois or something along those lines, then sure. But if it's the person who invented the stop light and these little trivial facts that we hear a lot of times during Black History Month is kind of obsessive.

If you think works by persons of color should be included do you think the recognition was adequate, inadequate, or excessive? Please explain.

Well, I think it is discussed a lot of times just within the general context of general studies. You know, if you take an English course, the Harlem Renaissance might come up, or things like that. So I think it's discussed in the right context.

39. *How would you characterize the climate in the classroom for you [as a black student]?*

For me it hasn't been any different. With maybe the exception with a lot of times a black issue comes up, you're maybe taken too much as an authority on the issue, when I guess my comments would be just as valid as the next person's. But other than that, I think that people tend to respect your opinions and professors, I don't have a problem.

If you have encountered 'problems in the classroom, how have you dealt with those difficulties?

40. *What is the role of the Office of Minority Student Affairs?*

I don't know, except just to make sure that minority students don't have any sort of problems in terms of fitting in.

How can the role of this Office be improved?

As far as improvement of the office, maybe more emphasis could be put trying to integrate students more with what's going on on campus — not necessarily changing them, just, you know, putting them in the mainstream.

How would you go about doing that?

I don't know. That's kind of a \$56,000 question for just America in general.

41. *From whom do you receive the greatest emotional support on campus? Do not use name(s), but please describe the person(s) in terms of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, and position (i.e. fellow student, faculty member, administrator, staff member). If appropriate, include more than one individual and describe the type of situations in which the person provides emotional support (i.e. personal, family, religious, etc.)*

I don't know. I'd probably have to say a friend that I have, a white male. I haven't had a particularly difficult time here, so that I think that emotional support might be kind of a strong word for it, because I would think emotional support would mean some kind of tribulation or something that you have to have somebody help you with. I'd probably describe them as white male students. He was a roommate.

What percentage of your friends are black, what white, and what international?

I'd probably say about half and half as far as black/white, and I think I maybe only have one or two international friends.

42. *Have you experienced any discriminatory behavior on campus directed against yourself?*

What form did that behavior take (written remarks including graffiti, spoken remarks, physical assault, discriminatory treatment).

I really haven't. I guess the only thing that would bother you is just, it's not even discrimination, it's just differences of opinion type things on issues ... like affirmative action and things like that. But other than that there's no slurs. Because I think that if there are these people on campus, they are smart enough not to show themselves and avoid acting in a repulsive manner.

Have there been any subtle things, like being turned away from any parties?

Well, no. As part of that is that you know where to go and where not to go, and so if you know that you are going to have difficulty someplace, then you just avoid those situations. I guess that's part of it.

How would you know? Just by scuttlebutt?

Yeah. Talk to other people who have had experiences. Not necessarily just black people, either. You know, white people will say, this is somewhere where you probably don't want to go.

Some people have been ask if they were W&L students in places like the athletic facilities or walking around on the street or at a party. Has this happened to you?

No, actually I think the only reason for that is maybe only because I know and work in Security and so they know me and they wouldn't ask.

Who was responsible for that behavior?

Individual students

Student groups

Greek

Non Greek

Faculty
Staff
Security

Leaving aside behavior, do you sense racial tensions on campus beyond what exists in the larger society?

Probably. Because, I don't like generalizations like this, but this campus tends to be more conservative, and, I think, in general conservatives are slower to recognize rifts and racial tensions and things like that. And I think this campus — there's not a large problem of white discrimination but I think there is a refusal to acknowledge that problems do exist and to act on them. Maybe it's an ambivalence, I don't know, but it is just a resistance to change.

If so, how do you think such tensions could be eased within W&L?

You see, there again, if I knew that — at the basic level, just make friends with people and you are not going to change the world but you change a few people.

43. *Aside from the Honor System do you believe that the student Executive Committee, the Student Conduct Committee or other University judicial committees treat black and white students equally fairly?*
I can't know that, because I haven't heard stories, proven or anecdotal or anything about black people being treated one way and white people another. So I guess just as a naïve assumption I would assume that they do treat them the same.

44. *Do you believe that the honor system is applied in an even-handed way to black and white students?*

I think so. I think it's difficult to see how it couldn't be, without just horrific and blatant discrimination. If you cheat, you cheat, or you lie, you lie, or whatever. So I don't know that that comes down to race at all.

45. *How would you evaluate student publications (i.e. the Ring-tum Phi, the Trident, etc.), the student radio and television stations with regards to opportunities for black students to participate.*
I haven't had a problem at all, I know. With the newspapers there's never been a problem or with the radio. I've had a great experience. I know that at least with the people I've worked with there never has been a problem.

How would you evaluate them with regard to their treatment of news about black students?
I guess fairly. I would say that because again I haven't found any kind of examples.

46. *Do you feel that black students at Washington and Lee today have problems that are basically different from, or basically similar to those of whites? Please describe in what way you feel they are different or similar.*

I think they have the same problems that white students have, just because I think that in general, not just students but I think in life, black people feel that they have to do more to get the same, and so if you are worried about law school or — just anything as far as academic performance, you have your career on the horizon — everything just comes down to you wonder how much is race going to play a role. I think that there are additional burdens added on to the regular student troubles to prove yourself.

*47. Sex M

*48. Age? 20

*49. Year in college? JUNIOR

*50. Cumulative grade point average [as of Fall 1996]? 3.197

*51. How do you identify yourself in terms of nationality? AMERICAN

52. How do you identify yourself in terms of race?

I would say I am black.

53. Are there additional comments you wish to make about any aspects of Washington and Lee?
Not really. I think I've said most of the things.