

James A. Blanchard III

Charlottesville, Va. 22902
October 27, 1983

John D. Wilson, President
Washington & Lee University
Lexington, Virginia 24450

Dear Mr. Wilson:

As an alumnus, I must regret your decision, taken after only a few months in office, to revive the distracting and fatiguing coeducation controversy at Washington & Lee.

Let me note that I have no objection in principle to coeducation. I attended a coeducational undergraduate school. I would be gravely concerned by any campaign, particularly one instigated by a new school official, to transform that school by changing its policy.

I share your concern for W&L's ability to attract a sufficient enrollment of qualified students. But if W&L is to survive and flourish, it will not be by the precipitous and undignified imitation of virtually every other college and university. It will do so by maintaining and emphasizing its historic character. That distinctive identity accounts for the extraordinary loyalty of its alumni and has seen it through more serious problems than those you envision.

Coeducation necessarily entails radical transformation of the school and destruction of its ambience and traditions. It would not reflect either the will or the best interests of the University and its community.

I assume that you will make every effort to seek the advice and consent of the University community, in which I include in particular the alumni, in the days ahead.

My fondest wish for Washington & Lee is that it will have the imaginative leadership capable of addressing serious issues and able to see it through any difficulties with its integrity intact.

Very truly yours,



James A. Blanchard III

cc: James M. Ballengee

WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY
LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

October 31, 1983

Mr. James A. Blanchard III
[REDACTED]
Charlottesville, VA 22902

Dear Mr. Blanchard:

I have your note and thank you for sharing your opinion with me.

I do wish to alter your view, if I can, of one point. You state that you regret "my decision to revive the controversy" etc. etc. I want only to say that the coeducation question at Washington and Lee was waiting my arrival here. I did not bring it with me. In fact, I accepted the residency of a coeducational University with an all-male undergraduate program in good faith. I lived and studied two years in an all-male college and enjoyed myself immensely. I assumed the issue was, at least, moot here.

I discovered quickly that I was wrong. It was the first question asked me at my first press conference fourteen months ago. It was the first question asked me by every group of students who entered my home last spring. And it was a matter virtually every member of the Faculty, including the 30 plus who graduated from Washington and Lee; thought fit to comment on when I met with them individually.

Bob Muntley did warn me, as he warned the Board, that this issue continues to be of central interest and concern here. It arose, you will recall, in the first year of his presidency and rose again five years later. I guess I shouldn't be surprised, nor should you be, that it rose during the first year of my tenure here.

What you could help me with is a concrete explanation of why you feel as you do. What part of the undergraduate experience, in your opinion, would fail to survive the admission of women? Keep in mind that there are women students in our Law School and in our classrooms by exchange (not many, but some), and there are large numbers of women here for social reasons almost any day or evening. But I realize W & L is not Amherst or Davidson and I want to know as clearly as I can what part of the particular experience we provide would be put at jeopardy if women were permitted to share in it. Is it the ambience provided by the fraternity system? Is it the camaraderie of men in and along the colonnade or the relationships our men form with their teachers?

I should be ever so grateful if you would invest still more of your time to tell me how you think about these matters.

Most sincerely,

John D. Wilson
President