

June 3, 1986

Dear President Wilson,

As the school year closes and I reflect upon my freshman year, I would like to share with you my opinion about the minority situation at Washington and Lee. When I enrolled at W&L, I was aware of the low minority population--now I know why it is so small.

It was my belief that this school cared about increasing the number of minorities/blacks. I came to W&L believing the school wanted to change its racial atmosphere but that was the fantasy of a naive freshman.

Washington and Lee's racial atmosphere can never change until the President decides to change it. You wanted co-education and it happened. You felt women would be considered minorities here, so you determined the best ways of making them feel welcome. You hired women professors and administrators. What about the Blacks that have been here for 20 years? Where are our professors and why is there only one black administrator? Don't you believe as a young black student, I need positive role models? Where are they? Why is there a total lack of black professors at this college; and the two that we had, why are they gone? So that I don't sound like other complaining students, I will propose some ideas.

A. What we need: Minority Recruiters

Why we need them: It is the shared opinion of minorities that the current plan for attracting minorities does not work as shown by the low numbers and the reason for rejections. Also, it doesn't help to throw the job into the lap of a person affiliated with admissions who was hired for a totally different purpose even if that person did work in a black school.

How to achieve it: "Minority Baby Dean"

We know change comes slowly as far as Blacks are concerned here. A "minority baby dean" similar to the position held by Mr. Tomaso could be the foothold we need to start with. The person might be placed in either the Minority Affairs Office or the Admissions Office.

B. What we need: Black Professors

Why we need them: We as black students need positive role models. The only blacks beside the students and Dean McCloud are the janitors and cafeteria workers.

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How to achieve it: Exchange Program

Establish an exchange program for students and professors with predominately black schools of high academic status.

C. What we need: A Black on the Board of Trustees

Why we need it: Being that few black students come in contact with the Board of Trustees, it is my opinion that the trustees are unaware of the problems that Blacks face. Having a black on the board would give us the voice we need.

How to achieve: You would know better than I.

You may ask yourself, if we are having so many problems/difficulties then why do we stay here. These are my answers:

- A. A perception that the administration is saying, "we know you people are not happy here but we will give you all the financial support you need if you will stay."
- B. Because of the depression due to low self-esteem stemming from the racial atmosphere and lack of social life, some minority students' grades are low and they can not be easily transferred to another school.
- C. And a few of us are hoping that it will get better and we won't always feel like "polar bears in the middle of Africa."

I know what can be accomplished with your support because as a female student at W&L, I have seen attitudes toward women change because of your vocal support of them. I close, no longer wondering why most of my fellow minority classmates feel as though they chose the wrong university; only wondering if you care enough to make it change.

Sincerely,



Rosalyn D. Thompson '89

RDT:bjm

June 30, 1986

Ms. Rosalyn D. Thompson
2217 Yorktown Drive, Apt. D-7
Lynchburg, Virginia 24501

Dear Rosalyn:

I have read and reread your letter and have thought a good deal about it. You have stated your views with compelling clarity and I think they have validity.

There is so much to do. I know full well that we must do more than we have to attract and retain black faculty and staff. It has been a discouraging year in that respect. We moved Professor Steele's tenure review up a year and offered him a permanent appointment. We also appointed Ms. Steele in the Admissions Office. Yet they decided for personal reasons to return to Columbus and we have lost two fine professionals. So, too, we granted a tenured appointment with a promotion to Professor Hobbs, and he has accepted it and yet will be away next year on leave-of-absence. I only hope he returns in a year's time. We also appointed Dean McCloud and Coach Young in the athletic department. But we haven't done very well in the undergraduate faculty appointments we have made and no one is more acutely aware of that than am I. We are not giving up, however. I believe your suggestion re visiting professors on exchange may be a good beginning point. The right persons brought in if only for a year or a semester could help a great deal.

The success we hoped for in the Class of '90 has also eluded us. Never in our history had we so many fine black applicants and we were able to accept a very healthy percentage of those who applied. We also were able to put together the required financial aid. But our "yield" is, as you know, terribly discouraging. I don't have the full story yet, but I will hope to know more by the end of the summer. I know the Ivy League schools hurt us some and I assume UVA and William and Mary also took some from us.

Was our on-campus visitation program poorly conceived? Could we do things we are not now doing to increase the number of accepted students who accept us? The problem was not in attracting qualified candidates (not this year). The problem was in persuading those who visited here that they could find academic satisfaction here and could also help us create a more supportive and encouraging extra-curricular life.

I have shared your letter with a few of my colleagues and I will continue to make reference to it as we seek to make greater progress in the years just ahead. I would be glad if you would come by in the Fall to visit with me about

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some of these matters. I do not underestimate the influence I can have but I know it is a job which many of us will have to work at if we are to have success. So do come by to meet with me in September.

In the meantime, I hope you have a pleasant and rewarding summer.

Most sincerely,

John D. Wilson
President

JDW/bcb

bcc: Dean McCloud w/enclosure
Dean Simpson