

Replacing “Lee” with “Liberty”: Washington-Liberty High School Renaming Committee - Alternate Choice

From Civil War to Civil Rights: *Updating the W-L brand to Reflect Leadership that Promotes Liberty*

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Embracing the school’s international diversity and cultural strengths

Rationale to support the renaming of Washington-Lee High School to Washington-Liberty High School

This renaming process has been an education

When this renaming process began, I was not sure what to expect. The assembled committee included representation from current students, faculty, parents, alumni, and various community civic associations. I wondered whether the Arlingtonians charged with naming the school in 1924 were as similarly diverse (alas, probably not). The year 1924 was the middle of the Jim Crow era; blacks were segregated in Arlington and “separate but equal” was the law of the land. Women had just earned the right to vote just four years prior in August 1920 with the passage of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution. It would take racial minorities four more decades to fight for and earn the right to vote unencumbered. Indeed, much has changed since that inaugural year. Our civil liberties are better today, but still there is work to be done.

Visiting the school; the campus today is not what I remember – today’s version is better.

The school campus, bounded by North Stafford, Quincy, and Washington Blvd looks nothing like what I remember from my days as a student in the early to mid 1990s, with the exceptions being the Planetarium, APS building, I-66 parking garage, and stadium. To be fair, the school facility I attended was demolished over a decade ago. Gone are the rusty lockers and the aging smells of the mid-century architecture I remember. Its replacement is stunning; a recent tour I had the pleasure of walking the halls of today’s campus, and if it weren’t for hallway lockers on the upper floors it would almost resemble a college campus more so than a high school. However, what has truly endured is most important of all – the rich tapestry of cultural and international diversity.



Visiting the school; words and artwork of inspiration, school spirit and colors throughout

After walking through the building, exploring the halls and seeing the students, the school is impressive. Inspirational quotes fill spaces above lockers, and greet you at the entrances. School pride is everywhere, where most walls are painted blue, gray, or both. General's pride fills the gymnasium and auditorium seats. There is much more school spirit than I can ever recall.



Personal Reflection

These committee discussions and proceedings have led me to ponder my time at W-L. What has W-L taught me? Is there anything I can take from my time there that can help guide this decision? The short answer is yes, on many levels. My diverse friendships, strong and lasting over these past two decades. The teachings of several teachers who helped me expand my horizons and develop the capability to think differently about the world, to empathize with my fellow citizens, and to develop the skills to articulate my thoughts clearly and concisely.

I am reminded of my favorite teacher, and perhaps the most impactful teacher I ever had in my life. His name was Rich McNamara (we called him Mr. Mac). He was my AP Physics teacher. He was fantastic. I needed help after school, frequently, and he always helped me. But he never gave me the answer to a question. He just helped me think through how to solve the problem. He would always ask me "What do you think?" That has stuck with me to this day. I use it in business; I use it in daily life. The temperance to not be afraid to ask **why** and to continually develop and nurture the capacity for independent thought. So even today, as we process feedback from constituents, survey respondents, current events, and historical analysis, the bottom line is that I need to explain what I think, why I think it, and how it can positively impact the others who will come next.

Closer Examination of both Washington and Lee – Affirmation and Reckoning

Washington and Lee are both powerful symbols. The former is part of our national identity, the "Father of His Country," revered across our country almost uniformly, from one coast to the other. The latter has been appropriated and manipulated by those who see a symbol of racial oppression, a return to better times, and the Lost Cause. The myth of Lee has grown since his death, and used for malfeasance during Restoration efforts and Jim Crow laws.

It is necessary to separate fact from fiction, myth from man. As general, Washington left his home state to help lead the Continental Army to fight against the oppressive British monarchy, establish an independent republic built on the foundation of laws and individual liberty. Lee, as general, after 32 years fighting for the Union, left his country to lead his state and the Confederate Army in battle against the United States to deny liberty to slaves. Some may argue that both men had honor, and should be honored. But honor is not the same as justice.



Reckoning of Lee is Necessary to Discuss, Understand, Heal, and Move Forward

Arlington County has not had the chance to come together to reconcile the complexities and realities of Robert E. Lee, perhaps the most infamous Arlingtonian. Incidentally, Lee's own words indicate he didn't want symbols or public recognition of his name, that it would be harmful and prevent healing. Lee objected to the idea of raising Confederate monuments, saying it would be wiser "not to keep open the sores of war but to follow the examples of those nations who endeavored to obliterate the marks of civil strife." (*New York Times*)

Symbols of hate are best countered by symbols of hope.

The man, myth, and misunderstanding of Lee should be explored further. Perhaps most importantly, to allow fellow Arlingtonians who feel aggrieved about this renaming process to have a chance to talk about Lee, and learn more of his writings. Perhaps this could even take the form of school curricula within the high school.

In addition to history lessons and public forums, the symbol that best represents the student body is the light, a guiding light perhaps, a light that shines on a darker chapter of our local (and national) history. A light that can show us the way forward, emanating from a lighthouse, a beacon of hope to replace a bastion of hate. The symbol I envision stands tall (quite tall, at 305 feet) to our North in New York Harbor. Lady Liberty, the Mother of Exiles, is a positive symbol that would foster inclusion of the international community, the broad diversity of her students, family, and faculty.

While Washington and Lee in the same title seemed to vindicate Lee (or bring him to the same level as Washington), juxtaposing the Father of His Country next to the Mother of Her People would bring together two of the most powerful symbols in our country, one representing humble servant-leadership during the inception of our democracy, and the other reminding us to be ever vigilant and aware of our civil liberties. Our Generals Pride runs strong and deep, that we fervently fight for our civil liberties and battle the constant scourge of oppression and ignorance.

Alignment with APS Core Values:

Washington-Liberty would demonstrate to our constituents a clear sign that W-L is open to all diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds as together we seek to **Foster Inclusivity** and **Seek Equity**. Liberty, as a symbol could help act to shine light on challenging current events or areas of study (Brandeis's "sunshine is the best disinfectant"), encouraging students to **Act with Integrity** and **Practice Good Stewardship**. The name would hopefully spur discussion to **Collaborate Openly**. Lastly, through these collective efforts, recognizing the

leadership and personal sacrifice of Washington to advance and defend our civil liberties, we would continue to **Strive for Excellence**.

As an additional benefit (especially given FY19's budget crisis), keeping the W-L Generals brand would help us, as Arlington citizens and taxpayers, reduce our fiduciary burdens to not create large changes to logos and decoration throughout the school and athletic fields. However, slight adjustments to banners, flooring, and seals would be necessary, but at reduced cost to wholesale change.

The W-L brand is strong and it continues to evolve.

It is a purposeful evolution, to meet the needs of the student body and community it serves. The name change is a "brand refresh" opportunity. The school's legacy will endure, perhaps become even more robust and inclusive of the greater community.

There may not be a perfect name, or at least a name that satisfies 100% of all constituents. However, by building on the W-L brand, by affirming Washington and replacing Lee with Liberty, we are staying true to the W-L name. It could be a grand compromise (not the status quo, but not radical change either).

Resources and Additional Thoughts

1) **How the U.S. Got So Many Confederate Monuments** (history.com) <https://www.history.com/news/how-the-u-s-got-so-many-confederate-monuments>

2) **The lessons my father, Charles Krauthammer, taught me about being thankful** (washingtonpost.com) https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-lessons-my-father-charles-krauthammer-taught-me-about-being-thankful/2018/11/21/c314bf34-ecee-11e8-8679-934a2b33be52_story.html?utm_term=.c9cb5aaf6eeb

3) **At 63, I Threw Away My Prized Portrait of Robert E. Lee** <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/10/why-i-threw-away-my-portrait-robert-e-lee/573631/>

4) **What This Cruel War Was Over** https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/06/what-this-cruel-war-was-over/396482/?fbclid=IwAR2CyokSL67nKNyPyBRHkLXBnR_uc7TudHL9O2W9_ApVgmsc8LD3BLJzjfo&utm_campaign=the-atlantic&utm_content=5bee98a79ac5640001fb12b5_ta&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook

5) **10 Facts about Washington and the Revolutionary War** (mountvernon.org) <https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/the-revolutionary-war/ten-facts-about-the-revolutionary-war/>

6) **Robert E. Lee WAS a man of honor. That's the problem** (washingtonpost.com) https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2017/11/07/robert-e-lee-was-a-man-of-honor-thats-the-problem/?utm_term=.51581cb9f4d5

7) **Making Sense of Robert E. Lee** (smithsonianmag.com) <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/making-sense-of-robert-e-lee-85017563/>

8) **What Robert E. Lee Wrote top the Times About Slavery in 1858** (new york times) <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/18/us/robert-e-lee-slaves.html>

- Lee's letter to his wife in 1856 included "In this enlightened age, there are few, I believe, but what will acknowledge, that slavery as an institution, is a moral & political evil in any Country." But he added that slavery was "a greater evil to the white man than to the black race" in the United States, and that the "painful discipline they are undergoing, is necessary for their instruction."
- Would not accept testimony from negroes in court (Mr. Custis's dying wishes to free slaves)

- While the slaves thought they would be freed, Lee said 5 more years
- Instructed overseers to provide thorough, additional lashings
- Lee did not support civil rights for black citizens, such as the right to vote. He was largely silent about violence perpetrated by white supremacists during Reconstruction
- Lee did object to the idea of raising Confederate monuments. It would be wiser “not to keep open the sores of war but to follow the examples of those nations who endeavored to obliterate the marks of civil strife.”

9.) **Robert E. Lee’s Opinion Regarding Slavery**

<https://www.civilwarhome.com/leepierce.htm>

10) **Commission Recommends Keeping Lee in Washington & Lee University Name**

<http://www.wvtf.org/post/commission-recommends-keeping-lee-washington-lee-university-name?fbclid=IwAR2AYGIkSfcjpiif-kEXIGnyNt2TEqJ9DQihGcVVe0BAgr8w&xBnfDjldGY>

- “One big recommendation is to increase diversity on campus. According to the university, there are about 1,800 undergraduate students. Of those, 41 are black.”

11) **The Myth of the Kindly General Lee**

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/06/the-myth-of-the-kindly-general-lee/529038/>

12) **George Washington’s Quotes on Liberty (Mount Vernon.org)**

<https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/quotes/topic/liberty>

Quote I would add to the hallways:

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, **Liberty** and the pursuit of Happiness.*

Another quote I would add to the hallways:

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
 With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
 Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
 A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
 Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
 Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
 The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
 “Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she
 With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,
 Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
 The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
 Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
 I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”



