



Patrick France, '25

## ***The Spectator* Presents: Matt Walsh, What is a Woman?**

*A prominent voice in the young conservative movement*

The *W&L Spectator* and College Republicans are proud to present Matt Walsh in Lee Chapel at 7:30 pm on March 30, 2023.

Matt is one of the most visible and prominent voices in the young conservative movement. He is currently a lead columnist for *The Daily Wire* and is close colleagues with avant-garde conservative pundits Ben Shapiro and Michael Knowles. With a massive social media following, Matt is an active voice and a frequent target of media attention. He is the author of four books and the host of the hit podcast, *The Matt Walsh Show*. He has also appeared on numerous radio programs, television shows such as *Tucker Carlson Tonight*, and other prominent podcasts, including *The Joe Rogan Experience*.

He recently made waves with his hit 2022 film

entitled *What is a Woman?*, viewable exclusively on *The Daily Wire*. Through an "often comical, yet deeply disturbing journey," according to the film's synopsis, Walsh examines the core logic and questions that contemporary society has prompted about gender ideology.

The *Spectator* is appreciative of the university's commitment to free speech. We would like to thank our donors, The Generals Redoubt, and Young America's Foundation for making this event possible.

We hope that you will join us for this event.

Tickets can be scanned on the back page, and the event livestream will be available on YAF's website. You can expect thorough coverage of Matt Walsh's remarks in our next edition.



Kamron M. Spivey, '24

## **Over 600 W&L students, faculty, and alumni protest upcoming Matt Walsh event**

*Resistance includes a petition, counter-events, the destruction of flyers, and a death threat*

A petition composed by law students to prevent prominent conservative author and talk-show host Matt Walsh from speaking on campus on March 30, 2023, has circulated throughout Washington and Lee University this week; 605 students, faculty, and alumni had signed it at the time this article was published.

No Washington and Lee University administrator has signed the petition, and the event is expected to continue as planned.

[Update: President William Dudley released a statement regarding the petition on March 28, 2023. In it, he upheld the university's commitment to freedom of expression, as well as their commitment to diversity.]

Sources to *The Spectator* have confirmed that multiple professors from different departments have asked their students to sign the petition both during and outside of class.

Of the over 80 faculty signers, examples include Bill Hamilton – Chair of the Biology Department – and Brenna Womer, Visiting Assistant Professor of Creating Writing.

[Update: Another biology professor, Gregg Whitworth, wrote the following statement, which has since been removed from the petition: claiming to be "the guy who will be standing up to ask Matt a few questions if he comes to our campus. It might be disruptive."]

Womer, the first faculty member to sign the petition, sent an email to 49 colleagues on March 21, stating, "as I understand each of you to be either members or allies of our LGBTQIA2+ students, I hope to see each one of you add your names to this petition."

"Matt Walsh," Womer continued, "is an extremely dangerous person who represents a very real threat of physical violence against trans and nonbinary people specifically, but also to all women, queer people, and people of color. I hope to see your names on this petition because the students need to see their professors and staff across departments and facilities vocalizing our support of them as members and allies of the vulnerable communities on campus."

She then copied the petition into her email and concluded, "please don't share this with anyone

you don't trust will respect the integrity of the document."

"We ask," the public petition says, "that the University prevent Matt Walsh from speaking on our campus and that the University live out its Statement of Commitment to Diversity by taking action to protect its minority students from future harmful events."

The Statement of Commitment to Diversity – adopted by the Board of Trustees in 2002 and revised in 2018 – recognizes the "many experiences, cultures, points of view, interests, and identities" of students, faculty, and staff.

Despite this policy, the petitioners state, "W&L continues to approve speaker events that provide one-sided platforms for harmful ideologies." The petition then cites several grievances about Matt Walsh, such as how he "openly refers to himself as the 'Transphobe of the Year' in his Twitter bio."

This title was first attributed to Walsh by critics in 2022.

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Kamron M. Spivey, '24

## Dudley responds to Matt Walsh petition

*President upholds university commitments to freedom of expression and diversity*



William Dudley, president of Washington and Lee University, responded on Tuesday to recent efforts to keep Matt Walsh from coming to campus on Thursday, March 30, 2023.

As of March 28, a law-school petition asking “that the university prevent Matt Walsh from speaking on our campus” had 622 student, faculty, staff, and alumni signatures. No members of the university administration have signed it.

In a statement sent to protest leaders and posted online, Dudley wrote “to reiterate both the university’s position on speakers and my steadfast support of our LGBTQ+ community.”

He invoked the university’s Statement of Commitment to Diversity, which he said, “is manifest in our programming that explores, promotes, and celebrates the increasingly diverse backgrounds of our students, faculty and staff.”

He also invoked the university’s “commitment to freedom of expression,” noting that “we permit all recognized student organizations to invite speakers of their choosing to campus.” The university, he continued, “does not approve or reject events based on content, and the university does not endorse the views of any invited speaker.”

“[A]s an academic institution,” he said, “our purpose is to help our students learn to examine, evaluate, and express points of view, so that they may become lifelong learners, responsible leaders, and engaged citizens.”

After noting several ways one may voice opposition – such as petitions and alternative programming – he clarified that protesting may “not jeopardize the safety of the

community, damage property, or prohibit speakers from delivering remarks and engaging with those who choose to attend.”

“The College Republicans’ planned event this week lays bare deep ideological divides.” Dudley continued, “I hope our community will use this moment as an occasion to reflect upon what it means to freely exchange, discuss, and debate ideas, and upon the kinds of events and speakers that are most conducive to stimulating thoughtful, intellectual conversations.”

According to *The Ring-tum Phi*, “Dudley donated \$1,000 to a fundraiser organized by OutLaw, the affinity group for queer law students.”

*The Phi* also reports that protest leaders have asked the university to “match a \$20,000 donation,” whose proceeds will go directly to the Shenandoah LGBTQ Center.

Donations can be made here to *The Spectator’s* Jefferson Davis Futch III Speaker Forum, which has helped sponsor Walsh’s visit. Future speakers and events will be determined following community feedback for Thursday’s event.

Kamron M. Spivey, '24

## Administration reserves space intended for Walsh overflow

*Despite requesting Stackhouse Theater on March 13, university schedules fraternity meeting*

Plans to reserve Stackhouse Theater as an overflow for Matt Walsh’s upcoming talk on March 30, 2023, have been curbed by an alternative event booked by Student Affairs.

Stackhouse Theater seats 185 and is frequently used to host speakers and lecturers. It is one of the largest indoor venues on campus, compared with the 525-person capacity of Lee Chapel, National Historic Landmark.

Washington and Lee University College Republicans attempted to reserve Stackhouse – also known as Elrod Commons 24 – on March 13. They were promptly sent an automatic confirmation email by the university scheduling system, 25Live.

Following a student request, the reservation

must be confirmed by a space “approver.” For Stackhouse Theater, approvers include four Student Affairs personnel: Bethany Coffey, Lynn Fitch, Mariel Potter, or Wendi Rice.

According to an email sent by Lynn Fitch on March 28, that “request to use Stackhouse was never approved.”

The university did not give a notice or reason for that decision.

On March 21, Fitch reserved Stackhouse from 6 to 9 PM, March 30, for a “Student Affairs Meeting with Fraternities.” She estimated a 40-person headcount.

Fitch did not respond to requests to move the fraternity meeting to a smaller space.

The livestream overflow will now be set up in Science Overflow 214, which seats up to 98 people.

The “approver” for that space, Tanya Bennett of the Physics and Engineering Department, confirmed that reservation within 3 minutes of the student request on March 28.

Walsh’s visit has faced other obstacles, such as Eventbrite deleting the event for reasons they say violated the “Community Guidelines” and “policy on Hateful, Dangerous, or Violent Content and Events.”

Eventbrite did not respond to *The Spectator’s* request for further clarification about the decision.

## Over 600 W&L members protest Matt Walsh (continued)

Other grievances include Walsh's "repeated accusations that Boston's Children Hospital was 'mutilating' children who seek gender-affirming medical care," and that "he repeatedly and intentionally misgenders well-known trans TikTok creator Dylan Mulvaney."

"These are not the only harmful views welcomed onto our campus this semester," the petition declares, alluding to Rodney Cook's January 12, 2023 speech about the reconciliatory aims of President Robert E. Lee and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. "This event insulted the sacrifices of the civil rights movement and reduced the history of white supremacy," the petition continues, "to 'flimsy both-sideism' that alienated Black students, faculty, and staff."

Cook's event was met with a protest and walkout of around 150 students, despite clarifying that his "lecture was about peace and reconciliation, not focused on Lee, the Lost Cause, or whitewashing."

Similar protests are planned for Walsh's speech next week, though a walkout seems unlikely.

According to a March 22 email sent by the Executive Board of OUTLaw, an LGBT+ law school student organization, a "counter program" will begin with a "brief protest" at roughly 6:55 PM on March 30. The protest will be followed by a fundraiser and movie night at the law school.

"[W]e will launch our own fundraising campaign with proceeds going to a local organization serving the health needs of transgender individuals," OUTLaw said. They hope to raise \$20,000, which they say "may or may not be" Matt Walsh's speaking fee.

"We know that Matt Walsh is a professional inciter. He has online support from people who harass those who disagree with him, and he uses counterprotests as a way to market himself further. We do not plan to go to the event and feed this more," the email said.

Further plans are being withheld until Monday, March 27, "for safety" reasons. OUTLaw listed several other safety precautions in anticipation of their protest, having spoken with school administrators and campus security earlier this week.

They asked protestors to "remain professional," to "not block the University Chapel," and to "be careful of the crowd that gathers for Matt Walsh. He does have private security coming, so please be wary," the email said.

"Public safety will be briefed and present at the protest for our safety[.]" they continued.

Security was recently increased for Walsh's event due to the rising opposition to the event, some of it threatening.

Blake Ramsey, '23, made waves on conservative platforms beginning on March 15, after posting on Instagram a famous 1945 image of fascist leader Benito Mussolini's public hanging, with the caption "Because Matt Walsh is now apparently speaking at this school, I thought I would post an important reminder of what happens to fascists."

Ramsey, the former vice president of College Democrats, was an outspoken critic of the university's name in 2021 and has earned a reputation around campus for his passionate left-leaning beliefs.



Interim Director of Public Safety, Mac Testerman, initially determined that the university would provide four or five Public Safety officers for the event.

However, following news of Ramsey's post, the planned protest, and Testerman's unannounced departure from the university — the second director to leave in recent months — Lieutenant Chellie Bergos determined that the number of Public Safety officers would be increased to ten.

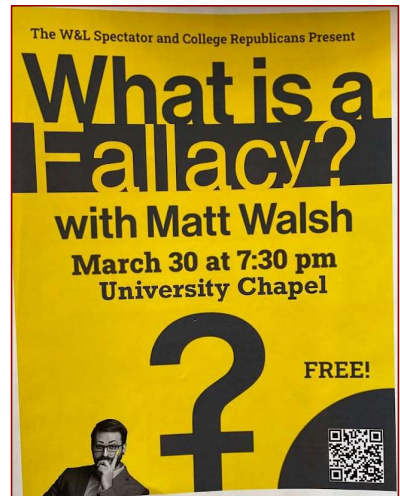
This number is in addition to the Lexington Police Officers and private security who will also oversee the event.

Other forms of resistance to Walsh include the destruction and satirization of the event and the persons associated with it.

Over 100 flyers reading "What is a Woman?" — the title of Walsh's 2022 documentary and the subject of his national College Campus Tour — have been torn down or ripped up since The Spectator announced his visit to Lexington on March 14.

This type of behavior is by no means an unprecedented reaction against conservative events or messages, but has been particularly rife this time around.

So too have some opponents made a mockery of the event, tearing down or covering up the flyers with a spoof version that reads "What is a Fallacy?" and features Walsh in makeup.



Many of those mock flyers were accompanied by a page-long statement saying that inviting Walsh "is a dangerous decision that clearly places ignorant bigotry above thoughtful discourse."

"There is no sufficient way to clearly define what makes someone a woman," the statement continues.

Other groups, like the student-run leftist satire, *The Radish*, mocked Matt Walsh, Mike Pence, and *The Spectator* editor-in-chief, comparing them to Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan.

The Walsh event faced additional opposition off campus on March 22, when Eventbrite — the ticketing service used for his upcoming talk — deleted the event for violating the "Community Guidelines" and "policy on Hateful, Dangerous, or Violent Content and Events."

Eventbrite did not respond to The Spectator's request for further clarification about the decision.

Ticketing has since moved to TicketSpice; all ticket holders have been alerted that the change in platform has not affected their reservation.

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The Editorial Staff

## “Violence” is not the problem with Walsh’s speech, “Certainty” is

*A critique of the ideological monoculture and stubbornness plaguing campuses nationally*



Left: the Stanford Law School protest of Judge Duncan; Right: the W&L Law School protest of Rodney Cook (credit Bri Hatch); Center: Matt Walsh (credit YAF)

The simple truth is that Matt Walsh’s visit to campus on March 30, 2023, poses no threat to anyone involved.

Unlike the mandatory Orientation Week (O-Week) training that forces First-Year students to entertain the far-left perspectives of speakers like Ibram X. Kendi and participate in guided discussions of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) that make many students feel uncomfortable, nobody is being forced into the chapel to hear Mr. Walsh speak.

But just as those O-Week events can prompt useful reflection among conservative students and peers, so too might Walsh challenge some of the beliefs of progressive students. Furthermore, one might argue that Walsh’s Q&A session enables even more dialogue than O-Week, which is notorious for allotting scant opportunity for incoming students to challenge the facilitator.

After all, it was never the intention of *The Spectator* and College Republicans to congregate a mass of 500 homogenous-thinking students in the historic pews of Lee Chapel, National Historic Landmark. Not even all the leaders of those two conservative groups agree with Walsh’s position and demeanor, yet they recognize the value that his visit to campus might have in stimulating intellectual debate and political inquiry, both before, during, and after March 30.

This will not be achieved, however, if members of the W&L community continue reaffirming their absolute intolerance to conservative events and messages that do not adhere to the current status quo.

The opposition to Walsh’s speech — which was reported upon here — obeys an obstructive cycle that has only served to enhance partisanship and ignorance.

One need look no further than the recent lecture by Rodney Mims Cook, Jr.

Cook is a genuinely nice guy, a peacemaker trying to live up to his father’s esteemed legacy. He has tried to quell the intense vitriol that has risen between dissident alumni and the university administration over the last few years. If there is anyone suited for that goal, it’s Cook.

But before Cook had the chance to come to campus with a striking sculpture of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and before he had the honor to be introduced as a dear friend of their family by Alveda King, W&L students began criticizing Cook as a racist, white supremacist. The subsequent protest speeches and *Ring-tum Phi* coverage of the event did nothing to recast the speaker in a more accurate light.

Judging by his feature in the latest petition against a campus speaker (Matt Walsh), those same students gained nothing from Cook’s reconciliatory address. Few students who disagreed with Cook even stayed to hear him out, rather entwining themselves deeper in what one columnist has called the “Certainty Trap.”

Ilana Redstone, a professor of sociology at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, defined this counterproductive phenomenon as “a resolute unwillingness to recognize the possibility that we might not be right in our beliefs and claims.” She recently applied it to the debacle at Stanford Law School when student hecklers were joined by the Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in denouncing the conservative message of Judge Stuart Kyle Duncan.

Stanford’s example — which has fortunately (and perhaps surprisingly) resulted in a productive recommitment to their guarantee of free speech — began with a trend not dissimilar from Washington and Lee. And while the protestors’ behavior may slightly differ between the two schools, their obstructive ideology and inhibition to campus intellectualism is the same.

The Certainty Trap can snare conservatives and liberals alike, and is not fixed to any particular environment. In recent years, however, it has been especially pertinent to college campuses. This is a major problem.

Colleges are already “moving toward becoming an ideological monoculture,” says Washington Post columnist Ramesh Ponnuru. College professors are at least 5-to-1 left-leaning nationally, which for obvious reasons “undermines higher education.” Conservative arguments are ignored (except for the seldom strawman “counter” argument); liberal students do not get challenged or trained to adequately defend their beliefs; and conservative students feel pressured to keep to themselves and refrain from engaging in academic dialogue. Over time, the partisan gap widens and both sides find themselves less and less motivated to intellectually engage with each other. Sometimes, their interactions become polemic, hateful, and *ad hominem*.

According to Redstone, the Certainty Trap “is what gives us the satisfying sense of righteousness we need to judge harshly, condemn and dismiss people with whom we disagree.”

The relationship between the Certainty Trap and campus ideological monoculture is, therefore, a reciprocal one: monoculture feeds *Certainty*; and *Certainty* feeds monoculture.

Let’s look at some examples.

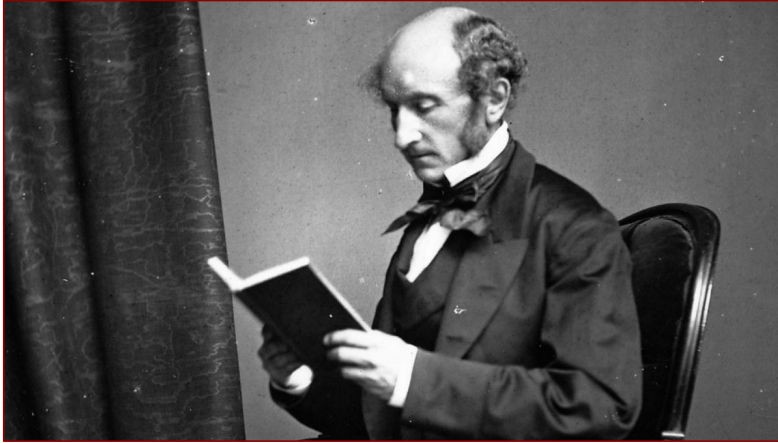
Protestors denounced Rodney Cook’s lecture because they were certain of the — to quote a sign held up by the protestors — “White Supremacy Meeting Straight Ahead.”

As Cook himself responded, “I wonder if that young man ever had a cross burned in his yard to write such a thing against me.” The  
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Evan Cecchini, '25

## On What is a Woman? and campus speech

A measured response to "The conservative 'war' against trans people"



(Picture: John Stuart Mill)

On March 28, *The Ring-tum Phi* published an opinion piece by Blake Ramsey titled "The conservative 'war' against trans people," written in response to *The Spectator* bringing political commentator Matt Walsh to speak on campus. In the article, he details two goals, to (1) "attempt to tackle the anti-trans rhetoric being pushed by Conservatives," and (2) "push forward a plan to repel these attacks."

To achieve his first goal, the bulk of Ramsey's argument hinges on one assumption: transgender people have existed for millennia, and they have been a normal facet of communities around the globe. He cites one-off examples such as the hijras in India and the Roman Emperor Elagabalus. Yes, these are indeed historic examples of transgenders. However, as every other aspect of society has evolved over time, so has the concept of transgenderism.

What is happening in the United States today is not comparable to the hijras, nor is it comparable to any other historical precedent. What we are experiencing in real-time is the exploitation of young, undeveloped children as the first profitable minority group.

While watching Matt Walsh's documentary *What is a Woman?* in preparation for his arrival on campus, there was one story that stuck with me the most. Scott Newgent is a 50-year-old transgender man who transitioned at the age of 42 and is the parent of three children.

Newgent details the seven surgeries he has had to complete his transition. He lists the several health complications that followed, including a heart attack, 17 rounds of antibiotics, a medevac ride, and countless emergency room trips. From ample knowledge and experience, he states that medically transitioning is a dangerous and experimental process. Despite doctors knowing this, they still administer these surgeries (which conveniently have a \$70,000 price tag) and puberty blockers that are permanently irreversible.

Neither these experimental procedures — with a 2-in-3 chance of eventually killing the patient from complications — nor their profit incentive, existed in Ancient Rome or any period previous to the present day.

At age seven, there was no reason for me to believe Santa wasn't real. At age 13, I was still profoundly naive and stupid. The human brain does not complete development until 25. Why should children at these young ages that cannot properly consent be able to independently make decisions with permanent consequences under the direction of malicious, money-hungry doctors?

To be clear, I do not condone violence or harassment of any minority group for their identity. Doing so would be against everything I stand for. But, as Scott Newgent states in his interview, he is not transphobic for wanting to educate the public on the very real dangers of modern transitioning. Yet, even as a transgender and a parent himself, speaking up on the common experiences that he and many others — including minors — had to endure are either ignored or labeled as "anti-trans."



Ramsey's plan to repel "anti-trans" rhetoric is remarkably simple: to ban the opinions he disagrees with. This seems to be a fairly popular view among students, faculty, and

alumni, with the petition banning Walsh's appearance at W&L featuring over 600 signatures. This approach is, frankly, dangerous.

In John Stuart Mill's 1859 essay *On Liberty*, he supports the idea that when individuals are free to express their thoughts and ideas, even those that are considered unpopular or controversial, it leads to a more productive society. Mill believes that no single person or group has a monopoly on truth and that the best way to arrive at the truth is to engage in open debate. He saw the free exchange of ideas as essential to a democratic society, where everyone is free to make decisions based on a range of perspectives and viewpoints.

Mill was not the only scholar to hold this rationale. In his inaugural address, President Thomas Jefferson stated, "error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat." Today, many call this concept the marketplace of ideas.

If Ramsey and other opponents of a Matt Walsh talk truly felt as if his rhetoric was "illogical," full of "hypocrisy, [and] lies," why prevent him from speaking? If his speech was evidently full of fallacies and falsehoods, then the marketplace of ideas, a tried-and-true concept, would phase out his views in due time and render them irrelevant. Yet, any resemblance of transparent public discourse is being replaced with attempts to suppress it.

The Chicago Principles were introduced and adopted by the University of Chicago in 2014 as a response to the many unjust censorship attempts of speakers that are viewed as controversial on college campuses. As of 2023, 98 U.S. colleges and universities, including Washington & Lee, have adopted or endorsed the Chicago Principles.

Because these institutions have expressed a commitment to freedom of expression, does that provide sufficient evidence for them to be labeled as conservative bigots? Would accepting that free, robust, and unfettered debate that a speaker, such as Matt Walsh, would bring to campus definitively classify Princeton and American as fascist institutions? Obviously not. American University has even been ranked as the most left-wing college in the United States for years.

And that's where the argument for banning "controversial" speakers on campuses tends to lose steam. The same people that sign a petition to ban Walsh from speaking at W&L believe that "we cannot allow [conservatives] to dominate public spaces." Would that not conveniently pave the way for their own agenda to dominate those same spaces?

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## “Violence” is not the problem with Walsh’s speech (continued)

KKK burned a cross in Cook’s Atlanta yard when he was 6 for his father’s support of civil rights.

Likewise, despite many claims – including by *The Phi* – that Cook propagated the Lost Cause, Cook reiterated that “There was no Lost Cause rhetoric of any sort.”

So who was wrong? Maybe Cook; maybe the lecture really was a rally for white supremacists to applaud “The Marble Man.” Or, maybe the protestors were wrong.

After all, many W&L students have a tendency to boldly pronounce that any event referencing Lee is one of white supremacy. In January 2022, a handful of students in a GroupMe chat removed any student who merely promoted or defended a lecture on Lee’s presidency. The lecture was sponsored by Students for Historical Preservation (SHIP) and delivered by respected community leader and professor, David Cox. In addition to vulgar *ad hominem* attacks, one individual even warned students that an upcoming SHP event about Dr. King was a “pro-confederacy” ploy: a baseless and ignorant accusation to say the least.

As was also the case with the visit by conservative radio host Larry Elder last year and the effort to “Retain the Name” of Washington and Lee University in 2021, it has become the standard for protestors to fall into the *Certainty* Trap. Rather than respectfully acknowledge or hear out an opposing view, some students (and faculty) take immature measures to inhibit the message: tearing down flyers, drawing false equivalencies to Nazis and the Klan, and in Stanford’s case, heckling the speaker.

The more civilized protestors – like those who walked out during Cook’s speech and who are organizing the Walsh counter-event – act in accordance with university guidelines, but are still just as stubborn. What might one hope to achieve by signing a petition to bar Matt Walsh from speaking on campus?

Certainly, not any civil or intellectual discourse.

The petition expresses a common rebuttal to this point. “Matt Walsh,” the petition says, “does not create spaces for productive, academic discourse, but rather, he insists that only his transphobic viewpoint be heard.”

Disregarding the fact that his talk features a Q&A segment, is it reasonable to assume that there would be any less opposition to the event if *The Spectator* had brought another speaker to discuss modern gender ideology? Would certain students be less offended if transgender ideology were questioned in the classroom or at lunch? Would a conversation between a conservative and a progressive about gender elicit any less criticism of the conservative?

As the aforementioned examples show, students fall into the *Certainty* Trap even when the event is not political – like historic lectures and reconciliatory talks – because there is the false *Certainty* that those events will espouse hateful beliefs. It naturally follows that any explicitly conservative position will fare no better in the eyes of the ideological monoculture.

The main error of this *Certainty* lies in an unwillingness to ask, as Redstone puts it, if disagreement is truly “rooted in ‘oppression’ or a denial of one’s ‘humanity and right to exist.’” It is quite possible that a conservative stance – be it gender, Lee’s legacy, or tax policy – is not rooted in a fundamental desire to oppress particular minority groups

Yet this is the assumption made about Walsh, *The Spectator*, and College Republicans.

Many protestors assumed that *The Spectator* invited Walsh to speak on March 30 because it was a day before the International Transgender Day of Visibility. If anyone had asked us, we would have politely reassured them that the date was purely coincidental, a mere scheduling decision made in early

February that best reflected student and speaker availability. Truthfully, we had no idea that March 31 held any significance to the transgender community.

Other protestors passed rumors that *The Spectator* had implemented some policy against wearing pride-themed clothing to the event. This was a baseless assumption that served only to further slur those involved.

Repeatedly, protestors have expressed the danger associated with Walsh’s talk, both ideologically and physically.

Professor Brenna Womer claimed that “Matt Walsh is an extremely dangerous person who represents a very real threat of physical violence against trans and nonbinary people specifically, but also to all women, queer people, and people of color.”

The counter-event planning email warned to “be careful of the crowd” and Walsh’s private security detail. They listed “protecting our safety” as their primary objective, and omitted further details “for [their own] safety.”

The petition, likewise, uses the word “harmful” at least once in every paragraph, with frequent sprinklings of “violence” and “threats.”

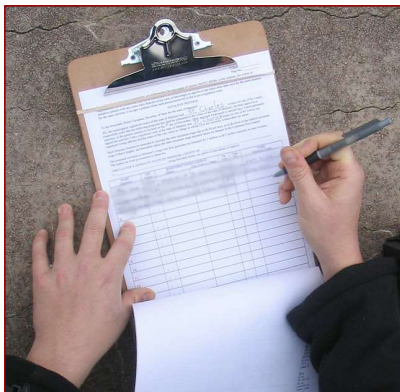
If the goal is to prevent someone from being oppressive and harmful, vilifying them will not work. Rarely do people form ideologies out of pure maleficence, but rather from well-intentioned beliefs and principles. Conservatives are not the bad guys, nor are liberals. But we are all ignorant if we refuse to occupy alternative beliefs and self-examine our own.

If you think there is a better setting and speaker to achieve this, *The Spectator* welcomes your feedback for future events.



Anonymous Student

## Letter to the Editor about Matt Walsh



Truthfully, I knew nothing about this guy until students started posting about him on social media and talking about him in class. I saw the petition last week and was asked to sign it. Surprisingly, my professor reminded our class about it and made a grandiose statement about human rights (trans rights) being fundamental to our society.

Sure, I don’t disagree. And after looking into Walsh and reading some stuff about him, he seems utterly toxic. He says mean things, draws up fallacy arguments, and insults people right in front of him. This is not the guy I want to share a meal with or have come to a party. At the same time, however, he

seems to capture the views of a lot of folks both on campus and nationally. I feel like we owe it to ourselves to at least hear him out. If people find him so repugnant, won’t that keep those students from ever wanting to reinvite him?

I take serious issues with professors endorsing a petition to keep a speaker from coming to campus. It should not matter what those intellectuals think. It should be up solely to the students, and it sounds like the students have decided. Only a minority of the student body signed that petition, so let’s hear what he has to say. Moving forward, I would love to see an opposite thinking speaker visit.

Rodney Mims Cook, Jr., '78

## To the editors of *The Phi*,

*A response to their coverage of my January speech*

*[The following column was written in response to a news article published by The Ring-tum Phi on January 23, 2023. The Spectator covered the same event on January 18 and agreed to publish Mr. Cook's response to The Phi after their editors informed him that his letter might only be published online, if at all. The Spectator is committed to free speech and civil discourse, for both students and alumni.]*

There are a few misunderstandings as well as journalistic omissions from *The Ring-tum Phi*'s recent article that are key to understanding the true narrative of my lecture in the chapel.

I was asked to speak about a spiritual, religious epiphany that was experienced by my father, W&L '48, after his 3 year tour of duty in the Pacific War. His ship, the most decorated of its type, was hit by a kamikaze strike which killed his mates before his eyes. He was next preparing for the invasion of Japan, in which he was certain he would die.

After he returned to Lexington, the intense heat in the W&L library reminded him too much of the South Pacific. He couldn't study there, so Dean Gilliam allowed him to study independently in Lee Chapel, a cooler building. Dad ultimately graduated valedictorian, Summa cum laude, ODK, with various other honors. Dean Gilliam expected this and so allowed him that special place of honor to study.

My father faced the Recumbent Lee statue each evening and was moved to read every book published on Lee. He admired Lee for rebuilding Virginia, for denouncing guerrilla warfare – which my father had personally experienced on Japanese islands – and for establishing a beloved community of honor, honesty, and gentlemanly behavior in Lexington. These actions blessed my father with an epiphany that the unfinished work of the Civil War was Civil Rights, that it had to come out of the South, and that it had to center in Atlanta, the city of peace. His study of Lee's example led him to befriend and help Dr. Martin Luther King.

*The Phi*'s article stated, "the protest communicated fierce student opposition to Lost Cause rhetoric on Washington and Lee's campus."

There was no Lost Cause rhetoric of any sort.

The story said when asked for thoughts on the protest by an audience member, I "took a moment to dig at the students," saying that the speech "might have been too long for them, anyway." The context was not fully reported. I had just said my speech was too long. The dig was against myself, not the students.

Upon entering the chapel, the students faced a heroic scaled statue of Dr. King, centered under the arch and the Recumbent Statue of President Lee. It was shocking, breathtaking, beautiful and the right thing to do. It is an image that only W&L can convey to the world, but *The Phi* did not show the beauty and drama of the whole statue ensemble with that of Lee. Why? This original statue maquette I brought to the chapel made the mold for the bronze, which will be unveiled on the 55th anniversary of Dr. King's assassination in The Honorable Rodney Cook Sr. Peace Park. *The Phi* falsely reported that the statue is already there. It is not; Washington and Lee saw it first. Following the MLK statue unveiling in April, a peace walk of thousands will start at the Center for Civil and Human Rights and proceed to the park, where a report on our Billion Prayer Revival will be delivered.

Next, Zach Zimmerman, 23L, delivered my credentials and introduced my friend Alveda King of the Martin Luther King Center. Her video welcomed everybody to the chapel, mentioned our 4 generation family friendship, how helpful my father was to her grandfather and uncle in securing Civil Rights in America, and that his epiphany in that very chapel led him to her family to help them do that. Alveda shared that I had traveled with her cousin and my friend, Bernice King, when she spoke at W&L five years ago on the 50th anniversary of her

father's assassination. She mentioned how hard it was for a white family to help them, and that the KKK burned a cross on our lawn when I was 6. (What Alveda did not share was that I did not speak for a year after

## Conservative 'war' (continued)

That's because it was never about preventing violence or the "eradication of trans people." This is a lackluster attempt to control the political narrative on campus by pressuring students and the administration to reject any dialogue that suggests any narrative other than the left-wing status quo.

How can one possibly claim to adhere to an ideology that emphasizes tolerance and acceptance when calling for the hanging of a campus speaker? How does one write an article about transgender rights when they blatantly reject the basic human right to free speech, to begin with? It is ironic that the justification of death threats in a valiant crusade against fascism is shortly followed by the tireless attempt to ban dissenting political discussion, a fundamental principle of fascism.

Contrary to what pessimists on both sides of the political spectrum will tell you, the fall of Western democracy will not be attributed to the so-called "eradicat[ion] of transgenderism," or because people want to be transgender to begin with. The history books will blame the continued ostracism of free-thinking individuals and the campaign to abolish the right to freedom of expression in academia.

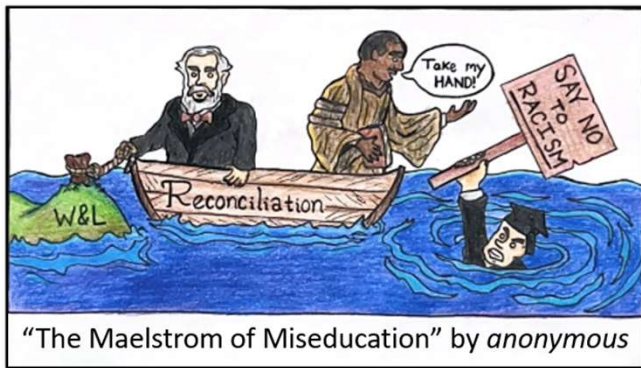
that horrific incident.) *The Phi* did not mention this important introduction.

A few minutes before the event began, I heard that a demonstration was assembling outside. I walked to the chapel terrace and saw a young man holding a large sign, "White Supremacy Meeting Straight Ahead."

I wonder if that young man ever had a cross burned in his yard to write such a thing against me.

A student demonstrator remarked to *The Phi*, "I hope they walked away feeling like maybe what's being said here is not accurate or a promotion of peace. But more importantly, I hope that students of color on this campus felt supported and felt like their voices were heard by participating in this protest."

The student demonstrators did not do their homework. The lecture was about peace and reconciliation, not focused on Lee, the Lost Cause or whitewashing. It was focused on a spirit-filled epiphany in a Christian chapel, it was focused on Dad's friend Martin Luther King, Jr., his beloved community, and the power of love to compel us to start talking and listening to one another again. I hope that students of color on this campus, rather than feel supported by the demonstrators, realize that their protesting peers chose not to listen, turned their backs on Martin Luther King, Jr and one of his living family members fighting for his legacy, and walked out.



"The Maelstrom of Miseducation" by anonymous

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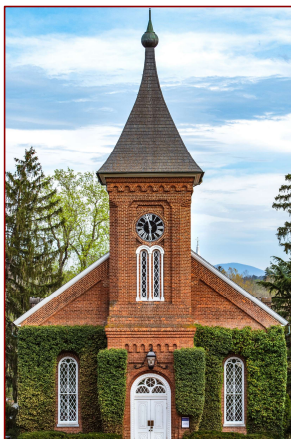
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~Robert E. Lee, President  
Washington College  
August 4, 1866



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The W&L Spectator and College Republicans Present

# What is a Woman?

with Matt Walsh  
March 30 at 7:30 pm  
Lee Chapel



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