

Powhatan Co. 24 Aug. '65

Gentlemen

I have delayed for some days, replying to your letter of the 5 inst: informing me of my election by the Board of Trustees, to the Presidency of Washington College, from a desire to give the subject due consideration. Fully impressed with the responsibilities of the office, I have feared that I should be unable to discharge its duties, to the satisfaction of the Trustees, or to the benefit of the Country. The proper education of youth requires not only great ability, but I fear more strength than I now possess, for I do not feel able to undergo the labour of conducting classes in regular courses of instruction. I could not therefore undertake more than the general administration & supervision of the Institution. There is another subject which has caused me serious affliction, & is I think worthy of the consideration of the Board. Being excluded in the terms of amnesty in the Proclamation of the President of the U.S. of the 29 May last, & an object of censure to a portion of the Country, I have thought it probable that my occupation of the position of President, might draw upon the College a feeling of hostility; & I should therefore cause injury to an Institution, which it would be my highest desire to advance. I think it the duty of every citizen in the present condition of the Country, to do all in his power to aid in the restoration of peace & harmony, & in no way to oppose the policy of the State or Genl. Governments, directed to that object. It is particularly incumbent on those charged with the instruction of the young, to set them an example of submission to authority, & I could not consent to be the cause of animadversion upon the College.

Should you however take a different view, & think that my services in the position tendered me by the Board will be advantageous to the College & Country, I will yield to your judgment & accept it. Otherwise I must most respectfully decline the offer.

Begging you to express to the trustees of the College my heartfelt gratitude for the honour conferred upon me, & requesting you to accept my cordial thanks for the kind manner in which you have communicated its decision,

I am Gentn with great respect

Your most obl. servant

R. E. Lee