HOYA PARANOIA:
HOW GEORGETOWN FOUND ITS SWAGGER
DURING THE REAGAN YEARS

by

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FIGURE 1: The cover of the November 26, 1984 edition of Sports Illustrated. Coach John Thompson, Patrick Ewing, and the rest of the Georgetown basketball team won the 1984 NCAA championship the previous spring on April 2nd. (Source: Sports Illustrated).
Introduction: November 12, 1984

“Patrick, you’re scaring me to death,” announced a voice from behind a camera in the White House Map Room.¹ The photographer Lane Stewart was preparing to snap the cover picture for the November 26, 1984 edition of Sports Illustrated (SI). According to SI publisher Robert Miller, the star player for the Georgetown University men’s basketball team Patrick Ewing glared menacingly during the test shoot. That day marked the second time Ewing and his coach, John Thompson Jr., visited President Ronald Reagan at the nation’s executive mansion. The first occasion came shortly after Coach Thompson and his players sliced off the nets, as is customary for national champions, at the Kingdome in Seattle, Washington on April 2, 1984, returning to the Georgetown campus with rings, trophies, and a lifetime of memories in hand. Reagan met with the Hoyas² on the Rose Garden lawn. He congratulated Coach Thompson for helping most of his players earn their diplomas.³ But the second meeting, which occurred six days after Reagan handily won his reelection bid, began with a more frigid reception.

The two men who arrived at the White House gate that November were hardly inconspicuous. Both were towering figures. Coach Thompson’s frame reached 6’10’’—slightly shorter than the seven foot tall Ewing. Moreover, they won a national championship and had received sports media attention for years. African Americans, especially younger generations, across the country held deep respect and admiration for the Georgetown program coached by Thompson. Nonetheless, Ewing carried one piece of identification: a gray jersey stitched in blue

² “Hoyas” is the name often assigned to basketball or other sports teams representing Georgetown. It derives from “Hoya Saxa,” which Georgetown fans chant at their sporting events. Although the exact origins of the phrase remain a matter of debate, many believe that “Hoya Saxa” is a combination of Greek and Latin words meaning “What Rocks.” See: William C. McFadden, S.J., “What the Hell is Hoya?” (Access to Father McFadden’s unpublished paper was provided by Special Collections Archive, Lauinger Library, Georgetown University, Washington, DC on April 28, 2009).
block letters with his name and a large “33”. But this was insufficient for security at the White House entrance; the guards refused to let the young man pass. Eventually one guard recognized the large center and along with his coach, Ewing was admitted for that afternoon’s appointment with Reagan.

Perhaps Ewing took the encounter at the front gate as a slap in the face, refusing to smile after security almost denied him entrance. Maybe he was just nervous. Regardless of the reason, Miller made a point to highlight Ewing’s terrifying presence—a description paralleling “Hoya Paranoia,” or the team’s intimidation, aggressiveness, and seclusion from the media, which sportswriters routinely stressed while covering Georgetown in the 1980s. The cover published by SI, though, featured the president flanked by Coach Thompson and a beaming Ewing (See fig. 1). The November 12, 1984 photo op with Reagan and Georgetown basketball marked a meeting between two powerful forces that crossed paths in more ways than one during the 1980s.

* * * *

Ronald Reagan’s two terms as President of the United States from 1980-1988 heralded a notable shift in the executive branch’s approach to social programs and services affecting African Americans. Reagan led a conservative backlash to the civil rights movement and social spending of the 1960s. Conservatives criticized the price tag of social programs and argued that they in fact perpetuated poverty, particularly among minorities. For instance, in justifying his hostility to welfare, Reagan drew upon the “welfare queen” stereotype which maintained that poor black mothers abused tax payers’ generosity. He furthermore gained the support of many

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white voters, some of whom formerly supported Democrats but gained the appellation “Reagan Democrats” for changing their presidential voting habits in the 1980s. After defeating the unpopular Democratic incumbent Jimmy Carter at the outset of the decade, Reagan signed a budget that significantly cut safety nets such as federally subsidized student loans and welfare programs like Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). As he had done throughout his political career as a conservative, Reagan further challenged the civil rights community’s agenda as president. For instance, he opposed a holiday to remember the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. as well as sanctions on South Africa where apartheid persisted. At the same time, he presided over the exacerbation of an urban crisis in which inner cities with significant black populations, like Washington, DC, saw growing rates of poverty, drug use, and crime. Reaganism and its conservative policies were thus seen as unsympathetic to the concerns of impoverished African Americans. And, as his presidency unfolded, Reagan would collide with Georgetown basketball, which became one of the most successful yet maligned forces of black defiance during the decade.

Several miles up Pennsylvania Avenue from the White House, the Hoyas emerged as a dominate college programs in the first half of the 1980s. In 1984 the Hoyas defeated the University of Houston by a score of 84-75 to win their university’s first National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) men’s basketball title. Moreover, from 1982-1985 Georgetown appeared in three NCAA final games; they also prevailed in the highly competitive Big East

8 Lou Cannon, President Reagan, 520.
conference, founded in 1979. College basketball rated among the fastest growing sports in the early 1980s. Expanded television coverage allowed millions of viewers to tune in to watch March Madness, the name for the yearly NCAA tournament. The Big East also developed into a preeminent conference with Georgetown as one of its most formidable representatives; and a desirable destination for sought-after players from the Northeast, who in earlier years often went to universities in the West and South.10

Coach Thompson and his recruitment of exceptional African American players like Ewing enabled Georgetown basketball’s development into a top college program. Thompson played on championship teams at virtually every level of basketball from amateur leagues to the professional ranks when Georgetown hired him as head coach in 1972. In 1966 Thompson retired from the National Basketball Association (NBA) and returned to his hometown of DC, where he worked with local youths and started coaching basketball. Beyond improving Georgetown’s team, officials at the university believed Thompson, in the wake of the race riots of 1968, had the ability to build stronger relations between their campus and black Washingtonians. From the outset of his career at Georgetown, he recruited talented African American players, many of whom grew up in the greater DC area of the Mid-Atlantic region. He further coached strong defensive basketball. Typical images captured Georgetown players swatting their opponents, banging for rebounds, and wrestling for control of the ball. Fists flew during several heated matchups. Detractors complained about Georgetown’s rough, unapologetic play. The conditions of the Reagan years often informed such criticism of the team.

The Georgetown basketball program experienced racism and clashed with the press during its ascension in the 1980s. At several games in 1983, fans directed derogatory chants and banners at the Hoyas, and in particular Ewing.\textsuperscript{11} The press also took its share of racially coded swipes. In 1982 a reporter compared Thompson to the Ugandan military dictator Idi Amin.\textsuperscript{12} The media was often at odds with the head coach, who denied many interview requests with his players. Certain sportswriters in fact labeled the 1980s the years of “Hoya Paranoia” to describe the limited access to Thompson’s program.\textsuperscript{13} The phrase also came to define what some saw as Georgetown’s overaggressive attitude. A journalist for SI named Curry Kirkpatrick likened the Hoyas to a gang of black thugs and their style of play to undisciplined basketball found in pickup games on city streets. Kirkpatrick’s depiction of Georgetown contrasted his praise of Chris Mullin, a white player for St. John’s in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{14} Other programs like Houston were predominately black and played tough basketball. Nevertheless, the media singled Georgetown and its coach out for scaring opponents. The Hoyas became a feared and detested team. The typecasting of Georgetown as thuggish and their experiences of racism fit into a decade in which Reagan and other conservatives invoked the “welfare queen” myth and opposed the agenda of black America.

Georgetown however also had its share of supporters. Younger African Americans, including those who participated in hip-hop, lionized Georgetown basketball, and at the same time, bemoaned Reagan and his policies. The Hoyas’ fans though stretched beyond a single race. The majority white middle- to upper-class Georgetown campus cheered for the team. The

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} Curry Kirkpatrick, “Hang On To Your Hats…and Heads;” Michael Madden, “Hoya Paranoia.”
\item \textsuperscript{14} Curry Kirkpatrick, “Hang On To Your Hats…and Heads;” Curry Kirkpatrick, “Just a Guy From Da Naybuhhood: St. John’s hoopaholic Chris Mullin may be the King of Queens; but he belongs (pale) body and soul to his beloved borough of Brooklyn,” Sports Illustrated, November 26, 1984.
\end{itemize}
university’s president from 1976-1989, the Reverend Timothy S. Healy, S.J., voiced support for the head coach as the ascendency of the basketball program coincided with administrators’ efforts to transform Georgetown into a nationally recognized institution. Still, young African Americans represented a visible demographic that backed Georgetown. Jackets, t-shirts, and hats featuring the Hoyas’ name and logo became popular apparel for those who embraced hip-hop, an urban cultural movement that rose out of minority communities in the late 1970s. Much like the Georgetown team, participants of the cultural force expressed defiance and swagger, and grew up in metropolitan areas wracked by worsening conditions. The culture’s adherents also came to deride the Reagan administration. For instance, a hip-hop artist named Carlton “Chuck D” Ridenhour called for the president’s impeachment in a song he wrote in the late 1980s. During the decade he furthermore wore a Hoyas jacket and even wanted to create a group called the “Georgetown Gangsters.” It is significant that the rapper simultaneously wore popular Hoya clothing and chastised President Regan for contributing to growing urban poverty. For “Chuck D” and other young African Americans, the Georgetown basketball team symbolized dissent from Reaganism.

This thesis seeks to assess the intersection between Ronald Reagan and Georgetown basketball over the heady course of the 1980s in order to draw larger conclusions about the condition of race relations during the decade. President Reagan and Coach Thompson were products of racial turmoil felt in the 1960s. Reagan became a leader of a conservative revolt against civil rights and social spending. Georgetown hired Thompson in the aftermath of racial

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17 Public Enemy, Rebel Without a Pause, Def Jam Records, 1988. As cited in Jeff Chang, Can’t Stop Won’t Stop, 261.
strife in 1968. The two figures met in the 1980s as they achieved national prominence. On several occasions the basketball team physically encountered Reagan. More often they crossed paths in subtler ways on America’s streets and at Georgetown’s main campus, where students, professors, and administrators debated the president’s policies. Reaganism also shaped perceptions, both negative and positive, of Thompson and his program. In other words, the conditions of the Reagan years made the Hoyas significant, especially to blacks. Ultimately when seized and gazed through, the lens which contains the collision between the Georgetown basketball team and Reagan, reveals an America that had yet to understand or solve ongoing problems with race.

** ** **

Much has already been written about Ronald Reagan, race relations during the 1980s, sports history, and Georgetown basketball; however, this thesis considers all these subjects together. Matthew Dallek provides a detailed account of Reagan’s rise as a conservative politician.19 Lou Cannon authored a thorough biography of Reagan in which he finds that while not racist, the president “never supported the use of federal power to provide blacks with the civil rights systematically denied to them.”20 Conservative historians rationalize Reagan’s challenges to civil rights and social programs used by African Americans.21 The president’s critics, on the other hand, find Reaganism racially divisive.22 Others downplay the significance of race while accounting for the negative situations faced by impoverished blacks during the

20 Lou Cannon, President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime, 519-520.
Despite differences between the contentions and approaches of these various works, the perception of Reagan as opposed to issues concerning black America fed the exacerbation of race relations during the 1980s. As scholars continue to debate racial politics of the Reagan years, they often ignore the significance of Coach Thompson and the Hoyas. For instance, a recent study of race from 1980-2000 lacks any mention of the Georgetown program. Arthur Ashe Jr. references Thompson in his influential book on the history of African American athletes between 1946 and 1988. Ashe nevertheless fails to recognize the widespread cultural influence of the coach in post-1960s America. Beyond passing mentions in books by Leonard Shapiro, a reporter for The Washington Post who penned a biography of Thompson in 1991; Nelson George, a journalist and filmmaker; and Dr. Todd Boyd, a scholar of race studies, few authors touch on the importance of the Hoyas during the Reagan years. This thesis therefore represents the first work to understand racial tensions during the Reagan administration in light of Coach Thompson and the Georgetown basketball team.

Beyond assessing secondary works, I researched periodicals, photographs, images, and conducted eight interviews with individuals with expert knowledge of questions posed. I primarily used The Hoya, one of several student newspapers at Georgetown, to collect information about basketball games and relevant opinions on campus during the 1980s. The Washington Post also published valuable articles about Georgetown basketball in its local sports coverage. Nearly all the photographs and images reprinted in this thesis were collected from the

23 Nicholas Lham, The Reagan Presidency and the Politics of Race; William Julius Wilson, The Truly Disadvantaged.
Special Collections Archive at Lauinger Library on Georgetown’s main campus. The Adelphi University Archives and Special Collections division in Garden City, New York supplied a copy of Carlton Ridenhour’s cartoon “Tales of the Skind.” The eight subjects interviewed for this thesis included: Councilmember Marion Barry, who served as Mayor of DC from 1979-1991 and recalled the significance of the Hoyas to Washington area residents; Dean Charles Deacon of Georgetown’s Department of Admissions, who chaired the selection committee that nominated Thompson for the head coaching position in 1972; Tim Lambour, who graduated from Georgetown in 1974 and played point guard during Thompson’s first season as head coach; Dean Patricia McWade of Georgetown’s Department of Financial Aid, who protested Reagan’s education policies in the 1980s; Dr. Daniel Porterfield, who graduated from Georgetown in 1983; Frank Rienzo, who served as a Georgetown Athletic Director from 1972-1999; Dr. Len Schoppa, who graduated from Georgetown in 1984 and wrote several articles for The Hoya about financial aid; and Starla Williams, who graduated from Georgetown in 1986 and chaired the campus chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) during her senior year. Along with periodical and photographic research, these eight interviews provided original insights into Georgetown basketball during the Reagan years.

The subsequent four chapters unfold in a rough chronological narrative from the early 1970s until the end of the 1980s. The first chapter outlines Thompson’s experiences growing up in DC and his career as a basketball player. This section further discusses Georgetown’s decision to hire Thompson four years after the riots of 1968 as concerns grew about racial divides on campus. Chapter 2 explains Reagan’s rise as a conservative politician and his appeal to “Reagan Democrats” in the 1980s. The chapter also details Reagan’s victory over Jimmy Carter and his effort a year later to rollback social spending on welfare and education programs
in the 1981 budget. Chapter 3 illustrates the Hoyas’ NCAA title-contending seasons between 1982 and 1985 when the program faced heavy criticism along with its success. This section seeks to understand how the negative perceptions and typecasting of the Georgetown basketball team fit into larger racial divides during the Reagan years. Chapter 4 adds to the discussion of Reaganism from Chapter 2 by explaining how the president’s anti-civil rights policies and the deterioration of inner cities like Washington, DC contributed to the significance of the Georgetown basketball program, particularly to young African Americans who identified with hip-hop. The final chapter further demonstrates moments when the Georgetown campus and the Hoyas reflected the state of race relations during the 1980s. The conclusion then demonstrates the importance of the limited impact that Coach Thompson and his players had on college basketball, Georgetown University, and popular American culture.
FIGURE 2: Georgetown students wave signs signaling their dissatisfaction with head basketball coach Jack Magee, who resigned after his team finished the 1971-72 season with a 3-23 record. (Source: Lauinger Library, Special Collections Archive, Georgetown University, Washington, DC).
Ch.1  The Big Hire: John Thompson and Georgetown Basketball, 1972-1980

The Hoyas staggered off the court as the final buzzer rang out at the Roberts Center in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts on March 4, 1972. The scoreboard registered 78-69. Boston College (BC) had just handed visiting Georgetown its twenty-third loss of the season and sixteenth straight defeat on the road. The period from the fall of 1971 to spring of 1972 marked the worst in the Georgetown program’s history. Coach Jack Magee and his team mustered a mere three wins that year at McDonough Gymnasium—a small basketball facility tucked away on the west end of the Georgetown campus. In the home stands, several fans expressed their dissatisfaction with the coach by waving signs scrawled in spray paint with “Magee Must Go” (See fig. 2). On February 8th, roughly a month before the final game against the BC Eagles, Magee submitted a letter of resignation to Vice President of Student Life, Dr. Patricia Rueckel.27 The Hoya speculated that Georgetown University President, Reverend Robert Henle, S.J and other administrators had little interest in rehiring the head coach. Instead the university’s leadership tasked a committee of professors, students, and alumni with finding three candidates to fill Magee’s position. One promising contender looked to change the Hoyas’ fortunes and stature for years to come: John Thompson Jr.

While deliberating, the selection committee considered using the new coaching position as a means of reaching out to black communities within sight of the stone spire of Healy clock tower28 near Georgetown’s front gate. The racial division between the university and such neighborhoods came to a head when DC erupted in violence for four days following the fatal bullet which struck Dr. Martin Luther King on April 4, 1968. Several years later, the outrage

27 “Gym Clash Continues; Coach Magee Resigns,” The Hoya, February 11, 1972, 16.
and frustration of those fiery riots lingered in the minds of committee members. In a 1980 *Sports Illustrated* feature on Coach Thompson, then Georgetown University President Father Healy explained,

> After the 1968 riots it became obvious that the university's position wasn't very smart… We began making some changes, some statements to the local community that we were going to try to be at least more responsible and useful.²⁹

Father Healy became president in 1976—four years after the coaching change—but believed as the smoke cleared in 1968, officials at the university grew more self-conscious about racial divides on campus. Despite its location in a predominately African American city, students and faculty at Georgetown were overwhelmingly white. After decades of separation and silence, the school began forging a connection to the greater DC area. Through diversification—from dorm rooms to the Athletic Department—the school proclaimed its commitment to neighboring black communities. As Father Healy put it, “I think it’s fair to say that hiring John Thompson was one of those statements.”³⁰

Born September 2, 1941, Thompson grew up in the then racially segregated DC, where he witnessed sports as a vehicle for integration and success. During his early years, Thompson was raised in various parts of the city, including a public housing project in Anacostia, Washington’s poor southeastern section. At that time bathrooms and public facilities as well as sports stadiums kept separate spaces for whites and blacks.³¹ Former-Athletic Director Frank Rienzo asserted that upon graduating from high school in 1960, Thompson likely felt unwelcome at Georgetown, where he became head basketball coach in 1972 because of his race.³² That such discrimination pervaded the Capital spoke to the level of prejudice confronting African

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³² Frank Rienzo, telephone interview by author, March 6, 2009.
Americans across the country in the 1960s. Shapiro highlights the future coach’s encounters at a young age with all-white professional sports franchises, which “couldn’t dream of having a black man run the bases or the football, let alone coach the team.” During his childhood, Thompson saw Larry Doby, an African American baseball player take the field for the Cleveland Indians.\(^{33}\) As he developed into an athlete, Thompson’s talents allowed him to pursue a professional athletic career during a time when many blacks continued to face discrimination and bigotry.

As a tall youth Thompson grew fond of basketball and went on to play the sport in high school. He loved baseball at first. By his thirteenth birthday, though, Thompson stood roughly six and a half feet tall. Basketballs soon replaced bats and gloves. Older kids invited him to join pickup games at neighborhood playgrounds. These asphalt arenas bred some of the greatest raw amateur talent in the District. Thompson and other youths flocked to local courts and the Police Boys Club No.2, a gym in Northwest Washington. After garnering the attention of several area coaches, Thompson agreed to attend a Catholic high school named Archbishop John Carroll.\(^{34}\) With a $200 scholarship the promising player enrolled at Carroll in 1957.\(^{35}\) Basketball therefore provided Thompson the opportunity to develop his skills on the court and also earn a high school diploma.

While racism continued to grip DC, Carroll and its integrated basketball team emerged as a local powerhouse; and Thompson’s success, both on and off the court, allowed him to further his education in college. Coverage of local high school basketball in The Washington Post ran a recurring story in the late 1950s: John Carroll decimated its opposition, becoming a top area school, and Thompson played phenomenally. “Undefeated John Carroll trounced Eastern, 99-54…as 6-11 John Thompson scored 34 points and monopolized the backboards” with his

\(^{33}\) Leonard Shapiro, *Big Man on Campus*, 20.  
\(^{34}\) Archbishop John Carroll founded Georgetown in 1789.  
\(^{35}\) Leonard Shapiro, *Big Man on Campus*, 25.
rebounding, read an article from 1960. At one point the Carroll Lions won 55 consecutive games. During Thompson’s career the program also won two city championships and appeared in numerous postseason tourneys. Shapiro notes that some fans shouted racial slurs at Carroll, which started three black players including Thompson. Such harassment grew more vociferous as the team began winning more often. Thompson’s teammate Edward “Monk” Malloy said, “One of the reasons we got a lot of notoriety was that we were, in a sense, a symbol of the hopes of the city to show that integration could work.” Similarly to his experience with the integration of baseball during childhood, Thompson witnessed the ability for a basketball team to transcend the court and become a more significant social force. His key contribution to the Carroll program led Parade Magazine to select him for the All-America High School Basketball team by the end of his senior year. He also graduated forty-eighth in a class of nearly 300, and college recruiters lined up to knock on his door. In 1960 Thompson entered Providence College in Rhode Island, where he matured further as a basketball player and became involved in community service.

At Providence he honed his skills as a student-athlete and helped the basketball team grow into a powerful force. Shapiro suggests that Thompson joined the Friars in college with the intention of one day playing for the Boston Celtics, which had dibs on the player due to a territorial draft system in place at the time. Long before the professional franchise offered him a contract, though, the 19-year old needed to polish his game. According to a brief entry on Thompson from a biographical dictionary of basketball published in 2005, he did just that—his

37 Leonard Shapiro, Big Man on Campus, 31.
38 Leonard Shapiro, Big Man on Campus, 27.
39 Leonard Shapiro, Big Man on Campus, 30-31.
41 Leonard Shapiro, Big Man on Campus, 36.
field goals and rebounding helped the Friars appear in two National Invitation Tournaments (NIT); they prevailed in one tournament championship and competed as well in one NCAA tournament. As a senior Thompson hit nearly sixty percent of every shot he attempted while playing center—the fifth position often filled by larger players on a team—and blossomed into a top twenty recruit, averaging 26.2 points and 14.5 rebounds per game. Beyond scoring buckets at an impressive rate, Thompson understood the importance of grabbing rebounds, a prerequisite for any accomplished big man. Meanwhile, he earned a degree in economics and received Providence College’s “Outstanding Senior Award” upon graduating in 1964. Shapiro writes that Thompson “was deadly serious about his studies.” His understanding of economics seemed to benefit Thompson as he went on to lead a financially savvy career. Having earned both a high school and college diploma, the future coach continuously stressed the importance of academics to younger generations.

Thompson launched a career working with youths while studying at Providence. During his senior year he tutored at Central Junior High School, where young students adored him. Despite hours of preparation both for the classroom and highly competitive basketball games, and juggling the competing desires of any college student, Thompson carved out time to help struggling kids. Such a sense of community involvement reappeared throughout his life. In fact, several years after graduation he shelved his jersey and returned to the District to guide kids through the pitfalls of a familiar inner city. Before dedicating himself to social service and youths, Thompson tried his hand in the professional ranks.

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44 John David Healy, “THOMPSON, John,” 473. 
45 Leonard Shapiro, Big Man on Campus, 48. 
46 Leonard Shapiro, Big Man on Campus, 48-49.
His remarkable Providence career garnered the interest of the dominant Celtics organization, which acquired him in 1964. In Boston he played for future Hall of Fame coach, Red Auerbach. From 1964-1966, however, Thompson watched mostly from the bench as the Celtics won two straight national titles, continuing a streak of consecutive championships begun in 1959. As a backup to Bill Russell, whose arrival in 1956 inaugurated the era of Celtics dominance, Thompson saw limited playing time. Regardless, he practiced alongside and learned from a man often considered the greatest center to play the game. Many sports journalists billed promising centers as “the next Bill Russell.” Even Thompson received the label.47 Years later, Russell kept in touch with his former teammate, making trips to Georgetown to instruct some of the coach’s top centers (See fig. 3), who became the focal point of the Hoya program.48

FIGURE 3: Ralph Dalton (#52) speaks with basketball legend Bill Russell, who Coach Thompson played with on the Boston Celtics from 1964-1966. (Source: Lauinger Library, Special Collections Archive, Georgetown University, Washington, DC).

47 Leonard Shapiro, Big Man on Campus, 49.
48 Leonard Shapiro, Big Man on Campus, 59.
After two seasons in the NBA, Thompson retired and moved back to Washington to work with youths. Shapiro cites Thompson’s dissatisfaction with the extensive travelling demanded of a professional athlete and the unsatisfactory compensation he received as reasons for his retirement. Rather than move to a newly created franchise in Chicago, which acquired the player in an expansion draft, he decided to return to his wife Gwen and their son John Thompson III, who was born March 11, 1966. Back in DC Thompson enlisted in President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty.

In 1964 President Johnson submitted the Economic Opportunity Bill with the intention of eliminating poverty in America. Thus began the government’s War on Poverty, which conservatives, particularly in the 1980s, found costly and ineffective at its stated goal. The act proposed by Johnson, which Congress later ratified, approved $727 million in its first year primarily to establish job training programs and assistance for needy youths. The United States Department of Agriculture for instance implemented 4-H programs to assist children in rural areas. By 1970, the initiative expanded into cities like DC where John Thompson ran one such 4-H program.

During his career in the War on Poverty, Thompson taught youths how to provide for themselves and play basketball. The Wall Street Journal quoted Thompson in 1970 explaining his focus:

Our kids don’t have to know how to make Indian head bands; they need to know how to survive in the city…We teach them how to make their own dinner, sew their own clothes and budget their bus money so they can get to school. We

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figure these skills will help pull them through the impossible odds they face in their neighborhoods each day.  

Having grown up in the District himself, Thompson knew full well the challenges black children experienced growing up there. He also knew how to survive. Kids under his direction learned the value of self-sufficiency and saving money from an accomplished role model. Thompson balanced work with play, however, running basketball clinics and playground activities for children under his direction. Basketball, a popular sport in DC, allowed kids to exercise and take their minds off troubled neighborhoods and adverse situations. And, who better to learn the game from than a two-time world champion? For the children who displayed talent beyond that of their peers, Thompson saw a road to success paved in his journey from the projects of Anacostia to an NBA locker room.

Armed with his basketball credentials, education, background, and commitment to kids, Thompson soon found himself once again on the bench, this time donning a suit and tie and coaching local amateurs to winning records. As the head coach at St. Anthony’s High School from 1966 until 1972, Thompson recruited African Americans from Washington and built the program into a local power. He ended his six year career there with 128 wins and twenty-two losses. Shapiro credits much of the teams’ successes to its coach’s recruiting abilities.

“Thompson had tentacles out on playgrounds, junior high schools and recreation centers in every corner of town,” he writes. The coach grew up on neighborhood courts and knew where and how to find talent. Just as he had used basketball to gain an education, at St. Anthony’s he stressed academics, refusing to allow players to participate in practices and games if they missed class. Shapiro recounts an episode in which Thompson yelled at a player who failed to complete

52 Leonard Shapiro, *Big Man on Campus*, 66.
an assignment for a teacher named Mary Fenlon. The youth made the ultimate mistake, as the
coach put it, of forgetting “the importance of school over basketball.” Fenlon soon began
working alongside Thompson to ensure his players’ academic achievement. The ability to attract
local talent interested in playing for a successful and knowledgeable coach while earning a high
school diploma helped Thompson build a competitive program at St. Anthony’s.  

Meanwhile across Washington, Jack Magee resigned amidst the Georgetown team’s
dreadful 1971-1972 season. Although the university began vetting replacements for his position
and other Athletic Department posts, Magee finished the spring schedule with the Hoyas. A
basketball player named Tim Lambour answered questions in front of the coaching selection
committee prior to a game. Lambour felt uneasy about discussing Magee’s replacement with the
season still underway. Even as a player he remembered the tension between Coach Magee and
Athletic Director Bob Sigholtz, who played a major role in scheduling the team’s games and
opponents. “They cleaned house,” Lambour recalled, referring to dismissals of numerous figures
in the athletic department including the trainer and equipment manager. About a week after
Magee decided to leave the school, a track coach named Frank Rienzo replaced Sigholtz. Before the end of the 1971-1972 season, the committee identified John Thompson as a possible
candidate to fill Magee’s position the following year.

As they evaluated prospective coaches, Georgetown officials sought to bolster
admissions among minorities from DC. For instance, beginning in the late 1960s, the university
developed a Community Scholars program geared towards working with and attracting local
African American students. Athletics, in particular basketball, represented another means of
encouraging Washington area youths to apply to Georgetown. Moreover, improving the team

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54 Leonard Shapiro, Big Man on Campus, 67-74, 84.
had the potential to garner greater national attention for the university. Dean Charles Deacon said,

It was my opinion that one of the ways to increase visibility to the university was through athletics…many Washington-area black athletes had become very successful in basketball but had left the city. It didn’t take a genius to figure out that finding a coach who would be appealing to the Washington community and who would be able to bring black athletes to Georgetown would not only help the Community Scholars program but also might help the basketball program to get visibility in the national limelight.57

Thompson represented a viable coaching choice because of his extraordinary basketball career and strong ties to DC. “He had always been a winner wherever he had gone,” explained Dean Deacon reflecting on Thompson’s track record. “That was very important to us in our discussion.”58 From city to college championships to professional titles, the coach had prevailed at nearly every level of basketball. He also claimed deep roots in the Washington community, where he spent years educating and coaching youths. At St. Anthony’s Thompson demonstrated his ability to recruit talented local players. Before accepting any offer, Thompson wanted to clarify Georgetown’s dedication to minorities in the District. Dean Deacon remembered him articulating the impression within the African American community of the university as a “white school up on a hill.”59 In their negotiations, officials assured the coach of their desire to foster diversity and forge a connection to the greater DC region. On March 13, 1972, Thompson signed a four-year contract with Georgetown. At a press conference announcing the hire, Father Henle cited Thompson’s “proven ability as a coach, manager, inspirer, and leader of young people [and] high personal ideals any young man would be proud to work with.”60 At the time, many in the university’s leadership believed the new head coach and team might make

57 Leonard Shapiro, *Big Man on Campus*, 82-83.
58 Dean Charles Deacon, interview by author, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, March 4, 2009.
59 Dean Charles Deacon, interview by author.
occasional NIT appearances.\textsuperscript{61} Thompson had higher expectations: “When I first came to Georgetown University, I pointed to the wall and told them, ‘a national championship flag will fly in this building,’” he said.\textsuperscript{62} Over the next decade he secured scholarships for outstanding black players from the DC area—not to mention countless other cities from New York to New Orleans—many of whom earned their diplomas while turning the program into one of the most commanding in college basketball.

In his first season at Georgetown, Thompson constructed a recruiting class entirely made up of DC players. Four of the new faces—Greg Brooks, Aaron Long, Jonathan Smith, and Merlin Wilson—graduated the preceding spring from St. Anthony’s. Along with William “Billy” Lynn from Spingarn High School in Washington, they formed a group of five African Americans joining the Hoyas for the 1972-1973 season. Thompson also introduced a local white player named Michael Stokes to the team. Stokes, Smith, Brooks, and Wilson all started off the bench during their freshman years.\textsuperscript{63} These recruits, especially Lynn and Wilson, who both stood about six feet nine inches tall, added size, speed, and talent to the program. Although blacks played for the Hoyas before—Mark Edwards for instance wore the Georgetown uniform when Magee coached—the arrival of five African Americans was unprecedented and immediately demonstrated Thompson’s intention to bring minority student-athletes from Washington to the university.

The head coach often recruited black players from DC due to the tradition of basketball in the city. Basketball’s historical roots in Washington’s black community dates back to 1907 when Edwin Bancroft Henderson, a Harvard-trained physical education teacher, taught local

\textsuperscript{61} Dean Charles Deacon, interview by author; Frank Rienzo, telephone interview by author, March 6, 2009; Leonard Shapiro, \textit{Big Man on Campus}, 91.
\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Perfect Upset: The 1985 Villanova vs. Georgetown NCAA Championship}.
\textsuperscript{63} “5 Frosh Recruits Hail from District,” \textit{The Hoya}, September 3, 1972; and Shapiro, 96-98.
African American schoolboys to play the sport. Red Auerbach, who saw Thompson on playgrounds and later coached him on the Celtics, described the nation’s capital as a “laboratory of basketball.” For generations all across DC, young hoopsters experimented on blacktops. Through trial and error they developed their moves and shakes, becoming scientists of the game. “Basketball is a game that is taken more seriously in the black community, especially in the cities,” Thompson told *Sports Illustrated* in 1980. “Black kids play basketball like Canadian kids play hockey. They start playing it early, and they care about it a lot…That's why they're so good at it. It's hard to find white kids with the same basketball background.” The coach made no secret of his desire to attract African American recruits. Still, Tim Lambour, who happened to be white, offered a deeper understanding of such recruiting practices—which received enough criticism to warrant a response by the coach in 1980. Among other reasons, Father Henle, Dean Deacon and others brought Thompson to Georgetown with full support for his plan to bring black student-athletes to the university. Second, these players possessed the skill sets the coach believed he needed to win games. And finally, Lambour surmised that black parents, more so than white ones, trusted their children with Thompson as he understood their expectations and experiences. In truth he successfully recruited and played several white players throughout his career, including Michael Stokes and Craig Esherick, who later became an assistant coach for the Hoyas and took over for Thompson when he resigned from Georgetown in 1999. Nonetheless, Thompson significantly altered the basketball program’s longstanding recruiting practices with his expressed commitment to African American players, many of whom came from inner cities.

65 Leonard Shapiro, *Big Man on Campus*, 52.
67 Tim Lambour, interview by author.
Beyond recruiting, Thompson focused on scheduling difficult opponents at home. Coming off a winless season on the road, the coach looked to rework matchups by “strategically placing the powerhouses on our schedule.” As Lambour recalled, many blamed former-Athletic Director Sigholtz for arranging a “brutal” 1971-72 season, which at one point saw the Hoyas lose nine straight games while traveling on the road from Wisconsin to Texas to California. Under Thompson and Frank Rienzo, they played many tough competitors at McDonough Gym. On December 12, 1972 for instance, the Hoyas faced the then second-ranked University of Maryland on their home court. Even though Georgetown lost that game 73-99 their away record improved and they finished the spring of 1973 with twelve wins and fourteen losses—a marked turnaround from Magee’s final season.

As the new coach set out to rebuild the basketball program from the ground up, he impressed Lambour and others with his emphasis on academic discipline and efforts to distance the program from alumni and the media. “When Thompson came on board, things changed immediately…There was a much tighter ship,” claimed Lambour. In contrast to the loose attitude which prevailed during Magee’s tenure, the new coach required his players to report grades and class attendance. Along with four of his initial recruits, Thompson brought Mary Fenlon from St. Anthony’s to fill the role of “academic coordinator and administrative assistant”—a position Frank Rienzo recalled few if any universities at the time maintaining. Like many of his teammates before him, Lambour was encouraged by an alumnus to play at Georgetown. But, the reliance on former students for such recruitments, with a few exceptions, ended under the new coach’s direction. A wall went up limiting both press and alumni access to

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68 “5 Frosh Recruits Hail from District.”
69 Tim Lambour, interview by author.
70 Leonard Shapiro, Big Man on Campus, 100.
71 Frank Rienzo, telephone interview by author.
the bench as Thompson grabbed the reins of the program. A journalist for *The Hoya* recognized the transformation to come with Thompson’s appointment, describing him as “a strict disciplinarian who will not tolerate anyone who does not give his all,” the article read.

“Discipline is one of the things many found lacking in the team this year and in the past. Usually the team could be found spending more time at Chadwick’s,” a local bar.

Along with a stricter atmosphere came a more intense style of basketball. Lambour asserted that from Magee the “style of play shifted from white kids [running a] pattern offense,” which involved predetermined movements and passing assignments to isolate a player for a field goal attempt. Thompson’s system, on the other hand, employed more black players and emphasized “athleticism…up and down the floor” with stress on tight “man to man defense” and keeping pressure on the ball—a style sportswriters, particularly those in the 1980s with a penchant for using terms like “Hoya Paranoia,” characterized as aggressive “beat you up” basketball. Far from an aberration from the 1970s, such hardnosed play along with seclusion from the media fit into the tough demeanor Lambour said Thompson coached from the beginning of his career at Georgetown.

Ready to turn the page on the Hoyas’ poor showing in 1971-1972, the Georgetown community largely expressed support for Thompson. Four days after the announcement of Magee’s replacement, the lead to an article from *The Hoya* read, “Campus reaction to the appointment of John Thompson as varsity basketball coach this week was enthusiastically favorable.” In the next paragraph the student reporter jumped right into the issue of race. Conan Louis, the chair of an important African American student group, the Black Student Alliance (BSA), was quoted as saying, “I think the addition of Mr. Thompson to the University

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72 Tim Lambour, interview by author.
74 Tim Lambour, interview by author.
administration will definitely increase good relations with the Washington community.” Louis saw the coaching change as a true expression of the school’s new tone with regard to minority relations. More than just a new administrative hire, Thompson at the time was one of only six black coaches at a majority white school in the US, and the first at Georgetown. Further, when hired he joined a mere handful of African Americans in top positions at the university. Far from worrying about such a historical departure from past coaching selections, Georgetown largely embraced Thompson precisely because the campus looked to start anew—to turn the basketball program around but also reach out to black communities in DC.

Unfortunately, expressions of racism directed at Thompson also emerged from within the campus community. On February 5, 1975 as the National Anthem rang out over the stands at McDonough Gym, an unidentified group unfurled a banner up high near the American flag. Their hateful message: “Thompson, the Nigger Flop Must Go.” Shapiro notes the presence of a group of black youths from Washington who “had also seen the bedsheet that night.” The coach often brought such local kids to campus to give them insight into a college atmosphere. For these youngsters, the Georgetown campus was anything but inviting or attractive the night the banner was displayed. That game marked the 17th in the coach’s third season, which saw some rough patches early on. Insufficient academic performances sidelined starters Larry Long and Jonathan Smith on several occasions. Merlin Wilson, another key player, suffered a neurological problem that threatened his ability to play. Rather than announcing these issues, Thompson preferred to keep them personal and quiet. At a press conference condemning the banner, a player named Felix Yeoman thanked the coach for protecting his bench’s privacy. The

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75 “Reaction to Thompson Unanimously Favorable,” The Hoya, March 17, 1972, 3.
76 Leonard Shapiro, Big Man on Campus, 113.
Hoya speculated that the vile sign expressed displeasure with the team’s record.\textsuperscript{77} Regardless, an outcry from the university’s community rang loud and clear. Father Henle described the action “as the work of a couple of bigots [which] does not reflect the attitude of the faculty, staff and students at Georgetown University.” He added, “I regret that it happened, and, as president, will continue to do everything within my power to prevent any display of bigotry at this University.”\textsuperscript{78} Student reporters likewise condemned the act and apologized to the coach on behalf of the campus.\textsuperscript{79} Outside of Georgetown, many in DC were equally infuriated and disturbed by the event. Marion Barry, a civil rights veteran and the city’s future mayor, even called his friend John and told him, “Hang in there.”\textsuperscript{80}

More than just an isolated instance of the banner at McDonough Gym, Thompson witnessed other racially insensitive episodes at Georgetown, in particular students’ treatment of a black youth named Raymond Medley. “Let me tell you why he was called Pebbles,” Thompson detailed the origins of Medley’s nickname. “It’s his hair, man. The Georgetown students used to rub Medley’s head for good luck. He was a mascot. Like a bulldog...His hair grew in tight, kinky curls so...it’s like rubbing pebbles. That’s how he got his name.”\textsuperscript{81} The quote appeared in an article by novelist and DC native John Wideman in the 1984 SI issue featuring President Reagan flanked by Patrick Ewing and the coach. Thompson challenged Medley’s nickname when he asked a former student, “Did you ever think of Pebbles as a man?”\textsuperscript{82} The banner in McDonough Gym along with the “Pebbles” story demonstrated concerns about race relations at Georgetown in the 1970s as Thompson assembled a predominately black basketball program.

\textsuperscript{78} Steve Friedman, “Thompson Slurred by Fans,” \textit{The Hoya}, February 7, 1975, 16.
\textsuperscript{79} “Bigots Go Home,” \textit{The Hoya}, February 7, 1975, 6.
\textsuperscript{80} Councilman Marion Barry, interview by author, Office of Councilmember Marion Barry, Council of the District of Columbia, Washington, DC, April 15, 2008.
\textsuperscript{81} John Wideman, “Listen to the Drum: A celebrated author indulges an obsession to separate the facts from the fictions he has heard about Georgetown coach John Thompson,” \textit{Sports Illustrated}, November 26, 1984, 60.
\textsuperscript{82} John Wideman, “Listen to the Drum,” 60.
The rebuilding of Hoya basketball continued into the latter half of the 1970s as topnotch recruits enrolled at Georgetown. During the second half of the 1970s, Thompson recruited four players—Derrick Jackson, John Duren, Craig “Big Sky” Shelton, and Eric “Sleepy” Floyd—listed on Georgetown’s recently inducted “All-Century Team” to commemorate 100 years of Georgetown basketball. In 1974 Jackson, one of the coach’s first major recruits outside of DC came to the university from Illinois. During March of his freshman season he hit a twenty-foot jump shot to defeat the University of West Virginia by a score of 62-61, sending the Hoyas to their first NCAA tournament in over three decades. Thompson signed blue chip recruits Duren and Shelton in 1976. Both players shined at Dunbar High School in Washington. At Georgetown they led scoring charts and helped the program appear in several postseason tournaments. Floyd, a guard from Gastonia, North Carolina enrolled at the university in 1978. One of the most prolific players to don a blue and gray jersey, he remains the leading career scorer to date at Georgetown with 2,304 points. The Hoyas finished the 1979-1980 season among the last eight teams in that year’s NCAA competition. Georgetown lost 81-80 in the Eastern Regional Final due to Steve Waite’s three-point play with 5 seconds left, which capped off the University of Iowa’s come-from-behind victory. Nonetheless, the rebuilding of Georgetown basketball was well underway.

The Hoyas also won the first tournament title of the newly established Big East Conference during the 1979-1980 season. Coach Thompson received the first coach of the year

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83 See: “100 Years of Georgetown Basketball Gala” program from February 10, 2007. (Access to program provided by the Special Collections Archive, Lauinger Library, Georgetown University, Washington, DC on April 28, 2009). Other “All-Century Team” players who attended Georgetown in the 1980s include: Fred Brown, Patrick Ewing, Michael Jackson, David Wingate, Reggie Williams, Charles Smith, Dikembe Mutombo, and Alonzo Mourning.
award for the Big East as well. Beyond Georgetown, the conference included Boston College, Providence, Seton Hall, St. John’s, Syracuse, and the University of Connecticut. Villanova University and the University of Pittsburgh became members of the Big East in the following years. Dominating play typified the financially successful conference. Fierce rivalries also emerged between schools like Georgetown and Syracuse. On February 13, 1980 after the travelling Hoyas beat Syracuse by a score of 52-50 at the final game before the Orangemen changed home courts, Thompson grabbed a microphone and said: “Manley Field House is officially closed.” The moment spoke to the confidence Thompson and his surging program exuded as they swaggered into the 1980s.

Much like the case across America, the 1960s proved formative years for Georgetown. The race riots of 1968 encouraged administrators at the university to reach out to black Washingtonians. The hire of John Thompson factored heavily into that effort. And while racial divides continued on campus, the 1970s saw greater concern about minority relations. The basketball team represented a huge force in changing attitudes of the past. After all, the campus community immediately condemned the hateful banner directed at Coach Thompson in McDonough Gym. Whereas the Hoyas were a source of embarrassment during the 1971-1972 season, by the end of the decade they were quickly gaining respect. Thompson represented a seminal figure in the program’s ascendancy. Beginning with his hire in 1972, better win-loss records and outstanding recruits became the norm for the basketball program. Few predicted what the Hoyas would achieve in the 1980s. At the same time that they marched into national prominence, Ronald Reagan led a conservative backlash to social spending of the 1960s to the White House.

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87 See: “100 Years of Georgetown Basketball Gala” program.
88 Leonard Shapiro, *Big Man on Campus*, 160-167.
FIGURE 4: Bill Martin (#24) cuts down the nets at Madison Square Garden in New York City on March 10, 1985 after Georgetown beat St. John’s University to win the Big East Tournament title. Patrick Ewing (on the left) and Ralph Dalton (on the right) hold Martin’s legs. (Source: Lauinger Library, Special Collections Archive, Georgetown University, Washington, DC).
Ch. 2 Cutting Down the Nets: Ronald Reagan’s 1981 Budget

On January 20, 1981, nearly nine years into Coach Thompsohn’s career at Georgetown, Ronald Reagan was sworn in as the 40th President of the United States. He came into office with roughly 51 percent of the popular vote. He also won 489 electoral ballots to incumbent Democrat Jimmy Carter’s 49. During his inaugural address Reagan proclaimed, “government is not the solution to our problem, government is the problem.” Some saw Reagan’s victory as a mandate for conservatism: a political movement that gained footholds during the late 1960s and 1970s, and called for among other changes, lower taxes and less government spending on social programs. Others believed the election signaled more dissatisfaction with Carter than approval for Reagan. For instance, many so-called “Reagan Democrats” voted Republican for the first time in 1980 due to disenchantment with their party. Regardless, Carter’s defeat demonstrated America’s willingness to give conservatism and its leader Reagan a chance. During his first year in office the president signed a budget that cut welfare programs including AFDC as well as student loans. The course the administration plotted in the 1981 federal budget to slash social spending raised concern about the negative effects of Reaganism on African Americans from urban areas like DC and diversity at universities like Georgetown.

Reagan changed his political affiliation in 1962 to Republican, citing disillusionment with liberalism in the Democratic Party. He formerly backed President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal—the Roosevelt administration’s plan to use federal programs to lift the country out of the Great Depression during the 1930s. By the 1950s and 1960s, however, Reagan diverged with liberalism in the Democratic Party, voicing concern about the growth of

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92 Matthew Dallek, 1.
government and the spread of communism. After registering as a Republican in 1962, he emerged as a prominent conservative figure when he delivered his “A Time for Choosing” stump speech on behalf of presidential candidate Barry Goldwater in 1964 and defeated California’s incumbent governor Edmund “Pat” Brown in an upset victory in 1966. When Reagan challenged Jimmy Carter in 1980, he effectively communicated to voters disillusioned with the Democratic president a conservative agenda calling for large reductions in federal expenditures.

In the 1980 election Reagan gained the support of “Reagan Democrats,” as the economy spiraled downward and America faced threats from abroad. In the 1970s “stagflation,” or the combination of high inflation and unemployment rates coupled with rising oil prices, dragged the U.S. economy down and distressed the public. Carter further lost the confidence of voters as he suffered foreign policy embarrassments such as the Iran Hostage Crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Stanley Greenberg asserts that Reagan successfully capitalized on such discontent. In the 1980 presidential race “Reagan Democrats,” many of whom traditionally supported Democrats and were white working and middle-class voters, cast their ballots for the first time for a Republican candidate, Reagan. The rise of “Reagan Democrats” marked a significant shift in American politics. For such voters, Reagan increasingly symbolized a restoration of confidence, and his emphasis on less government meshed with their own fiscally conservative values.

Reagan’s critics attribute his courting of white Democrats dissatisfied with welfare spending to racism, while others find more philosophical reasons underwriting Reaganism.

93 Matthew Dallek, The Right Moment, 33, 41.
94 For further reading on Reagan’s speech see: Jonathan M. Schoenwald, A Time for Choosing, 195-197. For further reading on Reagan’s first California gubernatorial win see: Matthew Dallek, The Right Moment.
Greenberg maintains that Reagan exploited racial divisiveness in the country by advocating cuts in welfare and other social programs in order to gain the support of “Reagan Democrats.” \(^96\) Nicholas Laham, on the other hand, contends in his analysis of race during Reagan’s presidency that such criticism overlooks the genuine concern among conservative white voters about the size of government as their tax dollars paid for the majority of welfare while they gained the least from such programs. \(^97\) Conservative historian John Patrick Diggins writes that when confronted with stagflation of the 1970s, Reagan and others examined social programs dating back to the War on Poverty and found that they “only perpetuated laziness and irresponsibility,” particularly among minorities, by awarding recipients for failing to work. \(^98\) Despite debate on the motivation—whether racist or out of more genuine economic concern—for Reaganism as it related to welfare, agreement exists that the Reagan administration wanted to drastically reduce social spending on programs used by impoverished African Americans.

In 1984, a conservative ideologue named Charles Murray offered evidence to support typecasts of poor black mothers on welfare while expounding his logic for cutting social spending. Murray acknowledged that more whites received AFDC benefits than minorities. Nevertheless, he provided statistics to validate the stereotype dating back to the 1950s which held that African American mothers birthed increasing numbers of illegitimate children in order to stay on welfare and avoid work. \(^99\) Murray added that the War on Poverty failed and argued that social programs assigned preferential treatment based on race. He offered the following prescription:

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\(^99\) Charles Murray, *Losing Ground*, 18, 125-126.
My proposal for dealing with the racial issue in social welfare is to repeal every bit of legislation and reverse every court decision that in any way requires, recommends or awards differential treatment according to race…

So influential was Murray’s reasoning that “when a federal program was cut, it was commonly referred to as having been ‘Murrayed’ by Washington insiders.” Murray thus provided justification for the Reagan administration to slash welfare. For liberals, though, his reasoning associating such social programs with fraudulent African American women smacked of racism. Across the aisle from Murray, Michael Harrington asserted that Reagan’s conservative policies harmed poor black mothers. In 1962, Harrington first documented *The Other America*, which he characterized as a significant underclass facing increasing neglect from the government. In 1984 the liberal historian argued that Reagan’s economic agenda effectively turned the War on Poverty into a “war on the poor.” He believed that conservatives had used the impoverished as a scapegoat for economic problems during the 1970s. Harrington further took issue with claims associating the poor with laziness as well as stereotypes suggesting that all receivers of welfare “are mainly promiscuous black women with huge families spawned to raise their benefits and to protect them from having to work.” The author added that in 1979 over 51 percent of AFDC subscribers were white, as opposed to forty-three percent African American. At the end of Reagan’s first term in 1984, the welfare debate between conservative voices like Murray and liberals like Harrington continued. Often their disagreement centered on stereotypes of black mothers receiving AFDC, which Reagan popularized during the 1970s and 1980s.

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100 Charles Murray, *Losing Ground*, 223.  
Reagan mythologized the “welfare queen” as a political tactic, yet personally gave money to a poor welfare mother during his first term. He told the following anecdote during his failed 1976 bid for the Republican presidential nomination and again in 1981 and 1982:

There’s a woman in Chicago. She has 80 names, 30 addresses, 12 Social Security cards and is collecting veterans’ benefits on four nonexisting deceased husbands…She’s got Medicaid, getting food stamps and she is collecting welfare under each of her names. Her tax-free cash income alone is over $150,000.105

Reagan first mentioned Linda Taylor—the 47 year-old welfare receiver behind the story—during the New Hampshire primary in 1976. The image of such “welfare queens” taking taxpayers for a ride in their pink Cadillacs struck a chord with voters concerned about sizable government spending. Critics found the tale racially divisive. Reagan never mentioned Taylor’s name or race—she was black. Still, Lou Cannon asserts that the candidate’s detractors “believed that his repeated citation of the ‘welfare queen’ was a subtle appeal to racial prejudice…”106 Voters, particularly “Reagan Democrats” often associated “welfare queens” with African American mothers, regardless of whether Reagan intended to invoke such associations. And, despite the discovery that he largely embellished the Chicagoan’s supposed fraud, the “welfare queen” myth gained considerable traction.107 On the other hand, the president’s Deputy Chief of Staff, Michael K. Deaver described in a documentary how Reagan sent a personal check to a welfare mother. He then mailed another check after learning that the struggling woman framed the first.108 Nonetheless, the “welfare queen” myth far overshadowed his isolated act of benevolence, and social programs bore the brunt of the administration’s budget cuts in 1981.

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106 Lou Cannon, President Reagan, 519.
107 “Welfare Queen Becomes an Issue in Reagan Campaign.”
In order to recover from the economic downturn left by outgoing President Carter, Reagan advocated unprecedented cuts in federal programs. In November of 1980 Reagan ordered Washington to put “America’s economic house in order.” As his administration completed the final touches on a budget proposal calling for “cuts in virtually every department of government,” he told the nation, “Together, we must chart a different course.” Supply-side economics came to define Reganomics—the President’s economic policies which aimed to reduce federal spending while instituting marginal tax rates and balancing the budget.

Reagan’s budget proposal faced a divided Congress. In 1980, Republicans gained control of the Senate for the first time since 1955. The other half of the 97th Congress, however, maintained a narrow Democratic majority led by Speaker of the House Thomas “Tip” O’Neill from Massachusetts. In order to see his budget ratified, Reagan needed to convince “26 O’Neill Democrats” to break rank. He also had to sway Republicans uneasy about the viability of supply-side economics. Many eyed tax cuts falling on the wealthy with skepticism and saw that Reagan proposed cuts on programs designed to help the needy.

Reagan met initial resistance to the considerably different course he outlined in his economic recovery.

Public backing of Reagan intensified, however, after an assassin’s bullet almost ended the recently inaugurated president’s life. Packing a .22 caliber pistol, a deranged John W. Hinckley Jr. waited in the drizzle outside the Washington Hilton Hotel on March 30, 1981. Six shots rang out as Reagan exited the building with security and staff. Hysteria ensued. Police and Secret Service agents apprehended the shooter while Reagan was whisked off to the George Washington University Hospital. Three of Hinckley’s rounds struck Press Secretary James

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110 “Part One,” Reagan.
112 “Part One,” Reagan.
Brady, Officer Tom Delahanty and Agent Tim McCarthy. Their bodies lay sprawled across the pavement. Another bullet ricocheted off the siding of the presidential limousine, lodging in Reagan’s left lung about an inch from his heart. According to the president’s daughter Patti Davis, the American people found out only years later how close her father came to death. Having experienced the trauma of President John F. Kennedy’s assassination on November 22, 1963, many Americans stood by aghast as Reagan recovered. In the aftermath of the near fatal attempt on his life, support solidified for the president and his budget proposals.

On April 28th, weeks after the Hinckley shooting, Reagan received a standing ovation in the Capitol building. “I have come to speak to you tonight about our economic recovery program,” he told both legislative chambers and the American people, “let us talk about getting spending and inflation under control and cutting your tax rates.” The mandate given by voters on Election Day last November “was very simple,” he said. “Our Government is too big and it spends too much…Let us cut through the fog for a moment. The answer to a Government that is too big is to stop feeding its growth.” Only months before, Democratic opposition in the House of Representatives threatened to derail the president’s proposal. Riding a swell of national support, though, proved a vital asset to the administration seeking a dramatic change in economic course. By May 20, 1981 the House approved the president’s budget with “little debate”, and the Senate followed suit the next day.

Shortly thereafter Reagan signed the 1981 budget despite a cloud of uncertainty surrounding future effects of its cuts. According to the Congressional Quarterly Almanac for

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114 “Part One,” Reagan.
115 “President Reagan’s Address on Economy,” Congressional Quarterly Almanac 1981 (vol.37, 1982), 20-E.
116 “President Reagan’s Address on Economy,” 20-E.
that year, the administration’s budget initiated “a radical departure from the expansion of social programs that took place during the 1960s and 1970s.” While the President wanted to leave a “social safety net” in place for the “truly needy,” about seventy percent of the $35.2 billion in slashes fell on social programs “earmarked for the poor and lower middle” classes. The budget scaled back or stripped AFDC benefits from 687,000 households. Over one million lost food stamps. School lunch prices rose. Extended unemployment benefits ended for 1.5 million people and fewer federally subsidized housing units were available.118 The Reagan administration argued that the dire economic times required savings and therefore budget cuts. On August 13, 1981, Reagan traveled to his ranch in California to put his signature to the budget. Richard Darman—a presidential aide from 1981 until 1985—recalled how a thick fog that day made it so “you could hardly see the president.” Earlier that spring Reagan called on legislators to look past the fog blocking their approval of his budget. Nearly three months later clouds hung over his signing of the recovery package. The misty weather gave Darman the inkling that, “Maybe we were doing something in a fog, that is, without” a clear understanding of what to expect in coming years with the federal government’s marked new approach to social spending.119

The 1981 budget cuts aggravated the conditions faced by Washington, DC residents, who predominately were African American. The 1986 House committee on the District of Columbia, chaired by the Democratic Congressmen from California, Ronald V. Dellums, reported that because of Reagan’s first federal budget, the city “suffered the highest loss in the country, with a per capita cut of $682. The cuts were primarily in health care, social services, and education.” The Democrat-led committee noted that Reagan’s initiatives forced DC to rollback drug and

119 “Part One,” Reagan.”
alcohol abuse treatment, education for handicapped children, Medicaid, and AFDC. Unemployment and poverty continued to be a major concern.\(^{120}\) The Operating Budget for DC in fiscal year 1985 stated further that despite its role as “a primary source of income support for needy District families,” the number of residents receiving AFDC decreased by 25 percent from 1981-1985. The city “cushioned the impact of [reductions in welfare recipients] to the extent possible by continuing benefits with District funds.” In 1981, federal and District of Columbia spending for AFDC totaled about $45 million each. Within four years, the executive branch peeled back its support by nearly five million dollars, leaving the DC government to make up the difference.\(^{121}\) The situation in Washington during Reagan’s first term thus demonstrated an instance when the “truly needy” fell through the president’s promised “safety net.” The Reagan years began with a dismal outlook for impoverished blacks living in the very communities where Coach Thompson and many of his players grew up.

Beyond social programs, the 1981 budget significantly slashed the amount of federally subsidized student aid. The *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* from 1981 reported that “millions of low- and middle-income students faced reductions in their grants.”\(^{122}\) The Reagan administration also tried to dismantle the Education Department (ED) and transform what had been “a Cabinet agency to an independent foundation.”\(^{123}\) Congressional leaders voiced their opposition to this effort in 1982 and Reagan eventually backed off. Dean Patricia McWade worked in financial aid since the early 1970s, around the birth of many such federal programs, and recalled anxiety in her profession at the outset of Reagan’s presidency. While working in


\(^{122}\) “College Student Aid,” *Congressional Quarterly Almanac 1981* (vol.37, 1982), 493.

Harvard University’s financial aid office in the early 1980s, Dean McWade travelled to Washington to protest budget cuts that threatened graduate students’ ability to afford their tuition. She petitioned several members of Congress to challenge the president’s education policies. Dean McWade reflected, “from the perspective of higher education, I don’t think we saw [Reagan] as a friend…we saw the people that he put in [looking] to cut wherever they could in education.” During the early 1980s, McWade argued, rapid increases in tuition costs further hampered underprivileged youths’ access to expensive private universities. At Georgetown during the first half of the 1980s, students and administrators likewise worried that Reagan’s education cuts threatened diversity on campus and the affordability of tuition.

An article in the April Fools’ edition of The Hoya from 1981 quipped that Reagan “stated that he is forthwith canceling all federal financial aid to college students. This move will coincide with the immediate resumption of a peace-time draft.” The student journalists joked that the president explained his policies to them in an interview at his bedside at George Washington University Hospital, where he recuperated from Hinckley’s failed assassination attempt. They also wrote that aid programs destined for cuts included: “Basic Opportunity Grants (BOG)” and the “Federal Loan Organisational Program (FLOP)”—parodies of the Pell Grant, formerly the Basic Educational Opportunity Grant (BEOG), and Guaranteed Student Loan (GSL) programs, which the administration trimmed in the 1981 budget. Months before the enactment of Reagan’s economic recovery package, students found cuts to their federal aid unfair and used the yearly joke issue of the student newspaper to poke fun at such proposals.

124 Dean Patricia McWade, interview by author, Georgetown University Office of Student Financial Services, February 9, 2009.
126 “College Student Aid,” 493.
On several occasions, though, students seriously debated tuition cuts in the opinion section of *The Hoya*. In October of 1982 Len Schoppa detailed his concern about minority and poor applicants’ access to higher education amidst rising tuition costs, and challenges to the university’s policy to meet the full financial aid need of students.\(^{127}\) Weeks later, another student named Susan Mandel authored a letter to the editor questioning aspects of Schoppa’s logic, which she believed erroneously framed financial aid “as a contract by which poor students are hired by the school to enrich the social and intellectual lives of its rich students.”\(^{128}\) *The Hoya* entitled Mandel’s letter “Financial Aid: Do We Really Need It?”—which the author felt mischaracterized her argument.\(^{129}\) Regardless, the student newspaper published several letters at the end of October 1982 disputing Mandel’s rationale.\(^{130}\) The back-and-forth in the opinion sections of *The Hoya* demonstrated the concern among Georgetown pupils about the state of financial aid at the outset of Reagan’s presidency.

Several years later in 1985, Father Healy echoed the viewpoint expressed by Schoppa that slashes in financial aid homogenized universities. At Georgetown “there are very rich kids around; there are very poor kids around,” he observed. “It would be a great shame if we lost that spread.”\(^{131}\) Father Healy strived to transform Georgetown from a parochial school to a nationally respected research institution. In order to compete with other universities in the late 1970s and 1980s, he pushed to increase socio-economic and racial diversity on campus. John Thompson and the success of the basketball program represented a crucial aspect of the effort to

\(^{127}\) Len Schoppa, “The Financial Aid Crunch,” *The Hoya*, 8 October 1982, 7. (As Dean Charles Deacon and Dean Patricia McWade explained, Georgetown established a “full-need” financial aid policy in 1978 as part of the larger effort at the time to make the university more nationally competitive).


broaden the university’s reputation.\textsuperscript{132} Father Healy thus took issue with cuts in higher education spending, which threatened the goal of making Georgetown a more diverse and therefore more competitive institution.

Towards the end of Reagan’s first year in office, David Stockman, a member of the executive Cabinet, questioned the effectiveness of the administration’s budget as the economy worsened. “None of us really understands what’s going on with all these numbers,” confessed Stockman, the director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), to his own skepticism about Reaganomics and the 1981 budget, which he helped author.\textsuperscript{133} During December of 1981 \textit{The Atlantic} magazine published an article by William Greider about Stockman. Greider’s article caused a great deal of scandal for the administration as critics cited Stockman to cast doubt on Reagan’s budget. Problems with the economy furthermore continued. The recession deepened. Between 1981 and 1982, unemployment jumped from 8.5 to eleven percent.\textsuperscript{134} Reductions in AFDC and other forms of welfare left little assistance available to the growing number of poor citizens. Cuts in student aid also made tuition more costly.\textsuperscript{135} Within a year of signing the 1981 budget, questions remained about Reagan’s social welfare and education cuts, and their effects on needy families.

In the early years of the 1980s, Reaganism headed on a collision course with Georgetown University and the rising team coached by John Thompson. America entered the decade willing to try Reagan’s call for less government. In turn, voters grew further divided along racial lines.

Beyond discontent with the Carter administration, certain white “Reagan Democrats” supported

\textsuperscript{132} Dean Charles Deacon, interview by author; Dean Patricia McWade, interview by author.


a Republican president for the first time in 1980 because of their concern about programs they saw as preferentially geared towards poor African Americans. Some subscribed to the “welfare queen” myth and backed Reagan when he signed the 1981 budget, which stripped residents of the District and hundreds of thousands of others of their AFDC benefits. The administration also scaled back spending on education. While Thompson struggled to provide access to Georgetown for local African American student-athletes, Reaganism exacerbated conditions faced by many impoverished minority families in the Washington area and further limited the availability of financial aid. In the ensuing years, the formidable and predominately black Georgetown basketball team would confront white America. As Reagan’s budget cut safety nets around inner cities, Thompson and the Hoyas grabbed scissors of their own, bracing to take down nets as they competed for three national titles.
FIGURE 5 Michael Graham (#50), who sportswriter Curry Kirkpatrick referred to as Georgetown’s “glowering hatchet man,” playing in the Final Four game against the University of Kentucky on March 31, 1984. (Source: Lauinger Library, Special Collections Archive, Georgetown University, Washington, DC).
Ch.3 Hoya Paranoia: Georgetown’s Title-Contending Seasons, 1982-1985

By the mid-1980s Georgetown developed into one of the most dominant and maligned programs in college basketball. Between 1982 and 1985 the Hoyas competed in three NCAA championships; they prevailed in the final game of the 1984 tournament. In those years Georgetown also took three Big East regular season and post-season tournament titles—an incredible feat as competitiveness and exceptional play came to define the conference. Highly sought-after black players like Ewing from Boston and others who came from DC helped the Hoyas achieve such success. Members of the Georgetown campus and the African American community in Washington strongly supported the team. Nevertheless, Georgetown had many detractors. Thompson and his players continued to face racist chants and banners at several games. Portrayals of the Hoyas painted them as a force of angry black men to be feared. Curry Kirkpatrick, a sportswriter for SI, for instance, typecast Georgetown as thuggish while complimenting Chris Mullin for his hard work and self control. “Hoya Paranoia” furthermore came to describe fear of Thompson and his team. The harassment and media critique of Georgetown basketball revealed instances of racial prejudice aimed at a highly successful black team and social force during the first half of the Reagan years.

At the outset of the 1980s Georgetown resembled a big time program with a big time coach. During the fall of 1980, The Hoya reported on $160,000 in renovations to Coach Thompson’s offices. Len Schoppa, in his first semester as an undergraduate at Georgetown, contributed to that issue of the student newspaper by interviewing Thompson during a basketball practice at McDonough Gym. Schoppa asked specifically about a $350,000 house that a group of alumni purchased for the head coach. “I think I deserve it,” Thompson told the freshman

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137 Dr. Len Schoppa, interview by author, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia, February 13, 2009.
reporter. Many saw the large house, which included a pool featuring a Marilyn Monroe mosaic, as an attempt to convince Thompson to stay at Georgetown rather than accept job offers with other programs like the University of Oklahoma.\footnote{138} Mark Asher, a reporter for The Washington Post, noted further that more than ever before, Georgetown looked like a major program in 1980 as the Athletic Department raised salaries and hired a sports information director to focus on basketball.\footnote{139} According to Schoppa, who recalled feeling nervous as he approached the “tall imposing” Thompson, The Hoya staff wanted to raise questions about spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on Georgetown athletics rather than on academics or other areas relevant to the university. He got the distinct impression that most of his peers agreed with Thompson and viewed such athletic expenditures positively.\footnote{140} Along with success came greater support and investments in the program as well as greater media interest in the head coach and his team.

Leonard Shapiro wrote an article in January of 1980—eleven years before publishing his biography of the coach—in which he highlighted Thompson’s heated outburst at a game against the University of Maryland on December 5, 1979. A Georgetown player received a technical foul during the first half for hanging on the rim after dunking the ball—considered unsportsmanlike gloating worthy of awarding the opposing team a free throw. Thompson launched into a tirade. Maryland’s head coach Charles “Lefty” Driesell suggested that he take a seat. In response Thompson “tore into Driesell. ‘You blankety-blank SOB,’ he raged…but

\footnote{138} Sarah Rosenson, “House Bought for Thompson by Alumni & Friends,” The Hoya October 31, 1980, 1; Leonard Shapiro, Big Man on Campus, 155.
\footnote{140} Dr. Len Schoppa. Note: certain Georgetown students did not follow the basketball team. Xyra Harper, a disc jockey for Georgetown’s WGTB-FM, believed Father Healy sold the radio station to the University of the District Columbia for $1 in 1979 because students refused to air basketball games on top of their broadcasts contradicting the Catholic Church’s stances on abortion and homosexuality. See: Mark Andersen and Mark Jenkins, Dance of Days: Two Decades of Punk in the Nation’s Capital (New York, NY: Akashic Books, 2001), 32.
Thompson did not say blankety-blank,” wrote Shapiro about a month after the incident.\textsuperscript{141} The journalist went on to note that, “John Thompson is 6-foot-10 and weighs more than 300 pounds. When he gets angry, he gets very angry.”\textsuperscript{142} For much of his career during the 1980s sportswriters stressed the former center’s large size and temperament.

Thompson addressed his frequent cussing at games in a documentary from 1995. “I can speak two languages. I’m very educated. I speak English and profanity,” he explained to Spike Lee, a pioneering African American director whose films from the 1980s and 1990s often explored race relations in inner cities. That interview appeared in a documentary feature on Thompson that Lee directed. One montage during the segment captured the coach cursing repeatedly from the bench at an unidentified game in McDonough Gym during the 1995 season.\textsuperscript{143} The coach by his own admission employed such language as a means of effectively getting his point across, especially when he wanted to inspire or gain the attention of his players, or disagreed with an official’s ruling. In other words, Thompson at times fostered the perception of himself as a foul mouthed coach with a short fuse. In 1980 for instance he told Shapiro, “I am not St. John.”\textsuperscript{144} He was, however, far from the only coach to seek to use such a perception to his advantage.

Bobby Knight, who coached the men’s basketball team at Indiana University from 1971-2000 and happened to be white, also gained a reputation for throwing tantrums. On February 24, 1985, officials ejected Knight from a game against Purdue University for tossing a chair across the court in a fury.\textsuperscript{145} The high stress of managing a competitive basketball program in which a...

\textsuperscript{141} Leonard Shapiro, “Hoop-la at Georgetown: John Thompson, the Hoya’s go-getter coach, may be on the way to his winningest season ever,” \textit{The Washington Post}, January 13, 1980, sec. SM, 10.
\textsuperscript{142} Leonard Shapiro, “Hoop-la at Georgetown,” sec. SM, 10. Shapiro later entitled his biography of Thompson \textit{Big Man on Campus} in reference to the imposing coach’s large size.
\textsuperscript{143} “Real Sports: Coach Thompson,” directed by Spike Lee, HBO Sports, 16 minutes, DVD.
\textsuperscript{144} Leonard Shapiro, “Hoop-la at Georgetown,” sec. SM, 10.
questionable call from a referee had the potential to influence the outcome of a game, often manifested itself in rants or worse from passionate coaches and players. Knight’s act, though, was far more likely to cause bodily harm than Thompson’s swearing. Yet as Thompson and his players achieved greater success in the 1980s, they were singled out more so than their counterparts at Indiana as a terrifying force.

Thompson’s recruitment of Patrick Ewing in 1981 represented a pivotal moment in the ascendancy of Georgetown basketball. “After considering all the facts, my decision is to attend Georgetown University,” Ewing read from a piece of paper to over a hundred reporters and fans in Boston, Massachusetts on February 2, 1981. The seven-foot tall sensation immigrated to America from Kingston, Jamaica in 1975—about three years into Thompson’s career at Georgetown. By his senior year at Cambridge Rindge and Latin, he was considered the best high school player in the country. Coaches from outstanding programs including the University of North Carolina (UNC) and the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) vied for Ewing.146 “The main reason I chose to go to Georgetown was definitely John Thompson,” Ewing professed to Spike Lee in 1995, “He was a father figure to a lot of us.”147 Ewing’s comments underscored Thompson’s significance in recruiting African American players who helped Georgetown become one of the best college programs in the country. The young player also cited Thompson’s emphasis on education and familiarity with the center position, as well as the chance to compete on television in the rising Big East conference, as key factors in his decision

147 “Real Sports: Coach Thompson.”

Beyond Ewing, Thompson recruited three skilled African American players in 1981 from the DC area. In May, Georgetown signed two Washingtonians who were considered among the fifteen best high school players in the country: Bill Martin, a 6-foot-7 forward from McKinley Tech High School, and Anthony Jones, a 6-foot-6 forward from Dunbar High School.\footnote{Donald Huff and Mike Wilbon, “Dunbar’s Jones Adds to GU Success; Charles to Wake,” \textit{The Washington Post}, May 15, 1981, sec. E, 1. John Duren and Craig Shelton, two of Thompson’s recruits from the mid-1970s also graduated from Dunbar High School in Washington.} Earlier that spring a 6-foot-9 player named Ralph Dalton from Suitland, Maryland announced his intention to join the Hoyas as well.\footnote{“Dalton Signs With Hoyas,” \textit{The Washington Post}, April 24, 1981, sec. D, 4.} Nearly a decade into his career at Georgetown, Coach Thompson continued to recruit black players from or around Washington. With the help of the four incoming freshman as well as seniors Ed Spriggs, Eric Floyd, and Eric Smith, the 1981-1982 season boded well for the Hoyas.

During Ewing’s freshman year, Georgetown moved the majority of its home games to a bigger arena, received further television coverage, and became increasingly known for their suffocating defense. After Georgetown’s televised victory over the then fourth-ranked University of Missouri at McDonough Gym on February 20, 1982, \textit{The Hoya} reported that,

> The difference in the game was defense; hard-nosed, arm waving defense. The Hoyas pressed, trapped, collapsed on, and shut down the Tiger offense, eliminating their inside game and forcing bad passes and sloppy shots from the perimeter.\footnote{Bill Latham, “Hoyas Rout No.4 Missouri, 63-51, In National TV Thriller,” \textit{The Hoya}, February 26, 1982, 12.}

Tim Lambour recalled the emphasis on defense that Thompson brought to Georgetown basketball in 1972.\footnote{Tim Lambour, interview by author.} Ten years later, Thompson’s talented players defeated Missouri, one of
the best teams in the nation, by applying unrelenting pressure on their opponents. Broadcasting of the February 20th game on television moreover allowed viewers outside McDonough Gym to witness Georgetown’s impressive defensive display against the Tigers. And, while the Hoyas played Missouri at their campus facility, which had 4,600 seats, Georgetown moved the majority of its home games during Ewing’s first year to the 19,500-seat Capital Centre in Landover, Maryland. The move to the Capital Centre as well as greater television coverage of games in which Thompson’s team competed, and in the case of Missouri defeated, top ranked teams, offered further indication that Georgetown had a major basketball program by 1982.

In 1982 the Hoyas played in their program’s first NCAA championship against a formidable UNC team in what many considered one of the best college title games in history. On March 30th Georgetown and UNC, the final two teams remaining out of a field of 48 in the tournament, faced off at the Superdome in New Orleans, Louisiana. Georgetown’s freshman sensation Ewing scored twenty-three points and was famously called for goal tending on UNC’s first four shots, thus giving the Tarheels eight points without them ever putting the ball through the basket. Nonetheless, Ewing’s goaltending established the Hoyas’ physical strength early in the game. And, had Fred Brown not made an errant pass to James Worthy, who scored a game high 28 points for UNC, Georgetown might have prevailed in the waning seconds of the final half. The Tarheels led by future NBA players Michael Jordan, Sam Perkins, and Worthy, outrebounded and maintained a better shooting percentage than the Hoyas. Still though, the Georgetown players established themselves firmly in the running for the best in college basketball. The 1982 championship brought further national recognition of Georgetown;

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however during that year’s NCAA tournament, the team clashed with reporters who wrote about “Hoya Paranoia” and criticized Thompson and Ewing.

One of the earliest mentions of “Hoya Paranoia” in the print media appeared in a 1980 article for The Washington Post. “I’ve never heard it (the phrase) before…It’s a creation of the press,” Coach Thompson told reporter Mark Asher.156 A month before on February 13, 1980, Georgetown defeated then second-ranked Syracuse at the final game at Manley Field House. National polls listing the best teams in college basketball, however, continued to lack the presence of Thompson’s team. Asher contended that “Hoya Paranoia” referred to the resentment and anxiety that resulted among Georgetown fans. Fans of the Hoyas used the phrase to bemoan the lack of respect afforded to their program.157

By 1982 the meaning of “Hoya Paranoia” changed as reporters used it to deride Thompson’s practice of keeping his team secluded from the media. Tim Lambour recalled Thompson restricting contact with his players from the beginning of his career at Georgetown in 1972.158 Ten years later the basketball team’s success received heightened media interest. A reporter for The Boston Globe named Michael Madden defined “Hoya Paranoia” as Thompson’s fear about allowing outsiders to speak with his team. Madden noted that throughout the tournament the head coach lodged his players miles away from the arenas where they played. Interview requests often ended in negative replies from the Georgetown Athletic Department. Ewing and other freshmen rarely answered questions. Madden asserted that Georgetown “is one of the most disciplined and most controlled” teams, while also concluding that Thompson’s “worry lines are etched deep into his brow…and he has fostered a paranoid cocoon at

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158 Tim Lambour, interview by author.
Limited access made covering the Georgetown team a difficult task and frustrated journalists like Madden.

While some sportswriters during the 1982 season lauded Thompson, another named John Mooney likened him to the violent dictator Idi Amin. On March 24, 1982 the United States Basketball Writers Association (USBWA) recognized Thompson as coach of the year. Earlier in the month, though, Thompson decided to house his team in Salt Lake City, roughly an hour away from Logan, Utah where Georgetown played the University of Wyoming in the first round of the NCAA competition. This caused tension with reporters who struggled to cover the Hoyas and found the head coach hostile to their questions during press conferences. On March 13, 1982 John Mooney, the sports editor for the *Salt Lake City Tribune*, referred to Thompson as “The Idi Amin of Big East Basketball,” weaving a dubious analysis that compared the Georgetown coach and Uganda’s genocidal dictator. Thompson brushed the absurdity of Mooney’s article aside with humor: “I have talked to Idi about that, and he resents it. He says he is much better looking than I am.” Nevertheless, Mooney presented the Idi Amin comparison as though he first overheard it mentioned by a representative of an unidentified New York school. Equating Thompson to Idi Amin, as Mooney and likely others did, demonstrated the perception of him as a threatening African American figure.

Thompson’s embrace of Fred Brown after the gut-wrenching loss to UNC surprised the public, which often viewed him as a heartless man. It seemed off to some that the same coach who was likened to Idi Amin would also hug the player who might have been responsible for his team’s defeat. Recruits Horace Broadnax from Plant City, Florida and David Wingate from

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162 Leonard Shapiro, *Big Man on Campus*, 197.
Baltimore, Maryland claimed that Thompson’s consolation of a dejected Brown factored heavily in their decisions to come to Georgetown.\textsuperscript{163} Thompson noted how strange he found the shocked reactions: “It still amazes me…It’s almost as if people expected that I’d turn around and kick [Brown].”\textsuperscript{164} That many viewers expected Thompson to lash out violently at Brown revealed the prevailing image of him as a terrifying coach, which reporters like Mooney helped foster.

The media also perpetuated the conception of Ewing as unintelligent. During his senior year of high school, Ewing’s coach Mike Jarvis sent a letter to programs recruiting the player that said, among other requirements, the young player needed tutoring and untimed testing. Michael Madden wrote that the requests in the Jarvis letter “made clear [Ewing] could not be accepted at many schools.”\textsuperscript{165} Father Healy believed Madden and other Boston-based reporters published the letter to cast doubt on Ewing’s academic eligibility because they wanted him to attend a local school like Boston College rather than Georgetown. He chastised Madden’s journalism for disingenuously raising questions about the young player’s intelligence.\textsuperscript{166} Such criticism of Ewing, however, continued well into his freshman year of college.

On March 27, 1982, one day before the Hoyas’ game against the University of Louisville in the Final Four, the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN) aired a segment which again questioned Ewing’s intelligence and acceptance into Georgetown. The next day ESPN President Chet Simmons personally apologized for the programming. “It’s too late for that,” Thompson said of Simmons’ apology. “The damage was done.”\textsuperscript{167} Thompson asserted

\begin{enumerate}
\item Michael Wilbon, “Georgetown Basketball: in the Bonus Situation,” sec. D, 1
\item Michael Madden, “The Ewing Letter: He’s a special player, but what was asked of prospective colleges was extra special,” \textit{The Boston Globe}, February 20, 1981.
\end{enumerate}
that millions of viewers had seen the negative depiction of Ewing. Beyond the view of Thompson as mean-spirited, a common stereotype portrayed the Hoyas’ star center as illiterate.

During several games the following season, fans further criticized Ewing’s intelligence, at times in an openly racist manner. On January 26, 1983, while coaching an away game against his alma mater Providence, Thompson pulled the Hoyas off the court after a Friar fan held up a sign that read, “Ewing Can’t Read.” Five days later in a game against Villanova at the Palestra, an arena in Philadelphia, several fans held up a sheet with “Ewing is an Ape” written on it. One person in the stands wore a shirt that proclaimed, “Ewing Kant Read Dis.” Another flung a banana peel onto the hardwood during Ewing’s introduction.  

“It is cheap, racist stuff,” commented Father Healy. “No one on the face of the earth can tell me if Patrick were a 7-foot high white man that people would still carry these signs around.” Beyond the Georgetown president’s condemnation of the harassment of Ewing, Harry Edwards, a professor of sociology at the University of California, Berkeley and an activist during the civil rights movement of the 1960s, also spoke out. Edwards said, “in 1983, for people to be throwing bananas on the floor, to be calling out these ugly racial epithets, I think it’s unconscionable.”

The Washington Post also published several letters that called on referees to penalize college programs for allowing such racially insensitive signage and acts.

Still, others openly defended the banana peel and signs equating Ewing to an ape in the opinion section of The Washington Post, Georgetown’s hometown newspaper. “Ewing’s predicament is by no means unique and has no relation to the color of his skin,” wrote Jack Lee, who characterized the slurs as “at most overzealous fans supporting a rival school.” As a

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comparison to Ewing, Lee offered a white Duke University player named Art Heyman, who heard opposing fans demeaning his “intelligence level and heredity” but chose to “grin and swish another 20-footer.” Lee also told Georgetown’s head coach to stop complaining about the conduct of fans: “Grow up, John Thompson.” While Lee failed to see bigotry in the treatment of Ewing, other individuals like Dr. Edwards felt deeply troubled that such unabashed displays of racism persisted into the 1980s.

The Hoyas suffered further during the 1982-1983 season as both Coach Thompson and Patrick Ewing’s mothers died. In December of 1982 Thompson’s mother Anna passed away. While he mourned Anna Thompson’s death, the coach tasked his assistants Craig Esherick—who played for Georgetown from 1974-1978—and Mike Riley to fill in for him. Nevertheless, the team struggled to relive its success from the previous season. On March 10, 1983 the Hoyas lost in the first round of the Big East tournament to Syracuse by a score of 79-72. Nine days later the team lost to Memphis State in the second round of the NCAA tournament. On top of the absent leadership of Eric Floyd and Eric Smith, who graduated in the spring of 1982, Thompson cited his mother’s death as a key reason for the team’s problems that year. The coach however saw promising moments from his young squad during the 1982-1983 season. Months later in September of 1983, though, Thompson informed Ewing that his mother Dorothy had also passed on. When Ewing’s mother died “it was probably one of the most difficult experiences for me as a coach,” Thompson later recalled. The death added to an already emotionally draining year in which Ewing endured racist banners and a widely broadcast

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173 Leonard Shapiro, Big Man on Campus, 211.
176 “Real Sports: Coach Thompson.”
ESPN exposé questioning his academic capabilities. In the face of such tremendous challenges, Ewing and his teammates along with their coach grew ever more determined. The next year they rebounded, storming their way to earn a national collegiate championship.

The recruitment of Reggie Williams and Michael Graham, two excellent players from the greater DC area, further enabled Georgetown’s success in the following 1983-1984 season. Georgetown acquired Williams, who went to Dunbar High School in Baltimore in April of 1983.\footnote{Donald Huff, “Reggie Williams Signs With Georgetown,” \textit{The Washington Post}, April 14, 1983, sec. C, 1. Note: Not to be confused with Dunbar High School in Washington, DC which Craig Shelton and John Duren attended.} Two months later Thompson signed 6-foot-9 Graham, who won All-Metropolitan distinction in DC during his senior year at Spingarn High School.\footnote{Donald Huff and Michael Wilbon, “Spingarn’s Graham Signs Letter of Intent to Georgetown,” \textit{The Washington Post}, June 3, 1983, sec. E, 1.} Williams and Graham continued Thompson’s trend of successfully recruiting African American players from or around Washington. Moreover, they added further talent and size to Georgetown’s already impressive squad, which included Patrick Ewing, Fred Brown, Gene Smith, Bill Martin, Horace Broadnax, Michael Jackson, David Wingate, and Ralph Dalton among others. Along their way to the 1984 NCAA tournament, the Hoyas continued to face criticism.

During the 1983-1984 season a \textit{SI} journalist named Curry Kirkpatrick emerged as one of the leading detractors of Thompson and his players. In his coverage of Georgetown’s overtime victory over Syracuse at Madison Square Garden in the 1984 Big East tournament championship, Kirkpatrick wrote, “In New York the Hoyas’ MO was that familiar mix of public non-relations, suspicion and silly security precautions—now known as Hoya Paranoia—and intense play.”\footnote{Curry Kirkpatrick, “Hang On To Your Hats…and Heads,” \textit{Sports Illustrated}, March 19, 1984, 22.} He blamed Georgetown players for causing brawls during the conference tournament and emphasized what he called their “leather-jackets-and-chains image.”\footnote{Curry Kirkpatrick, “Hang On To Your Hats…and Heads,” 23.}
Kirkpatrick branded the Hoyas as thugs—a racially charged accusation of a predominately African American team whose players came from inner city environments. He also identified the team by one of its “milder aliases”: “Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Twelve”\(^\text{181}\)—a reference to the 1980s hip-hop group Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five. Thus, Kirkpatrick added to the typecast of Thompson dating back to the beginning of the 1980s by painting Georgetown as a group of undisciplined, terrifying black youths.

What made the racial implications of Kirkpatrick’s article all the more glaring was his positive treatment of Chris Mullin, who played for Georgetown’s rival, St. John’s from 1981-1985. In the SI issue from November 26, 1984 featuring the cover photo with Thompson, Reagan, and Ewing, Kirkpatrick called Mullin “a fine sportsman” and complimented him for keeping his cool in the tough Big East conference. He then described how a fight during a game between the Hoyas and St John’s failed to distract Mullin from keeping his composure. “Mullin is a glorious throwback to the old days before hang time, when Caucasians got by on guile and guts and something known as ball handling,” wrote Kirkpatrick. He added that “[Mullin] has worked and worked. And then worked some more. His ICBM (Irish Catholic Basketball Mind) and work ethic are such that he can hardly stop working.”\(^\text{182}\) The previous April, Kirkpatrick depicted Georgetown as a group of hoodlums. Comparing Kirkpatrick’s two portrayals, which appeared in the same popular sports magazine, demonstrates his belief that Chris Mullin succeeded at basketball because of his intelligence and hard work as a white player, whereas the predominately black Hoyas in his opinion won because they intimidated opponents with their rough, undisciplined play.

\(^\text{182}\) Curry Kirkpatrick, “Just a Guy From Da Naybuhhood: St. John’s hoopaholic Chris Mullin may be the King of Queens; but he belongs (pale) body and soul to his beloved borough of Brooklyn,” 49-50.
Thompson challenged the double standard between coverage of Georgetown players and Mullin, and the notion that the Hoyas played undisciplined basketball. “We play basketball and we play aggressively,” Thompson told reporters in Pullman, Washington on March 17, 1984. “If Chris Mullin hustles, he’s tough. If Gene Smith hustles, he’s dirty.”

Four years earlier, Thompson tackled the portrayal of his team as undisciplined: “that means nigger. They’re all big and fast and can leap like kangaroos and eat watermelon in the locker room…It’s the idea that a black man doesn’t have the intelligence or the character to practice self-control,” he told Bil Gilbert, another writer for SI. Thus, Thompson recognized the media’s treatment of his team as evidence of continued racism in the early 1980s.

One Georgetown player heavily criticized for his hostile and aggressive play was Michael Graham (See fig. 5). In the 1984 Big East tournament championship, Graham, whom Kirkpatrick labeled Georgetown’s “glowering hatchet man,” swung at Syracuse’s Andre Hawkins after struggling for a rebound. The freshman forward also took a swipe at Carl Wright from SMU in that year’s first round of the NCAA tourney. George Vecsey detailed a moment during Georgetown’s win over Dayton University two games later on March 24, 1984, in which a “shaven-headed” Graham, “who cast-in-your-face looks,” dunked the ball, turned around, and knocked his opponent Sedric Toney to the hardwood. The referees called a personal foul on Graham, but Brent Musburger, a CBS-TV anchorman, later said the Georgetown player should have been ejected. During the replay of Graham hitting Toney, an

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announcer named Billy Packer further commented, “Here is where Georgetown gets accused by many of being a bunch of thugs.” Reporters thus perpetuated an image of Graham as a threatening individual, often emphasizing his harsh stares. Moreover, journalists accused Graham and his teammates of acting thuggish for brawling on the court.

Fights broke out at several college games during the 1980s, particularly those between Big East teams. Although Kirkpatrick singled Georgetown out for causing many altercations, even he admitted that “[b]ench-clearing squabbles happen routinely in the Big East.” Still, the Hoyas became notorious for fighting. Beyond Graham, Ewing gained a reputation for throwing elbows and fists. Teams often applied double or triple man pressure to Georgetown’s star center, which at moments led to injuries as Ewing battled with other players for position near the basket. For instance, during Ewing’s sophomore year he punched Kevin Williams in the lip after scuffling with the St. John’s guard on several occasions in a heated game at Madison Square Garden. By 1988, Big East conference officials instituted penalties and suspensions for such fighting. The rule changes occurred in the wake of a game between the Hoyas and Pittsburgh that resulted in a brawl. Georgetown ultimately gained a reputation as one of the toughest and most intimidating teams in the physical Big East conference.

The terror Georgetown inspired in its opposition formed another dimension of “Hoya Paranoia.” “[Georgetown] just completely destroys people…they scare the hell out of you,” said Lou Carnesecca, the head coach for St. John’s. Rafael Addison, a forward for Syracuse, confirmed that Thompson’s players “intimidate you on and off the court. They can scare you to

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189 Access to a recording of the Georgetown versus Dayton game from March 24, 1984 was provided by the Special Collections Archive, Lauinger Library, Georgetown University, Washington, DC on April 9, 2009.
death the first time you play them.” The Hoyas and their coach’s imposing image made gaining the confidence to beat them all the more difficult. The Washington Post reporter John Feinstein noted that on top of separation from the media, Thompson and his players’ combativeness added to the prevalence of “Hoya Paranoia.” More than just the program’s strained relationship with sportswriters, the phrase came to define the trepidation other teams felt when facing off against Georgetown. “Hoya Paranoia” also represented fear of the nation’s most prominent African American basketball team during the first half of the 1980s.

The success and swaggering demeanor of Thompson and his players furthermore made them one of the most detested college programs in the country. By 1984, Georgetown became the team some loved to hate. Frank Rienzo, who identified himself as a 75-year fan of the New York Yankees, said, “Georgetown in the ’80s was like the Yankees forever.” Numerous World Series Championships made the Yankees one of the most disliked franchises to fans of other baseball organizations. Although the Hoyas never built something as enduring as the Yankee dynasty, they elicited strong disfavor while they appeared in three NCAA championships and reigned supreme in the Big East conference from 1982-1985. Intense dislike of Thompson and his players spoke further to the level of hostility directed towards a significant black team during Reagan’s first term.

In perhaps the most well articulated defense of the team, Father Healy attributed many of the attacks leveled on Thompson and his players to racism. He took particular issue with the use of terms “Hoya Paranoia” and “aggressiveness” to describe the Georgetown program.

“Basketball is a tough game, and the higher up the NCAA ladder it goes, the tougher it gets…it

197 Frank Rienzo, telephone interview by author, March 6, 2009.
doesn’t take much watching of the game to realize that ‘hustle’ and ‘aggression’ are close cousins,” wrote Father Healy in an opinion piece *The Washington Post* published on March 30, 1984—one day before Georgetown defeated the University of Kentucky in the first round of the Final Four in Seattle. Beyond defending Georgetown’s style of play, Father Healy expressed his admiration for Thompson: “many of the charges thrown at him lie along the fault line in American society, its racism. A totally successful black man…is hard for many white Americans to swallow.” “[Thompson] is a tough man born into the street realities of an inner city,” the Georgetown president added. “He knows how hard it is for 18- or 20-year-olds to work toward a sense of their own place in God’s world, of their own value and dignity, of their own strengths and weaknesses.” Father Healy attributed the fear and maligning of the Georgetown team to the antagonism felt by white Americans towards powerful blacks.

At Georgetown, Starla Williams, who graduated from the university in 1986, asserted that support for the basketball team cut across racial lines. “Everyone loved the team,” recalled Williams, president of the campus chapter of the NAACP during her senior year. As a student at Georgetown, Williams noticed separation particularly in settings such as the cafeteria between whites and blacks. She found socializing between pupils of different races sorely lacking during the mid-1980s. A notable exception occurred at basketball games. An avid fan of the Hoyas as an undergraduate, Williams remembered seeing students from the assortment of backgrounds represented at Georgetown cheering together in the Capital Centre stands. The interracial support for Georgetown basketball extended beyond the campus into DC as well.

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In the wake of the 1984 championship, a journalist for *The Hoya* named John Reagan contended that Washington area residents largely embraced the Hoyas. The team “has made Washington and its people a part of the Georgetown family,” John Reagan wrote. “‘Hoya Saxa!’ is now just as much a part of Anacostia as it is at Dumbarton Oaks”—a private park near the university’s main grounds. Just as Williams felt students of different races maintained separate social spheres, African Americans from Anacostia lived opposite the predominately white Georgetown campus in Northwest DC. Regardless, many of the Hoya players as well as their coach grew up in the city’s black communities, and found support there. John Reagan argued that through the success of his team, Thompson improved relations between Georgetown and black residents of DC.

Thompson expressed concern over reporters’ fixation on his race after his team defeated the University of Houston on April 2, 1984 to win the NCAA championship. The title game pitted Ewing and the Hoyas against Akeem Olajuwon, Alvin Franklin, and the rest of the Phi Slama Jama—the nickname bestowed during the first half of the 1980s on Houston’s basketball team due to its incredible dunking ability (see fig. 6). Georgetown led the Cougars in scoring for all but the first minutes of the first half, and beat their opponents in the end 84-75. The Hoyas’ national championship completed a record season for their program with 34 wins and three losses. After the game, a reporter inquired what Thompson thought about being the first black coach to win an NCAA title. Thompson answered, “I’m not interested in being the first or only black to do anything, because that implies that I’m also the first with ability.”

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FIGURE 6: In gray jerseys (from left to right) Reggie Williams (#34), Michael Jackson (#30), Michael Graham (#50), and Patrick Ewing (#33) apply the strong defensive pressure Georgetown became known for against Akeem Olajuwon (#35) from the University of Houston in the 1984 NCAA Championship game. (Source: Lauinger Library, Special Collections Archive, Georgetown University, Washington, DC).
When asked in 1982 how he felt as the first black coach to take his team to the NCAA Final Four, Thompson likewise replied that he found the question “insulting to my race.”

Thompson understood the significance of his achievements. Nevertheless, it bothered him in the 1980s that the media looked at his victories and deemed them noteworthy because of his race, in turn neglecting talented African American coaches before him who never had the opportunity to compete for an NCAA championship.

On April 7, 1984, days after their championship victory, DC Mayor Marion Barry and President Reagan recognized the Hoyas and their coach on the Rose Garden Lawn at the White House. Mayor Barry cited the day as a moment of celebration for all Washingtonians. Again, it seemed as though the embrace of Georgetown basketball occurred beyond the university’s campus in the majority African American sections of the city. Reagan told Thompson, “During your time at Georgetown in coaching, the overwhelming majority of your players have graduated. You have never let these young men forget that there is something more important for their being at Georgetown than basketball.” The president, in the midst of his reelection campaign and after cutting education spending in his 1981 budget, observed further that the Georgetown coach helped 42 out of his 44 recruits graduate.

Michael Graham represented a notable exception to the graduation rate mentioned by President Reagan. A year after playing a crucial role in Georgetown’s championship season, Graham transferred to the University of the District of Columbia (UDC) because he had fallen behind on his academics. Controversy emerged in the summer of 1983 after Graham signed a

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letter of intent to attend Georgetown while receiving low grades in high school. As was the case with Ewing, doubt surrounded Graham’s academic capabilities. Thompson’s critics further said the coach used Graham in order to win a national title and then sent him packing. A successful student-athlete at Providence in the early 1960s, Thompson understood the commitment needed to play college basketball and attain a degree. The coach found that “Michael had the innate intelligence to do the work [but his] biggest problem is academic motivation.” Regardless, Thompson provided Graham—like his other recruits—the opportunity to earn a diploma at Georgetown during a time when the federal government cut spending on education and student loans.

Months later on November 12, 1984, Coach Thompson and Ewing again returned to the White House to pose with Reagan for a SI cover photo. Dr. Daniel Porterfield, who graduated from Georgetown in 1983 and became a professor there in 1997, remembered disliking the picture when he saw it. As an undergraduate he established several programs working with deprived youths in DC and viewed the president as “completely unsympathetic to the needs of urban America.” “[Reagan] reflected a pre-civil rights era mindset as it related to race,” asserted Dr. Porterfield. He accepted why the President of the United States took the time to recognize the NCAA champions, but believed it was contradictory because Reagan’s policies during the 1980s harmed inner-cities where Thompson, his players, and many other African Americans resided.

In the 1984 election leading up to Reagan’s second meeting with the Hoyas at the White House, African American voters demonstrated their disapproval of the Republican president.

211 Leonard Shapiro, Big Man on Campus, 293, 295.
213 Dr. Daniel Porterfield, interview by author, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, February 2, 2009.
During 1984, the Reagan campaign produced a television ad crediting the president with 
restoring the country’s economy and confidence, and declared, “It is morning again in 
America.” Blacks who voted in that election disagreed overwhelmingly. Reagan defeated 
Democrat Walter Mondale and his running mate Geraldine Ferraro in 1984 with the largest 
electoral-vote landslide up to that time in U.S. history. The incumbent captured 49 states and 
nearly sixty percent of the popular vote. He lost in only one state, Minnesota, as well as the 
District of Columbia. However, out of the 55.8 percent of eligible blacks who voted for 
president that year, nearly nine in ten cast their ballots for the Democratic ticket, according to an 
ABC News exit poll taken after the election. The same poll also found that 63 percent of white 
voters pulled the lever, so-to-speak, for Reagan in 1984—compared to 55 percent in 1980. Whereas in 1980 voters supported Reagan mainly out of dissatisfaction with Jimmy Carter, four 
years later the number of “Reagan Democrats” increased with many Americans approving of the 
president’s first term performance. Nonetheless, Reagan’s reelection was far from a landslide in 
terms of ballots cast by black Americans.

The SI photo shoot at the White House on November 12th thus marked a physical 
convergence between the Hoyas and a president who African American voters strongly 
disapproved of. Over the course of Reagan’s first term, Georgetown basketball experienced 
criticism from the media and racism on the court while competing for NCAA titles. Similarly to 
how photographer Lane Stewart described Ewing as deathly terrifying, Coach Thompson and 
his program became seen as intimidating and thuggish. Supporters of the Hoyas like Father 
Healy claimed that basketball by nature was a physical game. Detractors said that Georgetown

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216 Table 1-3, “The Demographics/ USA Results,” in *The 84 Vote*, edited by Carolyn Smith, 42.
played overaggressive and dirty. Regardless, the perception of Coach Thompson and his players as frightening revealed white America’s unwillingness to embrace a powerful black team that did things its own way—that refused to allow interviews or apologize for playing their style of basketball. The backlash to the way Thompson coached his program in many ways paralleled the conservative backlash Reagan led against social spending. At the same time that negative portrayals of Georgetown basketball appeared in the media, Reagan invoked the “welfare queen” myth in order to raise concern among “Reagan Democrats” that programs such as AFDC awarded preferential treatment to African Americans. Meanwhile, minorities in Washington supported Coach Thompson and his players. They were not alone. Blacks across the country would come to embrace the Georgetown team at the same time that they found Reagan opposed to their concerns.

On April 1, 1985, the Hoyas—in their third NCAA championship appearance in four seasons—lost by a score of 66-64 to the Villanova Wildcats, who pulled off the incredible upset by making nearly 80 percent of their shots. Arguably a better team that year than in 1984, Georgetown finished with a record of 35-3 in Ewing’s final amateur season. The National Association of Basketball Coaches (NABC) recognized Thompson as coach of the year in 1985. While he continued recruiting talented players and competing in the Big East, Thompson’s program never realized the same success that it enjoyed from 1982-1985 during the rest of the Reagan years. Despite never returning to the White House as national champions, though, the Georgetown team continued to cross paths with the president during his second term.

219 Michael Douchant, Encyclopedia of College Basketball, 541.
Ch.4 Pulling Out the Raygun: Reagan, Race and the Hoyas, 1983-1989

Much like criticism of the Hoyas, Reagan’s policies informed how African Americans supported the team. The president frustrated black leaders and members of the Georgetown campus by opposing civil rights legislation. Black residents of DC and other inner cities furthermore faced increasing rates of joblessness, drug use, and crime. African American youths in particular suffered. In 1989, a year after he received continued criticism from the press as head coach of the U.S. Olympic basketball team, Thompson protested Proposition 42, an NCAA regulation he felt threatened minority student-athletes ability to afford college. He also confronted Rayful Edmond III, who federal and local police arrested in 1989 on charges of dealing large quantities of drugs in the Washington area. Meanwhile hip-hop heads expressed defiant attitude towards authority figures like Reagan. In 1988 Carlton “Chuck D” Ridenhour even demanded the impeachment of the president he referred to as “Raygun.” At the same time, “Chuck D” and other hip-hop aficionados championed the Hoyas and their coach. The Georgetown basketball team ultimately became symbolic of a rejection of Reaganism.

As a conservative politician in California in the 1960s, Reagan opposed civil rights legislation for impinging on states’ rights but denied claims that he harbored racist sentiments. Along with Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater—for whom Reagan campaigned in the 1964 presidential election—he disagreed with the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. In 1964 he also supported Proposition 14, which sought to overturn the Rumford Fair Housing Act, an antidiscrimination law in California’s public housing. Matthew Dallek explains that Reagan believed such civil rights legislation contradicted his conservative values and resulted in excessive government entanglement in the power of states and the lives of
individuals. To the shock of liberal Democrat leaders like Governor Edmund “Pat” Brown, Proposition 14 passed with over four and a half million Californians approving. The state’s Supreme Court later ruled Proposition 14 unconstitutional and reinstated Rumford. While running against Brown in 1966, Reagan’s critics equated his anti-civil rights stances with racism. The Republican candidate demurred. When George Christopher, an equal rights advocate, made such an assertion during the campaign, Reagan exploded: “I resent the implication that there is any bigotry in my nature.” He went on to pummel Brown on November 8, 1966 by over one million votes to become California’s 33rd Governor. As President of the United States in the 1980s, Reagan continued to challenge civil rights measures, which frequently set him in opposition to African American leaders, and again raised calls that he was racist.

In 1983 Reagan alarmed civil rights leaders when he hesitated to sign into law what the president viewed as a costly federal holiday to honor Martin Luther King. North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms—a onetime defender of segregation—opposed the enactment of the holiday on the grounds that King had communist sympathies. “Well, we’ll know in about 35 years, won’t we?” Reagan asked in reference to sealed Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) files on King that Senator Helms sought to open. Reagan had strongly opposed socialism and communism since the 1950s, and with the Cold War ongoing in the early 1980s, he refused to denounce opponents of the national day to celebrate King’s legacy. When he received criticism for his statement siding with Helms, Reagan called the widowed Coretta Scott King to explain and personally apologize. An official in the administration then claimed that Reagan challenged

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220 Matthew Dallek, *The Right Moment*, 188.
the bill not because of any unproven charges of communist ties, but because he wanted a less expensive means of remembering King than giving all federal employees another day of the year off from work. Similarly to his position on the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Voting Rights Act of 1965 and Proposition 14, Reagan claimed to dispute the King Holiday as a conservative concerned about cost as well as the size and scope of government.

Reagan nonetheless angered African Americans across the country by joining Senator Helms in questioning King’s integrity. Biographer Lou Cannon notes that he further provoked public outrage when he asserted that King relieved the U.S. from “the burden of racism.” Only miles away from the White House, Ewing experience offered evidence of enduring racism in the 1980s. On November 2, 1983 Reagan joined Coretta Scott King, the Reverend Jesse Jackson Jr. and other civil rights leaders and members of Congress on the Rose Garden Lawn to certify the King Holiday. Rev. Jackson—a colleague of King’s during the 1960s that ran unsuccessfully against Walter Mondale in the 1984 Democratic presidential primary—commended Reagan, who acknowledged the prevalence of bigotry in America at the signing.

A year before his reelection in which African Americans voted nine to one against the president, Reagan reluctantly ratified the legislation to honor the slain civil rights leader. Still, his initial lukewarm approval and defense of Helms’ comments raised doubts about the sincerity of his concern for issues important to black America, especially antidiscrimination, affirmative action, and anti-apartheid measures.

A push for antidiscrimination legislation appeared in the aftermath of the Supreme Court’s Grove City College v. Bell decision on February 28, 1984. In their ruling, the court’s

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227 Lou Cannon, President Reagan, 523-524.
majority determined that penalties for breaking sexual discrimination laws, rather than applying
to an entire academic institution, applied only to specific programs within universities and
colleges which received federal funds.\textsuperscript{229} The high court’s findings had the potential to carry
over to cases involving discrimination against the elderly, disabled, and minorities. In response,
lawmakers and civil rights proponents supported a bill to overturn the Grove City College
decision, which died on the Senate floor on October 2, 1984. The \textit{Congressional Quarterly
Almanac} for that year states that the legislation’s death “was a victory for the Reagan
administration,” and for conservatives who believed that the measure represented an unnecessary
growth of government authority. “Shame on this body,” said Senator Edward Kennedy from
Massachusetts, a key sponsor of the bill. “If we table this civil rights amendment, we are saying
we will tuck discrimination under the mattress until next year.”\textsuperscript{230}

Nearly four years later Congress promptly overrode Reagan’s veto of the Civil Rights
Restoration Act of 1988, which reversed the Grove City College ruling. The Civil Rights
Restoration Act subjected entire colleges, universities, and other public and private school
systems to penalties for discriminating on the basis of gender, age, disability, and race. On
March 16, 1988, the president rejected the legislation on the grounds that it “would vastly and
unjustifiably expand the power of the Federal government.”\textsuperscript{231} Reagan argued that the Civil
Rights Restoration Act intruded in the decision making of the private sector and religious
institutions. As an alternative he sent a bill back to Congress entitled the Civil Rights Protection
Act, which exempted organizations identifying with a religion from antidiscrimination

\textsuperscript{229} \textit{Lou Cannon, President Reagan}, 524.
\textsuperscript{230} \textit{“Grove City’ Rights Bill Shelved by Senate,” Congressional Quarterly Almanac 1984} (vol.40, 1985), 239.
\textsuperscript{231} \textit{“President Vetoes Civil Rights Bill, Outlines His Alternative,” 1988 Congressional Quarterly Almanac} (vol.44, 1989), 14-C.
regulations. Six days later both chambers of Congress overturned the president’s veto. Once more Reagan attempted but failed to block civil rights legislation during his presidency. The passage of the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1988—much like the adoption of the King Holiday—revealed a moment when again he clashed with African American leaders.

Affirmative action marked another civil rights issue Reagan and William Bradford Reynolds—appointed by the president to head the Justice Department’s civil rights division—fought Congress over during the second half of the decade. The Senate Judiciary Committee on June 27, 1985 refused to confirm Reynolds after heads of numerous civil rights groups testified against the nominee during the committee’s proceedings. Among other issues, they criticized Reynolds for opposing affirmative action programs. Nicholas Laham argues that following his landslide victory over Mondale in 1984, Reagan began his second term by attacking affirmative action programs. The president, and many of his ideological supporters, believed such programs resulted in “reverse discrimination” whereby qualified whites lost opportunities for the sake of hiring specific numbers of minorities. According to Laham, though, efforts by civil rights leaders and even voices within Reagan’s cabinet, led him to largely back off on the effort to reform affirmative action by the spring of 1986. While affirmative action remained partially intact, the fight waged by Reagan and Reynolds put the administration further at odds with civil rights advocates.

Disagreement over affirmative action occurred at Georgetown during Reagan’s second term as the university looked to increase the number of minority faculty hires. During the fall of 1984 University Provost J. Donald Freeze, S.J. funded a workshop to address racism and
discrimination on campus. The following year The Hoya reported that he proposed to implement a “Five Year Plan,” which among other initiatives, promised to increase minority hires from the less than ten already employed. The so-called “hiring quotas” spurred debate on campus. While The Hoya editorial board endorsed Father Freeze’s proposal, members of the Georgetown University Student Association (GUSA)—student representatives elected by their peers—passed a resolution condemning the “Five Year Plan.” Two students from the class of 1986, Kevin McGrath, who sponsored the resolution, and GUSA president Mark Ouweleen, argued that the “Plan” implied “a form of quota and would be reverse discrimination.” The student leaders thus echoed the concerns of the Reagan administration when they contended that affirmative action threatened to limit white professors’ access to positions at Georgetown for the sake of fulfilling diversity requirements.

Certain African American student leaders on campus also spoke out against the Father Freeze’s proposal. “The concept of affirmative action is limited by the use of quotas,” asserted Starla Williams, then president of Georgetown’s NAACP chapter. Well aware of the administration’s commitment to diversification beyond the Athletic Department, Williams received phone calls during her senior year of high school from several Georgetown admissions officers encouraging her to apply to the university on the basis of her impressive academic performance. The Hoya however failed to clarify Williams’ comments regarding the proposed quotas. Over two decades later she drew a distinction between her logic and that of McGrath and Ouweleen, who cited Williams and sophomore Barry Hargrove—president of the BSA—in

236 Mary Carroll Johansen, “Five Year Plan Calls For Minority Faculty Hiring Quotas,” The Hoya September 13, 1985, p.1.
240 Starla Williams, interview by author.
241 Black Student Alliance.
explaining their condemnation of the “Five Year Plan.” Whereas the latter two students opposed affirmative action, Williams supported it. She in fact believed that quotas undermined the goal of affirmative action by emphasizing a specific number of hires rather than providing every qualified minority the opportunity to join Georgetown’s faculty.242

Despite the dissent among student leaders, Georgetown went ahead with its “Five Year Plan.” “Affirmative action must begin by changing [Georgetown’s] attitude,” explained Father Freeze to students, faculty, and administrators at the beginning of the 1986 spring semester. He explained that the university’s goal was to increase the number of African American professors and students. At that time blacks comprised 8 percent of the entire student body. Father Freeze also said Georgetown planned to convene a committee consisting of twelve faculty members to focus on integrating more African American studies into course material and syllabi.243 While Congress turned down Reynolds’ nomination and Reagan relented on initial efforts against affirmative action during his second term, Georgetown worked further to encourage diversity both in classrooms and among faculty hires. The debate that occurred at Georgetown thus mirrored larger disputes in America during the 1980s about affirmative action and equal opportunity for minorities.

In 1986 Georgetown experienced another significant aspect of race relations in the decade when students demanded that the university divest in companies with ties to South Africa where apartheid persisted. After a rally on Thursday April 24, 1986, students constructed a shantytown outside White-Gravenor Hall—located on the north end of the university’s front lawn—and renamed the building “The Jimmy Lee Jackson Freedom College” after a civil rights

\[242\] Starla Williams, telephone interview by author, March 12, 2009.
worker shot and killed by Alabama police during the 1960s.星拉·威廉斯，参与了此次示威，将其描述为多民族的事业。“我们真的想让我们的学校作为一个天主教机构，作为耶稣会的机构站起来”并承诺进行撤资，她说。

据威廉斯称，学生们在感到政府忽视了他们对少数族裔招聘的担忧以及对南非的投资后，开始在校园内变得激进。

这样的坐地示威和棚屋建设在全美各地展开，以唤起人们对种族隔离制度的认识并反对美国对南非的商业利益。在里根于1984年连任总统后，每天都有示威在华盛顿特区的南非总领事馆外举行。名流和非裔美国领导人如牧师杰克逊加入到在首都的示威中。这样的抗议活动在12个月内导致了5000多名抗议者被捕，记者将这一运动与1960年代声势浩大的青年民权运动相比。

根据大学官员的命令，校园安全，被称为乔治城大学保护服务（GUPS），与DC警官合作逮捕示威者。一些35名学生被戴上手铐，被带到附近停放的警车，一边唱歌“我们将克服”。GUPS官员后来摧毁了棚屋城镇。院长学生事务的约翰·J·迪乔亚——他在2001年成为大学校长——在给教员的一封信中解释了困扰他们的问题。

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244 Rob Nau, “SCAR, PSU Rally Against University,” The Hoya, April 18, 1986, 1.
245 Starla Williams, interview by author.
arrests of students that he feared for the safety of protestors, noting recent attacks on shantytown participants at the University of Utah, Dartmouth College, and Pennsylvania State University. On May 23, 1986 The Hoya reported that the DC Superior Court dropped all charges against arrested Georgetown students at DeGioia’s request. Furthermore, the following fall Georgetown became the first Jesuit institution to heed the recommendations of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops by withdrawing all holdings in companies with business ties to South Africa, which comprised one-sixth—roughly $30 million—of the university’s total investments. Administrators denied any connection between the divestment and protests from the previous April. Like many other schools and cities during the mid-1980s, though, Georgetown experienced the increasing uproar over America’s ties to South Africa; and likewise terminated such connections as Congress did in 1986 despite Reagan’s dissent.

On Capitol Hill a battle ensued between the president and Ron Dellums, a Democrat Congressman from California, along with other members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), who moved economic sanctions on South Africa to the top of their agendas by 1980. Reagan and some of his top foreign policy advisers opposed such measures. His ambassador to the United Nations Dr. Jeanne Kirkpatrick—a former Georgetown professor and onetime Democrat turned conservative Republican—was quoted in 1981 by The Economist “observing that racial dictatorship was not as bad as Marxist dictatorship.” Calls for Ambassador Kirkpatrick’s resignation came after she met with South African military leaders on March 25, 1981 despite a U.N. arms embargo on the country.

251 Francis Njubi Nesbitt, Race for Sanctions, 139.
253 Francis Njubi Nesbitt, Race for Sanctions, 114.
adviser Richard Allen likewise wanted to maintain relations with South Africa in order to gain access to strategic minerals from the country. Mounting pressure by the mid-1980s, even from within the Republican Party, forced Reagan to reconsider his stance and denounce apartheid in South Africa. On September 9, 1985 he issued Executive Order 12532 which prohibited the export of computers and nuclear technology to South Africa as well as the import of Krugerrands, or gold coins from the country. The order’s provisions, however, echoed those included in a bill sponsored by Pennsylvania Representative William Gray, which the House passed months before on June 5, 1985. Francis Njubi Nesbitt asserts in her book about the effort for sanctions on South Africa that Reagan’s “actions were superfluous and clearly designed to save face…and forestall congressional action.” When the issue of penalizing South Africa for its maintenance of apartheid again came across the president’s desk a year later, he vetoed the legislation.

On October 2, 1986 Congress overrode Reagan’s veto of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Bill, which implemented strict sanctions on South Africa. Rep. Dellum and the CBC had fought for such measures since the early 1970s. In fact, Dellums introduced an act with many of the provisions of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Bill alongside Rep. Gray’s more moderate piece of legislation in 1985. When he reintroduced the so-called “Dellums bill” in 1986, Republicans in the House stepped aside, believing it too extreme to ever pass a vote. They were mistaken. Congress approved Dellums’ measure, which ultimately called for the creation of a democratic government in South Africa, an end to apartheid, and the release of political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela. The bill also banned future investment in

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254 “Africa: Certainly Not Neglected,” 34.
South Africa and air travel to and from the country. Reagan vetoed the measure on September 26, 1986 and argued that economic sanctions caused more harm to blacks suffering under apartheid. Three days later the House overturned the president’s veto with the Senate following suit on October 2nd. Congress’ rebuke represented a significant foreign policy setback for the Reagan administration. It also marked the first override of a presidential veto on international affairs since 1973. As was the case in his challenges to the King Holiday and the later Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1988, Reagan failed to prevent Congress from establishing sanctions on South Africa. Regardless, it revealed another instance when he stood in opposition to civil rights legislation, African Americans, and their representatives.

In 1987, a year after Congress’ noteworthy reversal of the president’s veto on the “Dellums bill,” Public Enemy released their first album, Yo! Bum Rush the Show in which the influential hip-hop group from New York denounced the government’s ties to South Africa. In “Timebomb,” the fourth track on the debut recording, “Chuck D”—a founding member of Public Enemy—rapped, “I’m a MC protector, U.S. defector, South African government wrecker. Panther power—you can feel it in my arm. Look out y’all, cause I’m a timebomb tickin’!”

“Chuck D” branded himself as a rapper MC, or master of ceremonies, while expressing discontent as a black youth with America and its politics. He invoked the Black Power movement of the 1960s and its emphasis on strength and racial pride. “Chuck D” took particular issue with the South African government. Lisa “Sister Souljah” Williamson joined Public Enemy in 1990, but in the 1980s she “was one of the most visible student leaders” and activists.

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in the anti-apartheid movement, according to journalist Jeff Chang.\textsuperscript{262} “Chuck D” and “Sister Souljah,” along with the founders of the Freedom College at Georgetown, reacted to the Reagan administration’s pre-civil rights mentality by identifying with the bygone 1960s movement for equality. Public Enemy became known not only for its catchy and controversial lyrics, but also its members’ political consciousness. The hip-hop group further represented one of the most outspoken critics of Reagan, and at various times during the 1980s protested along with other youths, apartheid in South Africa.

Hip-hop was a cultural movement stressing style and defiant attitude that emerged out of urban minority communities, particularly in New York City, in the late 1970s. Black and Latino youths initiated the cultural force, which spread across the country by the end of decade; but maintained its roots in inner cities. A journalist named Bakari Kitwana defined what he called the “hip-hop generation” as African Americans born between 1965 and 1984.\textsuperscript{263} While individuals from various backgrounds took part in the movement, it increasingly became associated with the musical expressions of black youths. In its nascent state during the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, hip-hop culture embraced graffiti writing, break dancing, disc jockeying, and emceeing or rapping. All four actions carried a unifying emphasis on style. The narrator of a documentary released in 1983 entitled Style Wars, which detailed the New York hip-hop scene, summed up the ambitions of the culture’s early adherents:

The idea of style and competing for the best style is the key to all forms of rocking. For the rap MC, it’s rocking the mic. For the b-boys, it’s rocking your body and break dancing. Or, for writers, rocking the city with your name on a train.\textsuperscript{264}

\textsuperscript{262} Jeff Chang, \textit{Can’t Stop Won’t Stop}, 275.
\textsuperscript{264} \textit{Style Wars}, directed by Henry Chalfant and Tony Silver, 70 minutes, Passion River Studios, re-released in 2005, DVD.
What ever medium one used to identify with hip-hop, they strived to rock: to be the most stylish and unique. They craved recognition, especially from others within the culture. Beyond searching for acknowledgement, hip-hop heads conveyed rebellious attitude. One graffiti writer in Style Wars named SKEME explained his motivation: “I’m out here to bomb. Period…Destroy all lines.” Bombing for artists meant setting out under cover of darkness to paint a tag, or piece, on various surfaces. SKEME and others alike were criminals. They defaced public property. As a result, they kept their identities hidden by using pseudonyms. But, after a night of bombing, graffitists woke up the next day hoping to see their art on the side of a train as it barreled through the transit veins of New York. Their refusal to stop painting signaled the underlying ethos of hip-hop, which entailed a determination to remain uncompromising and demand attention.

The progression of song lyrics from “Rapper’s Delight” to “The Message” to “Rebel Without a Pause” spoke further to the defiance of authority characteristic of hip-hop during the 1980s. Lyrics in “Rapper’s Delight”, a song written by the Sugarhill Gang in 1979, celebrated sex with women, partying, and America:

I said a hip hop the hippie to the hippie
The hip hip hop, a you don’t stop
The rock it to the bang bang boogie
Say you up jumped the boogie
To the rhythm of the boogie the beat
Skiddlee bebop we rock a Scoobie Doo
And guess what America, we love you

Although “Rapper’s Delight” received recognition as a precursory mainstream success of hip-hop, Sugarhill Gang’s song contrasted tracks of the genre from the early 1980s with bolder attitude. For instance, in 1983 Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five—the hip-hop group

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whose name Curry Kirkpatrick applied to Coach Thompson and the Hoyas in his coverage of the 1984 Big East tournament—recorded “The Message,” which described urban decay:

Broken glass everywhere
People pissing on the stairs, you know they just don’t care…
Rats in the front room, roaches in the back
Junkies in the alley with a baseball bat…
Don’t push me, ‘cause I’m close to the edge
I’m trying not to lose my head
It’s like a jungle sometimes, it makes me wonder
How I keep from going under

Grandmaster Flash equated his neighborhood to a jungle. Trash littered the sidewalk. People carelessly urinated and discarded their filth. Crime and drug addicts filled the streets. On edge and ready to snap, the artist warned his listener: “Don’t push me.” Then in 1988, Public Enemy articulated an even more defiant attitude in the song “Rebel Without a Pause” in which “Chuck D” called for the removal from office of the nation’s chief executive:

Impeach the president
Pulling out the Raygun (Reagan)
Zap the next one

Reagan thus represented a central figure that the lyricist “Chuck D” condemned as hip-hop expressed more and more swagger.

While attending Adelphi University in Garden City, New York in 1982—six years before recording “Rebel Without a Pause” as “Chuck D”—Carlton Ridenhour criticized Reagan for poverty on city streets. During his junior year, from 1982-1983, the future hip-hop star drew a running comic strip entitled “Tales of the Skind” for the student newspaper The Delphian. In one episode of the cartoon he caricatured Reagan as the villainous “President Pruneface” whom superheroes forced to see the homeless on America’s streets. “Come President Pruneface and

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267 Public Enemy, Rebel Without a Pause, Def Jam Records, 1988. As cited in Jeff Chang, Can’t Stop Won’t Stop, 261.
view the scenery of a vast economic wasteland,” demanded one character to the kidnapped politician. “There, countless individuals down and out, because of your budget errors and unfulfilled promises!”

One year after Reagan signed the 1981 budget that cut social spending, Ridenhour blamed the president for poverty in inner cities. Other hip-hop heads beyond Public Enemy’s future front man similarly held Reagan responsible for deteriorating urban conditions and neglecting poor African Americans.

For instance, in 1988 Tupac Shakur, a widely regarded rapper during his career, likewise chided Reagan for problems he encountered growing up. “I spent eight years of my seventeen years on this earth under Republicans, under Ronald Reagan,” Shakur explained, “under an ex-actor who lies to the people, who steals money, and who’s done nothing at all for me.”

Shakur’s quote appeared in a book written about his life by Dr. Michael Eric Dyson—hired as a professor of sociology at Georgetown in 2007. The rapper referenced Reagan’s Hollywood and television acting career, which began in 1937 and lasted into the 1960s. In the 1990s Shakur acted in several Hollywood productions himself while also becoming a seminal figure in gangster rap, a subgenre of hip-hop that grew in popularity during the 1990s. He played a drug dealer named Birdie in Above the Rim, a film released in 1994 that dramatized inner city crime and poverty, and ultimately concluded with a cameo by Coach Thompson and the Hoyas.

Before his commercial success, though, Shakur lived a troubled life. His mother Afeini Shakur, a Black Panther during the 1960s, suffered from homelessness and addiction to crack cocaine. Along with “Chuck D,” Shakur charged the president in 1988 with being apathetic about the

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268 Carlton Ridenhour, “Tales of the Skind,” The Delphian, November 10, 1982, 17. (Access to the comic was provided courtesy of the Adelphi University Archives and Special Collections, Adelphi University, Garden City, New York.).


270 Matthew Dallek, The Right Moment, 30-32, 35, 60, 70.

271 Above the Rim, directed by Jeff Pollack, 1 hour 36 minutes, New Line Cinema, 1994, DVD.

272 Michael Eric Dyson, Holler if You Hear Me, 71.
problems of urban black America, which included poverty, narcotics and crime—all issues that the Georgetown basketball team and its coach confronted as well.

Sociologist William Julius Wilson outlined how economic transformations during the 1980s threatened the employment options available to inner city African Americans. In 1987 he published a study of America’s “underclass”—a term the author defined as city dwelling blacks suffering from high rates of joblessness and crime in their communities. Wilson argued that while racism continued, it alone represented a poor explanation for the expansion of the “underclass.” The racism thesis, he asserted, ignored the emergence of a “modern industrial economy” in urban areas, which replaced family-wage manufacturing jobs with low-skilled, low-paying service industry jobs. Insufficient training and education in turn left many in the “underclass” struggling to provide for their families and to find work.

In 1983, the percentage of unemployed African Americans reached a decade-high 19.5 percent—compared to 8.6 percent among whites that same year, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. For much of the 1980s the percentage of unemployed blacks hovered around fifteen percent, anywhere from seven and ten points higher than jobless rates among white Americans. Moreover, a 1988 House of Representatives committee on Children, Youth and Families reported that in 1987 the gap between the rich and poor reached a forty year high. The committee also found homelessness at its highest rate in 1988 since the Great Depression.

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273 William Julius Wilson, The Truly Disadvantaged, 6-8.
274 William Julius Wilson, The Truly Disadvantaged, 10-13, 121-126.
Thus, the 1980s meant further economic instability and unemployment for impoverished, urban dwelling African Americans.

Black children in particular suffered economic hardship during the Reagan years. In its report on family trends, the House committee noted that, “one out of five American children lived in poverty—a 24% increase over 1979—compared to one out of nine adults.” Even more striking, the committee identified one in two African American children as poor.279 William Julius Wilson, repudiating claims made by Charles Murray in Losing Ground, added that three-fourths of black youths living in poverty resided in households headed by a single mother.280 Both the House committee’s report and Wilson’s findings made the argument at the end of the 1980s that Reaganism failed in the lives of black youths and their families.

As many African American children struggled, Coach Thompson protested NCAA rules he perceived as a further impediment to minority youths’ access to college. On January 14, 1989 Thompson walked out of a game against Boston College after the NCAA passed Proposition 42, which the coach believed unfairly limited poor minority student-athletes’ ability to acquire financial aid. Six years before, the NCAA ratified Proposition 48, which stated, among other provisions, that in order for athletic recruits to compete during their freshman year of college, they had to attain a score of 700 out of 1600 on the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT)—a standardized test taken for U.S. college admissions—and a minimum high school grade point average of 2.0.281 Enacted in January of 1989, Proposition 42 denied financial aid to students who failed to meet the requirements of Proposition 48. Thompson protested the NCAA measure

279 U.S. Congress, House of Representatives Committee on Children, Youth, and Families, Children and Families: Key Trends in the 1980s, 11. Also see: Lou Cannon, President Reagan, 24.
which he felt discriminated against African American recruits from the lowest stratum of society. He argued that the SAT “had been proven to be culturally biased” as poor black students statistically received low scores on the exam.\footnote{Mark Chubb, “Thompson Walkout Sparks NCAA Dispute,” \textit{The Hoya}, January 17, 1989, 1-2.}

Paul Evans, another Big East coach, as well as Georgetown administrators agreed with Thompson on the unfairness of Proposition 42, which the NCAA eventually overturned. Evans, who coached at the University of Pittsburgh—a Georgetown rival\footnote{As noted in Ch.3, a fight between Georgetown and Pittsburgh players during a game in 1988 led the Big East to establish punishments for such conduct. See: Molly Solomon, “Big East Uses Suspensions to Discourage Fighting,” \textit{The Hoya}, February 26, 1988, 1.}—told \textit{The Washington Post} he supported Thompson and that “[Proposition 42] is the most racist decision I’ve ever seen made.”\footnote{Dave Sell and Jim Brady, “Coaches Agree With Protest: Pittsburgh’s Evans: ‘The Most Racist Decision’ by NCAA,” \textit{The Washington Post}, January 14, 1989, sec. D, 1.} Beyond Evans, Georgetown officials like Father Healy, Frank Rienzo, and student writers for \textit{The Hoya} applauded Thompson’s protest.\footnote{Mark Chubb, “Thompson Walkout Sparks NCAA Dispute,” \textit{The Hoya}, January 17, 1989, 2. See also: “Block That Prop,” and “The Walk of Life,” \textit{The Hoya}, January 17, 1989, 4.} Officials within the NCAA eventually announced their plan to reevaluate Proposition 42. Satisfied with their commitment, Thompson returned to coaching the Hoyas on January 21, 1989.\footnote{Mike Carlowicz, “Thompson Ends NCAA Protest, \textit{The Hoya}, January 27, 1989, 1.} Thompson therefore made a successful stand against restrictions he viewed as biased towards African American youths at the end of the Reagan years—a decade in which a House committee found half of all black children suffering from poverty.

Thompson imparted to his players the value of education and hard work. He famously kept a deflated basketball in his office to remind his team that its days playing the sport would eventually come to an end.\footnote{Michael Wilbon, “John Thompson: Georgetown Coach Eschews the Hard Sell in Attracting Prize Recruits to Campus,” \textit{The Washington Post}, sec. D, 6.} In order to succeed he admonished, youths needed to look beyond the court. “Put yourself in a position of power where you can create a need for yourself that has
an economic effect on somebody,” Thompson explained his advice for players to sportswriter Dave Kindred.\(^{288}\) On top of the home purchased for him by alumni in 1980, Thompson earned a high salary from Georgetown and signed numerous product endorsements, including one with Nike.\(^{289}\) A successful businessman in his own right, he watched many of his players also go on to excel in their professional endeavors. Beyond NBA stars like Ewing, two individuals from the 1984 championship team, Fred Brown and Ralph Dalton, became entrepreneurs themselves.\(^{290}\) Furthermore by 1990, 57 out of the 59 players who finished four seasons in Thompson’s program graduated.\(^{291}\) This high graduation rate ignored individuals like Michael Graham, who transferred to another school before completing his degree at Georgetown. Still, Starla Williams recalled broadcasters routinely citing Thompson’s success graduating players.\(^{292}\) In 1984 Reagan even commended the head coach for his commitment to education. While many black children faced poverty during the 1980s, Thompson and his team became visible examples of college educated African Americans with financial success.

In absence of job opportunities or access to education, some urban youths turned to selling drugs during the 1980s. As sociologists Craig Reinarman and Harry Levine explain, smoking crack—made by heating a mixture of cocaine, water and baking soda—offered a cheap and brief, yet strongly intoxicating and addictive high. Although present in the U.S. since the 1970s, the use of crack grew in the next decade especially within inner cities. Reinarman and Levine account for the drug’s rise in the mid-1980s due to “a huge workforce of unemployed young people ready to take jobs in the new, neighborhood-based business of crack preparation


\(^{289}\) Leonard Shapiro, Big Man on Campus, 9, 159, 278.


\(^{291}\) Dave Kindred, “Saint John?” 93.

\(^{292}\) Starla Williams, interview by author.
and sales."293 Thus, the expansion of the “underclass” detailed by Wilson and the poverty among African American youth noted by the House committee report, contributed to an urban drug economy often centered on the production and consumption of crack, which in turn led to rising rates of addiction, crime, and death.

The highly publicized cocaine overdose of University of Maryland basketball star Len Bias in 1986 prompted the passage of legislation that established racially disparate penalties for drug possession. Bias died on June 19, 1986, days after the Boston Celtics selected him as their number two pick in the first round of the NBA draft.294 The shocking death of Bias and his promising future as professional athlete added to the political expediency of combating drugs. With midterm elections taking place the following month, Congress passed a $1.7 million drug bill, which Reagan signed on October 17, 1986.295 The measure established mandatory minimum prison terms, ranging from five to 40 years for possession of 500 grams of cocaine or 5 grams of crack.296 The disparity in sentencing between the two drugs created a racial imbalance as whites represented the primary consumers of more expensive powder cocaine whereas inner city minorities comprised the chief sellers and purchasers of crack.297 The 1980s thus saw increasing rates of incarceration among African American males. By 1990, more black men were behind bars than were in college.298 The government’s response to the Bias tragedy and

296 “Congress Clears Massive Anti-Drug Measure,” 98.
growing concern about narcotics resulted in disparate prison sentences for urban black youths who participated in the drug economy due to a dearth of other opportunities.

Despite continued efforts to deter the sale and use of drugs, some argued that Reagan largely failed in his anti-drug campaign by the end of his second term. During his last year in office in 1988, the president signed another major bill which authorized $2.7 billion to combat drugs. The legislation also established the Office of National Drug Control Policy as a Cabinet-level office to lead the so-called War on Drugs. The president’s wife Nancy Reagan played a key role in the initiative to curb demand for narcotics, championing a “Just Say No” campaign encouraging youths to abstain from drug experimentation. Reagan’s Secretary of Health and Human Services Otis R. Bowen, however, stated his pessimism about the effectiveness of the War on Drugs.²⁹⁹ Lou Cannon adds that even though Reagan dedicated vast sums of money and resources, “the magnitude of the drug problem, especially in the inner cities, was at least as great when Reagan left office as when he entered it.”³⁰⁰

The arrest and subsequent trial of gang leader Rayful Edmond III at the end of the 1980s revealed the extent of the drug problem in Washington, DC. On April 17, 1989 a joint investigation between the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), FBI, and DC police ended in the apprehension of sixteen members of a local drug dealing organization headed by Edmond. Prosecutors charged the gang with committing 30 homicides and distributing cocaine and crack in excess of 200 kilograms, or 440 pounds, per week in the District—as much as twenty percent of the city’s drug trade.³⁰¹ The federal investigation claimed that the cocaine supplied by the Edmond organization came from Los Angeles, California by way of drug cartels in Colombia.

³⁰⁰ Lou Cannon, President Reagan, 25, 813.
During the opening statements of the trial, the prosecution described Edmond as the president of “one of the largest business enterprises in the Washington, DC area.” The prosecution further alleged that with millions procured from selling narcotics, defendants paid for expensive cars, clothing, and trips to New York City. In order to protect jurors, Judge Charles R. Richey demanded that their names be kept secret—the first anonymous jury in Washington criminal history. Furthermore, bulletproof panels at the U.S. District Courthouse partitioned spectators off from the trial proceedings. Such security measures spoke to the level of danger attributed to Edmond and the other defendants accused of taking part in a massive drug dealing operation in DC.

Before his arrest, Edmond had befriended Alonzo Mourning and John Turner, two players for the Georgetown team he ardently followed. Coach Thompson received praise for allegedly telling Edmond to stay away from his basketball team. In April 1989 Thompson explained to ABC host Ted Koppel that federal agents questioned both Mourning and Turner about their interactions with the accused drug dealer. The two players had gone to a local nightclub in Washington with Edmond and his entourage. In the aftermath, Thompson “sent the word out on the street that” he wanted to speak with Edmond. The coach reportedly told the infamous drug dealer to stay away from the players and he complied. A writer for *The Hoya* applauded Thompson for meeting privately with Edmond, and for protecting Mourning and Turner from a possible death like that of Len Bias. Although it remained unclear what the coach communicated to the drug dealer, the report of their face-to-face encounter indicated the

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level of respect Thompson commanded in DC, even among the city’s worst criminals. Similarly to his protest of Proposition 42 for limiting black students’ access to college, Thompson addressed drugs, another roadblock to the success of many urban minority youths during the 1980s.

Alongside rising poverty and problems with drugs, crime rose in inner cities by the end of the decade. On October 11, 1984 Congress enacted the Comprehensive Crime Control Act (CCCA)—“the most far-reaching anti-crime measure” since 1968. Reagan had pressured legislators to pass the bill in his 1983 State of the Union Address, in which he demanded that “we make out cities safe again.” CCCA stressed drug enforcement by increasing fines and penalties, especially for violent crimes involving a firearm. The measure also toughened mandatory minimum sentences. Lou Cannon notes that overall national murder rates dropped somewhat during the Reagan years; however, in many inner cities those figures increased. Washington, DC represented one such city wracked by crime and drug related deaths.

High numbers of homicides in DC made the city the murder capital of America by the time Reagan left office. While the total population of Washington dropped from 635,233 residents in 1980 to 620,000 in 1988, the number of yearly murders jumped from 223 to 369 during the eight year span. Furthermore, three out of five homicides in 1988 were drug related—“a statistic the District did not even bother to keep in the year Reagan was elected president.” And while the number of yearly homicides in Washington fluctuated, dipping below 200 in 1984, 1985, and 1986, the U.S. Census Bureau found that it had 59.5 murders per

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307 Lou Cannon, President Reagan, 25.
309 Lou Cannon, President Reagan, 25.
100,000 residents in 1988—the highest rate for a metropolitan area followed closely by Detroit, Michigan for the year.\textsuperscript{310} In 1983, on the other hand, DC experienced 29.4 homicides per 100,000 residents.\textsuperscript{311}

As crime rates in Washington grew, a campaign emerged in 1985 that used images of Thompson and his players to foster better relations between police and local youths. Coca Cola sponsored the “Kids & Cops” initiative, which printed 65,000 sets of fourteen trading cards.

![Image of trading cards](image)

FIGURE 9: The first trading card in the “Kids & Cops” series, featuring Coach Thompson on the front and the campaign’s ground rules on the back. (Source: Lauinger Library, Special Collections Archive, Georgetown University, Washington, DC).


Each card included a photograph of a member of the 1985 Georgetown basketball team.

The first card in the series featured Thompson coaching from the sidelines and established the ground rules for the “Kids & Cops” campaign (See fig. 9). Participating youths asked police officers for the trading cards. After collecting all 14, they received a stamp from a local precinct office and two tickets to a Georgetown game. Other cards included pictures of players with a basketball tip and life lesson. For instance, the front of the fifth card in the set depicted Bill Martin performing a layup. The opposite side of the card declared the hook shot the “only unblockable shot in basketball.” Further advice told young players to keep their bodies between the ball and defenders when attempting to hook the ball into the basket. The Martin card went on to admonish, “Hooking school closes the door to a job. Education is a clean shot to the future.”³¹² That the creators of the “Kids & Cops” campaign thought to use Thompson and his players’ images to plug merchandise while also encouraging Washington area children to go to school and trust police, spoke further to the team’s significance as a symbol of black opportunity and empowerment. The cards moreover demonstrated the marketability of Georgetown basketball to younger generations.

Another example of the program’s market value was the popularity of Georgetown clothing during the 1980s. Younger generations of African Americans in particular coveted t-shirts and baseball caps with the Hoyas’ name and logo. Blue and gray nylon Georgetown jackets made by the Starter Clothing Line Company were especially trendy during the decade.³¹³ Even preeminent figures in hip-hop wore such fashionable items. “Chuck D” for instance recalled owning a Hoyas’ Starter jacket; he also wanted to form a rap group called the

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“Georgetown Gangsters.” Darryl “D.M.C.” McDaniels, cofounder of another influential hip-hop group from the 1980s called Run-D.M.C., asserted that wearing the Starter coat “meant that you was down like Georgetown. It also meant that you had attitude [and] that you was bad.”

Wearing Georgetown across one’s chest or donning a Hoyas’ cap thus symbolized the defiant attitude of hip-hop. Moreover, figures like “Chuck D” who embraced Coach Thompson’s program also criticized Reagan for presiding over the exacerbation of inner city conditions. For young blacks, Georgetown became emblematic of a rejection of Reaganism.

In 1990 Thompson acknowledged his significance to African American youths. All over the nation “young black kids have indentified with us and strongly,” the head coach explained to journalist Dave Kindred,

> I see it in a positive light. Everybody needs inspiration from somewhere. It’s like me rooting for Joe Louis and you, a white man, rooting for Joe Louis. It’s the same, but it’s different…I need Joe Louis to root for. And sometimes now I see touches of that need when people of color are rooting for Georgetown…If some sign of hope can be gotten from what these Georgetown kids have attempted to do…then let it be.

Like world champion boxer Joe Louis to the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the Hoyas had a strong following of black supporters who viewed the basketball team as a source of inspiration as they faced further struggles during the Reagan years. During her senior year at Georgetown in the fall of 1985, Starla Williams authored an article for *The Hoya* entitled “Thompson as a Symbol for Blacks.” In the piece, she wrote that the coach

> has won the respect and admiration of young black men, and women across the country. ‘Big John,’ as he his affectionately called, has become not only a father

315 Joe Louis received significant support from black America during his reign as world heavyweight boxing champion from 1934-1946; and, his success provided inspiration for the civil rights movement in the 1960s. See: Arthur R. Ashe Jr., *A Hard Road to Glory*, 82.
figure here on campus to black athletes and non-athletes alike, but he has also become an outstanding symbol for the black community.\textsuperscript{317}

While black America rallied behind the Hoyas, Thompson continued to face maligning from the press by the end of the 1980s. When selected to be head coach of the U.S. men’s Olympic team for the 1988 Games in Seoul, South Korea, a student journalist for \textit{The Hoya} remarked, “Victory in the Olympics would deflect much of the criticism Thompson traditionally receives; victory over the Soviets in particular might just make him a national hero.”\textsuperscript{318} In actuality, Thompson received numerous jabs from the press leading up to the Olympics. For instance, Brent Musburger—who decried Michael Graham’s play in the 1984 NCAA tournament—reported that the big question on everyone’s mind was, “Is John Thompson going to put a white basketball player on the U.S. Olympic team?”\textsuperscript{319} Thompson received further criticism for locking the press out of practices.\textsuperscript{320} The U.S. team went on to win bronze. The eventual gold medalist Soviet Union team defeated the Americans by a score of 82-76—the second time a U.S. basketball team lost in the Olympics. The first occasion also occurred against the Soviets at the 1972 Games in Munich, West Germany. In the aftermath of the loss, sportswriters questioned Thompson’s coaching ability.\textsuperscript{321} As had been the case at various points throughout his life—particularly from 1982-1985—Thompson experienced continued disparagement even while representing the U.S. against the country’s Cold War enemy at the close of the Reagan years.

The conditions set forth by Reaganism made the Georgetown basketball team significant, particularly among younger generations of blacks. Had Thompson prevailed in the 1988

\textsuperscript{317} Starla Williams, “Thompson as a Symbol for Blacks,” \textit{The Hoya}, November 8, 1985, 16.
\textsuperscript{318} Dennis Roche, “Now it is Thompson Against the World,” \textit{The Hoya}, November 7, 1986, sec. B, 1.
\textsuperscript{319} Leonard Shapiro, \textit{Big Man on Campus}, 251.
\textsuperscript{320} Leonard Shapiro, \textit{Big Man on Campus}, 252.
\textsuperscript{321} Leonard Shapiro, \textit{Big Man on Campus}, 256.
Olympics against the Soviets and handled the U.S. team the way reporters like Musburger wanted him to, perhaps America would have embraced the maligned coach. As it turned out, he continued to defy his critics—a consistent theme in Thompson’s approach to coaching that gained the respect of many African Americans. The Georgetown basketball team again collided with Reagan during the second half of the 1980s as it became a significant cultural force for blacks, many of whom viewed the president as diametrically opposed to their agendas concerning civil rights and the deterioration of inner cities. In protesting Proposition 42 and confronting Rayful Edmond III, Thompson addressed some of greatest challenges facing black youths during the Reagan years: lack of opportunity, drugs, and crime. While African Americans drew inspiration from the Hoyas, many continued to struggle with the decay of urban environments. Serious concerns remained about the state of race relations when Reagan left office. As he reflected on the Big East in 1989, Bill Reynolds wrote that “the delicate issue of race always hovers over the Georgetown program.”

But it could also be said that the 1980s demonstrated further that the delicate issue of race hovered over America.

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FIGURE 10: Ronald Reagan and Patrick Ewing at the White House on November 12, 1984. (Source: Lauinger Library, Special Collections Archive, Georgetown University, Washington, DC).
Conclusion: A Mixed Legacy

As the Reagan years came to a close, America continued to face problems rooted in race. Strained relations between blacks and whites existed long before the 1980s. These concerns nevertheless persisted into the decade that saw the rise of the Georgetown basketball team. Indeed, the conditions within inner cities deteriorated and poor African Americans were confronted by a two-term president who cut social programs affecting them and challenged the agenda of the civil rights community. Moreover, Coach Thompson and his team became simultaneously one of the most powerful and maligned symbols of black pride in a period of racial regression. The rise of Reagan and the conservative revolution, which drew a significant amount of energy from the white backlash of the 1970s, shaped both criticism and support of the Hoyas. While the president perpetuated the “welfare queen” myth and implemented policies in conflict with the concerns of many African Americans, Thompson and his team became symbols of black defiance in the minds of a significant number of whites. At the same time younger generations of blacks, a demographic that fared poorly during the 1980s, rallied behind Georgetown. To their supporters, Coach Thompson and his players were emblematic of a repudiation of Reaganism, and an assertion of an unapologetic, even aggressive black manhood.

While Georgetown basketball became significant beyond the basketball court, within the cultural context of the Reagan years, the team’s enduring legacy remained mixed. The Hoyas’ success had an undeniable effect on college basketball and the ascendency of Georgetown University during the 1980s. Nevertheless, the program never relived its achievements during the Patrick Ewing years from 1982-1985. Revenues and applications furthermore increased at Georgetown outside the team’s title-contending seasons, and racial divides persisted on campus. The Hoyas also left a mark on popular culture, becoming a symbol of escape from destitute
urban situations in three films from the early 1990s entitled Boyz N The Hood, Above the Rim, and Hoop Dreams. Still, Georgetown basketball was only a symbol of black pride, not a vehicle for black empowerment. Poor black youths continued to struggle regardless of their identification with Georgetown basketball. Coach Thompson and his players ultimately had little impact on the structural realities with which African Americans struggled during the Reagan years.

Even on the basketball court the Hoyas’ success was fleeting. The Hoyas dominated both the Big East conference and NCAA tournaments from 1982-1985. Thompson’s recruitment of Ewing as well as many talented players from the Washington, DC area allowed Georgetown to ascend. His coaching of hardnosed basketball and unrelenting defensive pressure further distinguished his program from other teams. As college basketball grew into one of the most popular televised sports during the first half of the 1980s, Georgetown competed for three NCAA championships. Nevertheless, the Hoyas’ loss to Villanova in the 1985 tournament final was their last appearance during the decade in an NCAA title game. They remained competitive but never at the level that they did during the Ewing years. According to Dean Deacon, Thompson recruited good teams for the remainder of the decade but never great teams.\(^{323}\) Georgetown therefore had a significant yet limited impact on the world of college basketball during the 1980s.

Beyond the Hoyas, Georgetown more broadly found its swagger during the Reagan years, transforming itself from a small parochial institution into a nationally competitive university. Father Healy’s obituary in the New York Times stated that he increased Georgetown’s

\(^{323}\) Dean Charles Deacon, interview by author.
endowment “from $38 million to nearly $228 million.” Father Healy, among other administrators, spearheaded the effort to expand Georgetown’s reputation during his tenure as university president from 1976-1989. Dean Deacon added that unlike many private schools, applications steadily rose at Georgetown from 1972-1987. The university also saw greater numbers of minority applicants. In 1989 Dean Deacon told the New York Times that black students made up nine percent of Georgetown’s student body—compared to the eight percent national average for institutions of higher learning as recorded by the American Council on Education in 1986. The growth of revenues and applications factored heavily in Georgetown’s national rise.

There is no doubt that Georgetown’s basketball team helped remake and elevate the university. In 1986 a monthly magazine about business in Washington entitled Regardie’s asserted that, after television revenues, NCAA tournament and ticket receipts, apparel sales, alumni donations, and other earnings, the near $50,000 investment in Ewing’s four year scholarship resulted in over $12 million in revenues for Georgetown. A month later Athletic Director Frank Rienzo disputed Regardie’s findings and concluded that the generation of “revenue is entirely secondary to the primary goal of education.” Although the exact dollar figure remained a matter of debate, the Georgetown Athletic Department saw unprecedented earnings in the first half of the 1980s. Still, the impact of the athletic program was only one part of the university’s ascendance. The $12 million revenues credited to Ewing represented a small fraction of the university’s total endowment, which reached $228 million by 1989.

325 Dean Charles Deacon, interview by author.
The basketball team’s impact on the diversity of the campus was equally significant, and yet also equally limited. Dean Deacon stressed that between 1980 and 1988 the number of applications submitted by African American students increased 333 to 851.\textsuperscript{328} The team’s success during Ewing’s years at Georgetown added to the growing rate of black applicants; but Dean Deacon noted that the efforts of Father Healy, Coach Thompson, and the Community Scholars Program also played important roles.\textsuperscript{329} Moreover, not every African American student who applied to Georgetown did so because of the basketball team. For example, Starla Williams knew little about the Hoyas when she applied in 1982.\textsuperscript{330} Similarly to the university’s heightened revenues, the number of black applicants grew beyond the years between 1982 and 1985. Although crucial to Georgetown’s rise, the visibility and financial gains brought by the basketball program, rather than acting as a sole cause, fit into a larger effort to transform the university.

The basketball team also played a role in redefining the university’s place in Washington, DC. Coach Thompson and his players received credit for stronger relations between Georgetown and outlying neighborhoods in the city. The Reverend Royden B. Davis, S.J., Dean of the Georgetown College from 1966-1989, asserted that the “success of the team on the court and of its members individually in the classroom has helped considerably in changing Georgetown’s past image of an all white, isolated hilltop campus.”\textsuperscript{331} Recall that upon his appointment in 1972 Thompson asked for the university’s commitment to change its reputation

\textsuperscript{329} Dean Charles Deacon, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{330} Starla Williams, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{331} Royden D. Davis, S.J., “Community and Diversity at Georgetown,” 17.
within the African American community as a “white school up on a hill.” Reflecting on Thompson’s career at Georgetown, Dean Deacon added,

We won on all scores because not only did we get a great basketball coach who was very successful at the highest possible rank; but we also had an individual who was outspoken, who took the opportunity from that platform to be a leader and try to advance issues that were part of the minority community…his leadership moved Georgetown into a much more prominent position in the African American community.332

Thompson’s recruitment of local black players, many of whom attained diplomas, and his social stances, particularly against Proposition 42, improved Georgetown’s standing from its dismal state in 1972 among the African American residents of the greater Washington area.

That is not to say that the basketball team dissolved the barriers between the campus and DC community. Like other expensive private universities, a gulf continued to exist between Georgetown and poor African Americans. The New York Times article from 1989 which investigated diversity at Georgetown claimed that “black students say there are too few faculty members from minorities [and] the campus can make people from an impoverished background feel out of place.”333 While the university maintained a population of black students one percent higher than the national average for academic institutions, African Americans continued to represent a clear minority on campus. Furthermore, outside of the few hours spent at each basketball game during her undergraduate years, Starla Williams remembered notable social divides between black and white students.334 The many impoverished African American residents of DC and other cities who rooted for the Hoyas likely never attended a competitive four year university like Georgetown. While race relations improved at Georgetown, at times

332 Dean Charles Deacon, interview by author.
334 Starla Williams, interview by author.
because of the basketball program, the university also witnessed the more prevailing racial divides in higher education that persisted during the Reagan years.

Three films from the early 1990s, *Boyz N The Hood*, *Above the Rim*, and *Hoop Dreams*, depict black youths from inner cities across America who embrace Coach Thompson and his program as a means of escape. In *Boyz N The Hood*, released in 1991, the main character Tre Styles grows up during the 1980s in South Central Los Angeles, where he encounters gang violence, drug abuse, homelessness, and police brutality. In one scene Tre dons a Black Power necklace and a Georgetown t-shirt while taking the SAT (see fig. 11). More than a fashion choice or simply an embrace of hip-hop style, Tre’s repeated appearance in the film with a Hoyas shirt underscores a larger connection between his character, a black youth who seeks to use his education to escape South Central, and the Georgetown basketball program.335

![FIGURE 11: Tre Styles, the protagonist in *Boyz N The Hood*, wears a Georgetown Hoyas t-shirt while taking the SAT. The film concludes with Tre attending Spellman College, an all-black university in Atlanta, Georgia. (Source: *Boyz N The Hood*).](image)

335 *Boyz N The Hood*, directed by John Singleton, 112 minutes, Columbia Pictures, 1991, DVD.
In the 1994 film *Above the Rim* the protagonist Kyle Watson, a talented high school basketball player in New York City who dreams of playing for Georgetown, also wears Hoya apparel. Much like Tre, however, he faces high rates of crime and joblessness. Tupac Shakur, the rapper who bemoaned Ronald Reagan’s administration at the age of seventeen, plays Birdie, a drug dealer who tries to corrupt the young player. The film ends happily with Kyle securing a scholarship at Georgetown and hitting a game winning shot for the Hoyas. Thompson even makes a cameo, having provided Kyle the opportunity to earn a diploma and break free from the destitute conditions of his home neighborhood.

The 1994 documentary *Hoop Dreams* follows two high school basketball players in the late 1980s named Arthur Agee Jr. and William Gates, who grow up in Chicago, Illinois and dream of playing in the NBA. “Basketball is my ticket out of the ghetto,” explains William. Like the fictional characters Tre and Kyle, problems within Arthur’s and William’s urban communities threaten their goals. For instance, Arthur watches his father become addicted to crack and his mother Sheila lose her job. William encounters street gangs while growing up near the notoriously dangerous Cabrini-Green housing project on Chicago’s North Side. Arthur and William further struggle to pass standardized tests and acquire scholarships to attend college. While experiencing such challenges they both identify with Georgetown. One scene in the film captures Arthur and his teammates looking longingly at Georgetown jackets hanging from the wall of a sporting goods store. William, a more promising prospect than Arthur, receives a recruiting letter from the Georgetown basketball program as well as dozens of other universities. Coach Thompson even watches him and other players at a Nike basketball camp. Despite several knee injuries and his difficulty passing a college entrance exam, William receives a

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337 *Above the Rim.*
scholarship to play at Marquette University. Arthur is eventually accepted at Mineral Area Junior College in Missouri. Arthur and William thus embrace the Hoyas despite their inability to attend Georgetown.

Beyond a strong cultural identification among black youths with Georgetown, a comparison of the three films paints a bleak picture of the effects of the Reagan years on black America. A striking scene in the beginning of *Boyz N The Hood* features an African American youth pointing his middle finger at Reagan’s reelection poster while viewing a murder scene in an alley (see fig. 12). The other two films likewise offer a critique of Reagan. Arthur, William, and the characters Tre and Kyle all experience similar problems within their neighborhoods. Sheila Agee furthermore represents a contradiction to the “welfare queen” myth expounded by Reagan as she desperately tries to provide for Arthur and his siblings. Furthermore, Coach Thompson and the Hoyas again symbolize a rejection of Reaganism in the films as the protagonists embrace the team while seeking to break free of the crime and poverty gripping their communities. In reality, poor black students had few chances of attending Georgetown, let alone any expensive university. The conclusion of *Above the Rim* in fact presents a mythic outcome of the 1980s. The vast majority of African Americans living in inner cities experienced something more similar to that of Arthur’s and William’s lives in Chicago. And, while both Arthur and William eventually earned scholarships, the poor conditions of their neighborhoods made it so that the majority of their peers struggled to even finish high school. While the cultural influence of Georgetown basketball remained strong in the early 1990s, the team obviously offered no real answers to most black youths who struggled to overcome the exacerbation of urban conditions during the Reagan years.

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338 *Hoop Dreams*, directed by Steve James, 171 minutes, Fine Line Features, 1994, DVD.
The Georgetown team accomplished a great deal both on and off the court during the 1980s. They had a profound influence on college basketball from 1982-1985. Coach Thompson stood up to Proposition 42, saw nearly all of his players who stayed at Georgetown for four years graduate, and became an inspiration to young African Americans. Nevertheless, moments of the Hoyas’ limited impact revealed a great deal about what poor black youths experienced under Reagan’s America. Many blacks suffered growing problems within their communities. Many continued to go through life without a college education. Many viewed Reagan as unsympathetic to their plight, and at the same time, embraced the Hoyas who persevered in the face of racism and maligning. The 1980s ended with further challenges to the state of race relations in the country, best symbolized perhaps by the bloody Los Angeles riot of 1992, the worst racial upheaval since the 1960s. African Americans emerged from the Reagan years dissatisfied and frustrated, yet ever more determined to stand up to injustices. Many no doubt
would have well understood Patrick Ewing’s reply when he was told by the *SI* photographer Lane Stewart that he looked menacing as he waited to have his photograph taken with Reagan: “I’ll smile when I’m ready.”

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