

A Painful Overcast on Legacy Park

Posted At : April 13, 2019 8:00 AM | Posted By : Mavis Carr

Related Categories: Campus

By Sydney N. Shuler

The placement of a bronze George H. W. Bush statue in **Legacy Park** at Hampton University stirred up controversy with students, alumni and national leaders in the black community, some of whom said they were outraged by the inclusion of a figure known for encouraging fear using aggressive black stereotypes during his presidential campaign.

President William H. Harvey, a longtime friend of Bush, has defended the choice stating that Bush's policies directly benefited historically black colleges and universities and brought \$40 million in scholarships, faculty research grants and other beneficial programs at Hampton.

"I found him to be an extraordinary man of love, values, principles, standards, honesty, compassion, loyalty, camaraderie, and character," Harvey wrote in a **2018 op-ed** for The Daily Press in Newport News.

Some black leaders are outraged by the choice, one is even seeking a public rebuke while others are circulating a petition advocating for the removal of the statue.

Rep. William Lacy Clay Jr., a black Democratic representative of the First District of Missouri, and his father **William Lacy Clay, Sr.**, who also served in the GOP and helped found the Congressional Black Caucus, are commissioning the CBC to publicly oppose the new statue.

The backlash since the ribbon-cutting ceremony Hampton University's new Legacy Park, a waterfront garden featuring eleven statues of Hampton University supporters, has included current students and the alumni association.

Bush "is not one that you can hold up as someone who believed in equal justice for all," Clay Sr. said in a letter to the Congressional Black Caucus, according to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. "He steadfastly and vigorously opposed any specific proposal to ameliorate the inequitable, bigoted treatment of black citizens."

Clay Jr. believe Bush's appointment of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas in order to replace the Civil Rights champion, Thurgood Marshall, was harmful to the black community and went goes against equal rights representation, according to an article by Chuck Raasch in The St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

During the 1988 election against Michael Dukakis, Bush supporters created the Willie Horton attack ad. William R. Horton is a black American convicted felon in Massachusetts who was imprisoned while Dukakis was governor. Horton was a recipient of Dukakis' "weekend pass" policy. The harsh mugshot and dapper photos of George H.W. Bush and Dukakis, historians believe, played into the black stereotypes of criminal behavior that ignites fears in whites.

The Hampton University Alumni Association posted a petition protesting the George H.W. Bush statue to the HU Board of Trustees and to Dr. Harvey on [change.org](https://www.change.org).

"It is an absolute embarrassment, that the institution that produced Booker T. Washington, Mary Jackson, Alberta King, and thousands of others that have stood on their shoulders," the petition reads, "that the Board of Trustees and ultimately the university's long-term president, William R. Harvey somehow found it morally acceptable to memorialize this man on our beautiful campus."

The petition recalls the on-campus protests following the announcement of Bush as the commencement speaker in 1991.

"It's no wonder why his visit to a Hampton University ... a historically BLACK university, was protested by the student body, faculty and staff resources collectively," the petition reads.

"He has some good things and some bad things as well," Edwards said. "His legacy should be remembered for being instrumental in getting the United Negro College Fund started. I don't think people know the history."

One of the good things that Edwards was referring to, as well as one of the reasons for honoring the 41st president is his significant involvement in propelling the UNCF to where it is today. After being recruited to lead UNCF fundraising drives at Yale University, Bush went on to become the UNCF chairman of Texas. He also donated partial proceeds from his autobiography to UNCF. While president, he signed [Executive Order 12677](#), which created a Presidential Advisory Board on HBCUs, a group created to strengthen Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) by advising the president & U.S. Secretary of Education.

And, there were students who were torn between the good things Bush did for African Americans and the bad, like increasing funding for HBCUs while continuing the war on drugs which incarcerated Black Americans at an alarming rate.

Bush founded the Yale chapter of the UNCF and was a long time ambassador for HBCUs. He worked to improve the recruitment of graduate and undergraduate HBCU students for part-time and summer federal positions and increased HBCU funding.. HBCUs received a total of \$776 million in 1989 and \$894 million 1990, an increase of \$118 million, right after his election.

Still, Edwards acknowledged the darker side of his legacy. "George Bush did not stop that War on Drugs, he kept it going," he said. Some current students spoke out to local news media about their opposition to the statues and said the administration should have explained the choice. Statues included Rosa Parks, Barack Obama, Martin Luther King Jr., Howard Taft, and several local figures important to the history or support of the university including founder Samuel Chapman Armstrong and President Harvey.

"Some of the statues were definitely deserving, but when you have someone like George H. W. Bush who was honorable, do not get me wrong, but as far

as the other people up there and what they mean to the campus, I think that students and alumni deserve an explanation."

"First of all, I believe that the chief reason for [Legacy Park] is promotion of learning," Dr. Harvey said in an article by Brandi Howliet in **The Hampton Script**, "I want students to research these figures. Be thankful."