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FOOTBALL IN THE SOUTHWEST, 1947-1976

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CHRISTOPHER R. DAVIS

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DESEGREGATING THE LINE OF SCRIMMAGE: RACE AND COLLEGE  
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A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE  
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY

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Dr. Stephen H. Norwood, Chair

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Dr. Robert L. Griswold

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Dr. Ben Keppel

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Dr. Paul A. Gilje

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Dr. Ralph R. Hamerla



## Acknowledgements

In many ways, this dissertation represents the culmination of a lifelong passion for both sports and history. One of my most vivid early childhood memories comes from the fall of 1972 when, as a five year-old, I was reading the sports section of one of the Dallas newspapers at my grandparents' breakfast table. I am not sure how much I comprehended, but one fact leaped clearly from the page—Nebraska had defeated Army by the seemingly incredible score of 77-7. Wild thoughts raced through my young mind. How could one team score so many points? How could they so thoroughly dominate an opponent? Just how bad was this Army outfit? How many touchdowns did it take to score seventy-seven points? I did not realize it at the time, but that was the day when I first understood concretely the concepts of multiplication and division. Nebraska scored eleven touchdowns I calculated (probably with some help from my grandfather) and my love of football and the sports page only grew from there.

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to discuss the works of Gordon Wood and Bernard Bailyn introduced me to the profession and his critical eye and constant support continue to benefit me today. Professor Ben Keppel joined the committee during the dissertation's final stages and provided vital input that ensured that this project moved beyond sport to address larger issues of racial change in twentieth-century America. Professor Ralph R. Hamerla served as the outside member of the committee throughout my master's and doctoral programs. I am grateful for his time and effort and for the perspective as a scholar and sports fan that he brought to my work. I would also like to thank Professors David W. Levy and Judith S. Lewis, my first two graduate school professors, for believing that a part-time master's student had the potential to become a professional historian.

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation traces the racial desegregation of major college football in the states of Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas from the end of World War II through the mid-1970s. Moving beyond the realm of sport, it links these events to the larger Civil Rights Movement and the dramatic changes in American race relations during this period. As a much-loved part of twentieth-century Southern culture, college football resisted racial change longer than many other institutions in the region. The overthrow of the color line in the Cotton Bowl beginning in 1947, the University of Oklahoma's signing of Prentice Gautt in 1956, and the recruiting of Jerry LeVias by Southern Methodist University in 1965, all marked gradual, but halting, steps toward the goal of athletic desegregation. Well after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 signaled the zenith of the peaceful Civil Rights Movement, Jim Crow on the college football fields of the Southwest finally collapsed in the late-1960s. By the early-1970s, even the most staunchly segregated universities gave in and began accepting African Americans into their programs. Ironically, after desegregation, the tremendous talent of black athletes coupled with an overwhelming desire to win football games among the general populace turned the college gridiron into one of the most thoroughly integrated social spaces in the region. As such, these spaces reflected both the potential and the limitations of a newly emerging racially desegregated social order. At the same time, they also played an important role in shaping these new patterns of race relations.



## Introduction

The setting is a fall Sunday evening in the mid-1960s in a middle-class African-American home in East Texas. In the living room, the television set is tuned to one of the highlights of weekend television viewing in the state—the Darrell Royal Show. As a recorded band plays “The Eyes of Texas,” two aspiring young Longhorn fans stand at attention and salute the screen.<sup>1</sup> Like countless other Texas youth, these two boys dreamed of capturing athletic glory for themselves and their home state by wearing the burnt orange jersey of Royal’s Longhorns. As the highlights of that weekend’s game roll, they imagined themselves scoring touchdowns and leading the University of Texas to football championships.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the overwhelming majority of their fellow daydreamers, however, these two had the talent to deliver on those dreams. They were Joe and Kenny Washington, the sons of high school football coach Joe Washington Sr., and both would become college football stars. The older of the two, Joe, Jr. would in fact star on two national championship teams and play ten seasons in the National Football League, but neither played for Royal’s Longhorns. The story of how these two loyal young Texans came to abandon their love for the flagship school of their home state and take their considerable skills elsewhere is deeply tied to a larger tale about the history of race relations and the desegregation of major college football in the south

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<sup>1</sup> During the 1960s and 1970s, on fall Sunday afternoons and evenings throughout the Southwest and the nation, college football fans tuned in to a variety of network and independent stations to watch the coaches’ highlight shows for the region’s most popular teams. In many locales, these programs ran throughout the afternoon and evening and featured extensive highlights and analysis from that week’s game as well as a preview of the upcoming competition. In an era when the NCAA limited the number of games televised in each region to one or two a week, and before cable television, the internet, and the media saturation of college football, these shows often offered the best opportunity for committed fans to see highlights of their team in action.

<sup>2</sup> Joe Dan Washington, Jr., “Sport in America,” Class lecture, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK, April 18, 2005; Stephen H. Norwood, *Real Football: Conversations on America’s Game* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 170.

central United States between the mid-1940s and the mid-1970s.

A former star in his own right, Joe Washington Sr. played integrated football in the Air Force in the aftermath of World War II and then starred collegiately at the all-black school, Prairie View A&M, from 1948 to 1951. In an era when prejudice and segregation blocked any opportunity to further advance his playing career, Washington turned instead to one of the few avenues to the professional middle class open to blacks at the time: he became an educator and a black high school football coach. He began his career in 1951 at segregated Hilliard High School in Bay City, Texas before moving to Port Arthur and Lincoln High School in 1965.<sup>3</sup> Washington coached Lincoln, an all-black school that eventually desegregated, for three decades and became one of the most respected high school coaches in Texas. His professional career spanned the era of desegregation in southern life and made him a participant in the racial integration of Texas football. Early in his career, the best his African-American players could hope for was a scholarship to Prairie View, Texas Southern University, Grambling College, or one of the other all-black colleges in the region. In the 1960s, that slowly changed; by the mid-1970s, those with the talent could attend all of the region's top universities.

Both of Washington's sons became outstanding high school athletes who competed in integrated leagues, but when it came time to select a college neither acted on their youthful loyalty to the University of Texas. The younger one, Kenny, picked North Texas State University, which had become one of the first Texas schools to open its team to black football players in 1957. In the mid-1970s, he played quarterback for the Mean Green under the tutelage of coach Hayden Fry, a persistent champion of the black athlete. At Southern Methodist University in 1965, Fry signed Jerry LeVias, the

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<sup>3</sup> Norwood, *Real Football*, 118-152.

first African-American football player awarded a scholarship to a Southwest Conference school. With scholarship offers from all around the country, older brother Joe Jr. chose the University of Oklahoma, a program, like North Texas State, that desegregated in mid-1950s. When Prentice Gautt took the field for the Sooner varsity in 1957, Oklahoma became the first major football power from a state with an elaborate Jim Crow system to play an African-American athlete. At the University of Oklahoma, Washington excelled at running back for another coach who played an important part in breaking down barriers for black athletes, Barry Switzer. As a key player on an integrated team, Joe Jr. helped lead the Sooners to national championships in 1974 and 1975 before starring for the Baltimore Colts and Washington Redskins in the NFL.

As an African-American head coach, Joe Washington Sr. brought a unique perspective to the desegregation of college football. He was as a devoted, lifelong fan of the game, a passion he shared with countless other individuals of all races in his state and region. During the twentieth century, the game made enthusiastic fans and followers of large numbers of residents in Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. By the 1920s, prominent universities in the region played games in large constructed stadiums and in front of steadily expanding crowds.<sup>4</sup> In the 1930s, teams from the Southwest began to compete for national prestige and leading players emerged as stars recognized across the country. Beginning in 1937, business leaders in Dallas staged an annual New

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<sup>4</sup> The 1922 Thanksgiving Day game between the University of Texas and Texas A&M University in Austin drew 20,500 fans to cramped Clark Field. Texas had played at the site since the late-1890s and in 1907 students joined African-American carpenters to build its first bleachers, which seated 2,000. With fans packing the aisles of the wooden structure and spilling out onto the field, the 1922 game clearly demonstrated the need for a larger facility. Five hundred thousand dollars was raised and Memorial Stadium was completed by Thanksgiving Day 1924. Thirty-three thousand attended the dedication of the new concrete and steel structure and watched the Longhorns defeat A&M 7-0. By 1928, the Texas – Texas A&M game in Austin drew a crowd of 45,000 and generated gate receipts of \$93,283, both records for a football game in Texas at the time. John Maher and Kirk Bohls, *Long Live the Longhorns! 100 Years of Texas Football* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 12, 60, 63-64, 72.

Year's Day contest dubbed the Cotton Bowl, featuring one of the region's top teams pitted against a prominent national opponent. The game quickly gained national notoriety and became one of the four major bowl games that concluded each college football season. Following the Second World War, the popularity of college football continued to grow and, during the ensuing decades, the game solidified its role as a central cultural institution in the region.

For more than half of the century, however, the teams and players enthusiastically supported by the large majority of fans, reflective of the social worlds they lived in, remained wholly white. As one of the region's most revered public spaces, the fields of major college football during the first half of the twentieth century served as an exclusive proving grounds for young white men. Racial attitudes, however, slowly began to change following the Second World War. By the late-1950s, a few teams in the region took the first halting steps toward desegregation—the elimination of laws, customs, and practices separating the races—by slowly adding black athletes into their programs. The success of these early pioneers, coupled with the achievements of black athletes who left the South and excelled at universities in the North and West, demonstrated the tremendous untapped potential of black athletic talent. Combined with the dramatic advances made by the Civil Rights Movement during the first-half of the 1960s, this pushed the process of desegregation forward within all of the region's college football programs by 1970. By the mid-1970s, something approaching racial integration—or the interaction of the races in an environment where racial distinctions carry no weight—took shape on the college football field. Black athletes played important roles on all of the region's teams and,

though change was limited to the playing field itself, the college gridiron began offering equal opportunities to those of all races. This dissertation traces the racial desegregation and eventual integration of major college football in the states of Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas from the end of World War II through the mid-1970s. Moving beyond the realm of sport, it links these events to the larger Civil Rights Movement and the dramatic changes in American race relations during this period.

During the first four decades of the twentieth century, African Americans struggled in a society that denied them equal status and access to the opportunities of American middle-class life. An elaborate system of legal and customary racial segregation that began in the aftermath of the Civil War and consolidated with the *Plessy* decision in 1896 kept African Americans socially isolated from the social and economic mainstream.<sup>5</sup> Discriminatory voting laws—especially in the Southern states—left them politically disenfranchised and economic discrimination in the workplace trapped many in generations of poverty.<sup>6</sup> A racist criminal justice system intent on controlling African-American behavior, as well as widespread and at times horrifying acts of racial violence perpetrated by the white majority, ensured black

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<sup>5</sup> On segregation and the Jim Crow system see: George M. Frederickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage, 1998); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955); C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951).

<sup>6</sup> On the widespread disenfranchisement of African-American voters in the aftermath of Reconstruction see: Michael Perman, *Struggle for Mastery: Disenfranchisement in the South, 1888-1908* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974). On economic discrimination and Southern labor law see: Peter J. Rachleff, *Black Labor in the South: Richmond, Virginia, 1865-1890* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984); Pete Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South, 1901-1969* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972).

compliance and undergirded the system.<sup>7</sup> Signs of gradually changing racial attitudes in the 1930s drowned under the economic collapse of the Great Depression and African Americans suffered even worse economic hardship than their white counterparts.<sup>8</sup> The Second World War, however, initiated a slow but profound shift in the nature of American race relations. Made possible by the war-fueled economic boom and the desire of Americans to see their country as a force fighting for democracy and freedom in the world, the attitudes of many Americans regarding race began to change. Deeply ingrained racial prejudices remained strong, but in the North and West, in particular,

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<sup>7</sup> On African Americans and the criminal justice system see: Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010) Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery By Another Name: The Re-enslavement of Black People in America from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Doubleday, 2008); Matthew J. Mancini, *One Dies, Get Another: Convict Leasing in the American South, 1866-1928* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996); Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor: The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South* (New York: Verso, 1996); David M. Oshinsky, *Worse Than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice* (New York: Free Press, 1996). On lynching and racial violence see: Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Crystal N. Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Gregory Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2005); Christopher Waldrep, *The Many Faces of Judge Lynch: Extra Legal Violence and Punishment in America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Michael J. Pfeifer, *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1874-1947* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Fitzhugh W. Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> As it did on many other fronts, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal offered an ambiguous response to issues of race. On one side, New Deal programs institutionalized the racial discrimination endemic to the era and black Americans benefitted little from government relief and assistance, especially in the South where local administrators controlled the distribution of funds. On the other, the President and members of his administration, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt in particular, demonstrated a new concern for African-American issues. Through the "Black Cabinet," an unofficial group of influential black leaders who advised the administration, African Americans gained a voice in the federal government for the first time since the brief era of Radical Reconstruction. During the 1934 midterm election and Roosevelt's 1936 re-election, large numbers of black voters responded by switching their allegiance to the Democratic Party and becoming an important and dependable part of the New Deal coalition. Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue* Vol. 1, *Depression Decade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Jack Kirby, *Black Americans in the Roosevelt Era: Liberalism and Race* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980); Robin D. G. Kelly, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

increasing numbers of whites began to support the ideals of equal access and equal opportunity.

Since the era of slavery, African Americans had struggled to gain an equal place in American society and during the Civil Rights Movement they played a decisive role in reshaping the country in a period many called the Second Reconstruction.<sup>9</sup> After a decades long fight in the courts, culminating in the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown* decision, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People successfully overturned the legal basis for segregation.<sup>10</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s, a mass non-violent protest movement energized by the participation of 100,000s of ordinary Americans confronted and defeated Jim Crow policies in everyday life. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Acts of 1965 codified their accomplishments and represented the zenith of the peaceful Civil Rights Movement as the last vestiges of

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<sup>9</sup> Historian Steven Hahn traces the roots of African-American political activism back into the period of slavery and argues that political awareness and acumen among the slaves set the stage for the rapid organization of black politics after emancipation. In the six decades after the Civil War, Hahn finds, the political struggles of black Americans "contributed to the making of a new political nation" nationally while at the same time creating "a new people—a veritable nation as many of them came to understand it" among African Americans themselves. Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 9. The literature on the Civil Rights Movement is vast. Some of the best works include: Hasan Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Thomas Sagrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008); Steven F. Lawson, *Civil Rights Crossroads: Nation, Community, and the Black Freedom Struggle* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005); David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long? African American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

<sup>10</sup> On the struggle in the courts see: Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice and Sing: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New Press, 2009); Michael J. Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Abraham L. Davis, and Barbara Luck Graham, *The Supreme Court, Race, and Civil Rights* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995); Mark V. Tushnet, *Making Civil Rights Law: Thurgood Marshall and the Supreme Court, 1936-1961* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Genna Rae McNeil, *Charles Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

*legal* second-class citizenship were relegated to a bygone era. The successful fight for equal rights, however, inspired a white backlash that blocked advances toward achieving large-scale racial integration.<sup>11</sup> Despite the significant achievements experienced by the African-American community, especially its growing middle class, racial disparities persist. In the last decades of the twentieth century and early decades of the twenty-first century, de facto segregation, skyrocketing incarceration rates, and enduring poverty suggest that structural inequalities still often define the black experience in America.

The story of racial change in college football in the Southwest parallels many aspects of the larger civil rights struggle. Prior to World War II, law and custom strictly forbade African Americans from participating in major college football throughout the region.<sup>12</sup> Beginning in the 1930s, a few teams from the Southwest played against integrated opponents outside of the region, but none hosted mixed race opponents on their own campuses or ever considered adding an African American to their own

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<sup>11</sup> On the conservative backlash to the Civil Rights and Women's Movements and the dramatic social changes of the 1960s see: Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008); Sara Diamond, *Roads to Dominion: Right-Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> Laws restricting blacks and whites from participating in recreational activities together had a long history in the region. Even before joining the United States, the Republic of Texas passed legislation prohibiting blacks and whites from playing cards and similar games with one another. In 1907, the Texas legislature mandated that theaters and other places of amusement either establish segregation or ban black customers outright. In 1937, Arkansas mandated that gambling houses and racetracks segregate their customers. A 1915 Texas law requiring racially segregated bathing facilities for coal miners became the basis for public swimming pool (and restroom) segregation for decades. Similar laws passed in Oklahoma and Arkansas produced the same result. Each states' long legal tradition of segregated education sufficed in barring blacks from white high school and college football, but sports like boxing required specific legislation. A 1925 Oklahoma City ordinance prohibited interracial sparring in practices for the Golden Gloves competition. In 1933, the Texas legislature legalized boxing, but banned interracial competition in the sport. Bruce A. Glasrud, "Jim Crow's Emergence in Texas," *American Studies* 15.1 (1974): 47-60; Francine Sanders Romero, "'There Are Only White Champions': The Rise and Demise of Segregated Boxing in Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 108.1 (2004): 26-41; *Daily Oklahoman*, 13 February 2005, pg. BH3; *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, s.v. "Jim Crow Laws," by Carl H. Moneyhon, accessed July 21, 2014, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/>.



squads. The postwar era brought gradual steps toward change. On January 1, 1948, the Cotton Bowl game between Pennsylvania State University and Southern Methodist University broke the color barrier as two African Americans from Penn State, Wallace Triplett and Dennis Hoggard Jr., competed for the first time in a major college football game in the region. The Cotton Bowl became the first of the three major Southern New Year's Day bowls to desegregate.<sup>13</sup> Afterwards, teams in the Southwest proved more open to scheduling integrated opponents away from home and, in the 1950s, began hosting them in their own stadiums for the first time.

It took almost ten years, however, before any schools in the region considered allowing blacks in their own programs. As it did on other regional civil rights issues, Oklahoma led the way toward athletic integration. In 1957, the University of Oklahoma and coach Bud Wilkinson became the first major football power in the Southwest (and the entire South) to play an African American when sophomore Prentice Gautt from Oklahoma City took the field against the University of Pittsburgh in the team's opening game. In the late-1950s and early-1960s, a few of the smaller, less prestigious schools in the region—North Texas State, Texas Western, Texas A&I, and the University of Houston—joined Oklahoma in desegregating their football programs. However, the region's most prominent schools—the members of the Southwest Conference—continued to uphold segregation. In 1965, as the Civil Rights Movement reached its zenith, SMU finally initiated the process of desegregation by awarding a football scholarship to Jerry LeVias of Beaumont, Texas. LeVias emerged as a major star and, by 1969, black athletes appeared in growing numbers on conference rosters. The two

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<sup>13</sup> The two other major Southern bowls, the Orange Bowl played in Miami and the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans, desegregated in 1955 and 1956 respectively.

most prominent members of the conference, however, the University of Texas and the University of Arkansas, still excluded blacks from their varsity teams. Their epic, season-ending 1969 clash, known in popular lore as “The Big Shootout,” helped crown the last all-white national championship team in college football history. In retrospect, the game also symbolized the end of an era—a point where the old segregationist traditions of the Jim Crow regime held out as long as they could, but finally gave way; after which, true racial democracy began to take hold on the college football field.

Desegregation came late to the region’s college football teams, but once it started it came fast and progressed, at least on the playing field, more thoroughly than in other areas of American life. The influx of black athletic talent changed the game and made recruiting and utilizing African Americans a necessary precondition to winning college football glory. In the early-1970s, the University of Oklahoma once again led the way in advancing the pace of racial reform within the region. Coach Barry Switzer and his staff took the decisive step toward racial inclusion in 1973 when they removed all restrictions and began extensively recruiting blacks. Oklahoma pursued the best athletes available regardless of race and played them at the positions where they performed best. In doing so, they returned to the upper echelon of national competition and won back-to-back national championships in 1974 and 1975.

During the same period at Texas and Arkansas, coaches Darrell Royal and Frank Broyles watched their programs suffer because they were late in recruiting black athletes. Hard feelings in the black community and a lack of cultural familiarity on the part of white coaches hampered early recruiting efforts. Eventually, however, a small but increasing number of African-American high school stars proved willing to

overlook the sins of the past for the opportunity to attend their state's most prestigious university. By the mid-1970s even the schools that had resisted desegregation most stridently welcomed black athletes in significant numbers. If as Martin Luther King, Jr. often noted, "Eleven O'clock on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in Christian America," then, by the 1970s, Saturday afternoons in the fall were quickly becoming one of the nation's most integrated times.<sup>14</sup> On the playing field, where something approaching a racial meritocracy now reigned, black players began dominating the upper echelons of national competition. In the stands, on television, and in the popular press the white majority embraced the talent of black athletes and became more willing to consider them socially. In the Southern states especially, increasing numbers of African Americans began supporting the newly desegregated teams of the major universities for the first time. The college football gridiron, previously one of the most tightly segregated social spaces in the region, now emerged as one of its most thoroughly integrated.

Geographically, this study focuses on the racial integration of major college football in the states of Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. Each state possesses a rich and unique history of its own, but they also share enough similarities—especially in terms of race relations and their passion for college football—to justify thinking of them in this context as a semi-coherent historical region. This Southwest area of the country occupies the region where American slavery expanded and the Cotton Kingdom thrived during the first-half of the nineteenth century. During the crisis of the Civil War, Texas and Arkansas seceded, joined the Confederate States of America, and fought a war in a

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<sup>14</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Peter H. Holloran, and Clayborne Carson, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Volume II: Rediscovering Precious Values, September 1951-November 1955* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 149.

failed attempt to preserve racial slavery. The native tribes of Indian Territory divided over the war, but the mixed-blood slaveholding elite in each supported the Southern cause and all of the tribes officially allied with the Confederacy. The entire area shared in the bitterness of the Southern defeat and the resentments of the Reconstruction period that followed. In the late nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries, the region joined the rest of the South in constructing an elaborate system of political disenfranchisement, social segregation, and economic exploitation that relegated their black residents to a distinctly second-class form of citizenship. The threat and reality of vicious, unchecked racial violence ensured black compliance as the volatile history of American race relations reached its nadir. During the Civil Rights era, all three states became battlegrounds in the struggle between integrationists intent on destroying the structures of legal inequality and gaining access to a democratic public sphere and segregationists dedicated to maintaining the Southern system of white racial supremacy. In all three, desegregation came earlier and with less violence and overt resistance than in the states of the Deep South. And in all three, the weight of the past and the enduring legacies of structural inequality and de facto segregation persisted into the twenty-first century.

In demographic terms, the three states also share a common characteristic—a characteristic that further distinguishes them from their Deep South neighbors to the east—each possesses a significant, but smaller, black population, generally concentrated in the eastern section of their various states. In Eastern Arkansas, along the delta of the Mississippi River and in the lowlands near the Arkansas River, Southern cotton culture thrived by the 1840s and bound laborers constituted 20% population of the state's population. By 1860, slaves composed 26% of the state's total residents and were a

much higher percentage in plantation regions. In Chicot County 81% of the residents were black and in Desha, Phillips, and Arkansas counties the African-American population topped 50%. Moreover, as one historian argues, “the influence of slavery was pervasive.” The peculiar institution “established prerequisites for wealth and power” in the state, “structured the law to meet its own imperatives, and shaped the relationship between Arkansas and the Union.”<sup>15</sup> Moving north and west away from the rivers, however, the land grows increasingly mountainous, the soil less rich, and the population increasingly white. By the late-1950s, blacks comprised less than one percent of the population in twenty-five of Arkansas’s seventy-five counties. In twelve others they were less than ten percent.<sup>16</sup>

In Texas a similar settlement pattern emerged. Yeoman southern farmers seeking personal fortune through the expansion of the Cotton Kingdom constituted a majority of the early migrants to Mexican Texas. These Southerners brought their African-American slaves with them and, by the time the Republic of Texas won its independence from Mexico in 1836, approximately 5,000 bound African laborers lived there.<sup>17</sup> Slavery spread rapidly afterwards and during the 1850s and the black population of Texas grew by more than 124,000. By 1860, 182,566 blacks lived in Texas and African Americans, almost all of them slaves, represented roughly 30% of the population. Moreover, cotton production and slave labor concentrated on the rivers

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<sup>15</sup> S. Charles Bolton, “Slavery and the Defining of Arkansas,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 58.1 (1999): 2-5. On slavery in Arkansas, also see: Orville W. Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Arkansas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1958); Carl H. Moneyhon, *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Arkansas: Persistence in the Midst of Ruin* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994); James M. Woods, *Rebellion and Realignment: Arkansas’s Road to Secession* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1987).

<sup>16</sup> Neil R. McMillen, “The White Citizens’ Council and Resistance to School Desegregation in Arkansas,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 30.2 (1971): 96-97.

<sup>17</sup> Robert A. Calvert, Arnoldo De Leon, and Gregg Cantrell, *The History Of Texas*, Fourth Edition, (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2007), 72.

in the eastern and southeastern two-fifths of the state and almost all Texas slaves and slave owners lived east of the ninety-eighth meridian between the Red and Nueces rivers.<sup>18</sup> During the Civil War, the state experienced another major influx of black migrants as some Southern slave owners sent their chattel as far away from Union lines as possible. This process known as “refugeeing” at the time brought an estimated 30,000 additional bondsmen to East Texas between 1862 and 1864.<sup>19</sup> After the war, black migration declined rapidly and the African-American population remained concentrated in the eastern portion of the state. White Southerners, however, continued to come to Texas and during the Reconstruction-era they spread Southern culture and its racial attitudes throughout the state.<sup>20</sup>

In Indian Territory, the mixed-blood elite of the displaced southeastern tribes brought plantation agriculture and slavery to their new home in the 1830s. Like their American counterparts, Indian slaveholders adopted harsh slave codes to control black behavior and the most successful planters created vast agricultural empires. Mixed-blood Choctaw planter Robert M. Jones owned five plantations near the Red River where the labor of five hundred slaves made him one of the richest men in the region.<sup>21</sup> The slave economy and population expanded significantly in the decades after relocation (the slave population had nearly doubled in the Creek Nation by 1860) and persons of African descent constituted a significant minority in each tribe on the eve of

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<sup>18</sup> Randolph B. Campbell, *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 207.

<sup>19</sup> Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, 260.

<sup>20</sup> Walter L. Buenger, “Texas and the South,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 103.3 (2000): 309-311.

<sup>21</sup> Arrell Morgan Gibson, *Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries*, Second Edition, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981), 98-100.

the Civil War.<sup>22</sup> Just as in Arkansas and Texas, geography limited profitable plantation agriculture to the eastern portion of the territory and following emancipation and statehood the black population of the state remained centered there.

In all three states, football emerged as a key component of state identity. In a culture where anti-intellectualism thrived, winning teams and important victories became an important symbolic means of overcoming past disappointments. Here, as in the rest of the South, from the 1920s through the 1970s, the battle to achieve national football recognition and then to compete at the upper echelons of collegiate competition symbolically reenacted the conflicts of the Civil War era. Victories on the twentieth-century college football gridiron provided Southerners with an opportunity to right past wrongs and win redeeming victories for the “Lost Cause.”<sup>23</sup>

In Arkansas and Oklahoma, the redemptive qualities of college football glory also helped alleviate more recent humiliations. Devastated economically during the Great Depression, Oklahoma saw its population drop as thousands took to the road and left the state seeking better opportunities. The image of destitute Okies trekking westward on Route 66 achieved iconic status with the publication of John Steinbeck’s novel *The Grapes of Wrath* in 1939 and the release of John Ford’s film adaptation one year later. Following World War II, Oklahomans turned with pride to their state

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<sup>22</sup> David Chang, *The Color of the Land: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Land Ownership in Oklahoma, 1832-1929* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 29; Barbara Krauthamer, *Black Slaves, Indian Masters: Slavery, Emancipation, and Citizenship in the Native American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 78-82; Celia E. Taylor, *African Cherokees in Indian Territory: From Chattel to Citizens* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 18-19. Taylor estimates that slaves comprised 18% of the Chickasaw tribe, 15% of the Cherokees, 14% of the Choctaws, and 10% of the Creeks (Chang says 11.7%) in 1860. The Seminole tribe refused to give figures on its slave population, which had been estimated at 16-20% at the time of removal.

<sup>23</sup> Patrick B. Miller, ed. *The Sporting World of the Modern South* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Andrew Doyle, “‘Causes Won, Not Lost’: College Football and the Modernization of the American South,” *International Journal of Sport History* 11.2 (1994): 231-251; Wes Borucki, “‘You’re Dixie’s Football Pride’: American College Football and the Resurgence of Southern Identity,” *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 10.4 (2003): 477-494.

university's highly successful football team. When the powerful Sooners of the 1950s competed for national championships, they helped remake the state's tattered national image and instill new pride in Oklahomans.<sup>24</sup> Something similar happened in Arkansas during the 1960s when the Razorbacks emerged as a national power. Just after the Little Rock school desegregation crisis exposed the state to national scorn as a symbol of massive resistance in the late-1950s, the success of Frank Broyles' football program propagated a more positive image and provided a rallying point that enhanced state pride. In all three states, college football achieved a status that transcended sport and linked the game to the very foundations of the region's culture and history.

While college football rapidly gained popularity in the Southwest following World War II, the scope of serious historical inquiry also expanded. The field of sport history developed within the context of the larger democratization of the historical profession in the decades after World War II. An outgrowth of the greater attention given to social history, by the 1970s the study of sport emerged as its own field of serious inquiry.<sup>25</sup> The founding of the North American Society for Sport History in 1972 and its publication of the *Journal of Sport History*, beginning in 1974, provided organizational structure to this development as scholars increasingly looked at sport as an avenue for examining larger social, cultural, political, and economic issues.<sup>26</sup> Given

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<sup>24</sup> Berry Wayne Tramel, "The Significance of Sports in Oklahoma," in *The Culture of Oklahoma*, eds. Howard F. Stein and Robert F. Hill (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 143-159.

<sup>25</sup> The earliest historical analysis of sport came in an article by Frederic L. Paxson, "The Rise of Sport," which appeared in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* in 1917. A student of Frederick Jackson Turner, Paxson linked the rise of sport in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries to the closing of the American frontier. According to Paxson, as the nation grew beyond its rural roots and became increasingly urban losing the "open frontier that kept America young", sport provided "a partial substitute for pioneer life." Frederic L. Paxson, "The Rise of Sport," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 4.2 (1917): 167.

<sup>26</sup> Allen Guttman's seminal 1978 monograph, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* linked the rise of modern sport to the Industrial Revolution and the increased bureaucratization and



the intense mass appeal of sport—and in opposition to detractors who dismissed sport as immature or of marginal significance—these scholars argued for sport’s critical role in the daily lives of large segments of the population. The “cultural turn” in scholarship, beginning in the 1970s and achieving hegemony in the 1980s and 1990s, further stimulated the growth of the field through its interest in sport as a cultural text. Using the lens of culture, scholars see sport as a reflection of people’s fundamental beliefs and values, and as an access point for understanding attitudes regarding topics such as class, race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and region. The 1980s marked the appearance of scholarly monographs on a wide range of topics in sport history and the field has continued to expand ever since. In the twenty-first century, sport historians continue to address topics as diverse as bodybuilding and physical culture, children’s play, the role of international politics in Olympic sport, and the rise of modern commercial spectator sports.

For historians and other scholars, the intersection of sport and race has proven to be a fruitful area for study. Edwin B. Henderson pioneered the field with his 1939 study, *The Negro in Sports*, which chronicled black participation in the major American spectator sports.<sup>27</sup> Henderson devoted a section to black college football players and provided a detailed account of their participation at white colleges from the 1890s through the 1930s. He also discussed the emergence of football at black colleges and several instances of black players being forced to sit out when their teams played

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rationalization of modern society. According to Guttman, modern sport is secular, focused on equality, increasingly specialized, highly rationalized, controlled by bureaucracies, extensively quantified, and obsessed with establishing and surpassing records—a mirror-like reflection of modern industrial society. Allen Guttman, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 15-55.

<sup>27</sup> Edwin B. Henderson, *The Negro in Sports* (Washington: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1939).

segregationist opponents. Henderson and other early writers on sport and race provided accounts rich in factual detail but often light on analysis and connection to developments beyond the realm of sport.<sup>28</sup>

That began to change in 1969 when black activist and scholar Harry Edwards published *The Revolt of the Black Athlete*, his account of the 1968 Olympic boycott movement among black athletes that he organized and led. Edwards was a member of the sociology faculty at San Jose State College and later earned a PhD from Cornell. He contested the traditional view of sport as a meritocratic avenue to upward mobility and presented it instead as an integral part of the existing power structure, an institution that benefited from the racist exploitation of black athletes.<sup>29</sup> Four years later, his book *The Sociology of Sport* helped establish the field of sport sociology and further demonstrated sports' critical linkages to larger social structures.<sup>30</sup> As much a publicist and activist as a scholar, Edwards' style drew many critics; and yet journalist Robert Lipsyte argues that, "no other single figure in sports has done as much to make the country aware that the problems of the larger culture are recapitulated in sports."<sup>31</sup>

As Edwards reached the peak of his popular influence, Al-Tony Gilmore became the first African-American historian to complete a dissertation on sport in 1972.<sup>32</sup> Gilmore took the then-innovative approach of mining the archives of African-American and mainstream newspapers to study public perceptions of heavyweight

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<sup>28</sup> Edwin B. Henderson, *The Black Athlete: Emergence and Arrival* (New York: Publishers Company, 1968); Arna Bontemps, *Famous Negro Athletes* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1964); A. S. "Doc" Young, *Negro Firsts in Sport* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1963); Roy Ottley and William J. Weatherby, eds., *The Negro in New York: An Informal Social History, 1626-1940* (New York: Praeger, 1969).

<sup>29</sup> Harry Edwards, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete* (New York: Free Press, 1969).

<sup>30</sup> Harry Edwards, *The Sociology of Sport* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1973).

<sup>31</sup> *New York Times*, 22 May 1988, pg. 253.

<sup>32</sup> Al-Tony Gilmore, "America's Reaction to Jack Johnson, 1908-1915" (PhD diss., University of Toledo, 1972).

champion Jack Johnson.<sup>33</sup> His work pointed to the cultural power of sport when he noted that Johnson (loved by many blacks – hated by many whites and some blacks) “attracted more attention on a national level than any other black man” in the early part of the twentieth century.<sup>34</sup> Gilmore later focused on the career of the other great black heavyweight champion of the first-half of the twentieth century—Joe Louis. While Johnson’s career highlighted the racial attitudes of the Progressive Era, Gilmore found that Louis’s popularity reflected a broader spectrum of American cultural life. According to Gilmore, few figures in the nation’s history “reveal(ed) more about the hopes, frustrations, and ambiguities of the American people than” Louis. In the end, Gilmore’s work underscored the fact that serious scholars too often avoided the topic of sports, leaving the analysis of this integral social and cultural space to “journalists and popular writers.”<sup>35</sup>

In addition to Gilmore’s work, other important studies of the racial history of American sport began to appear in the 1970s. Historian Anthony O. Edmonds’ biography of Joe Louis and sportswriter Kal Wagenheim’s biography of Roberto Clemente both provided book-length treatments that moved beyond narrative to place their subjects within the social, political, and cultural contexts of their times.<sup>36</sup> John Behee’s *Hail to the Victors! Black Athletes at the University of Michigan* added to the field by focusing for the first time on the experiences of black athletes at a major

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<sup>33</sup> Also see: Al-Tony Gilmore, “Jack Johnson, The Man and His Times,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 6.3 (1972): 496-506; Al-Tony Gilmore, “Jack Johnson and White Women: The National Impact, 1912-1913,” *Journal of Negro History* 58.1 (1973): 18-38.

<sup>34</sup> Al-Tony Gilmore, *Bad Nigger: The National Impact of Jack Johnson* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1975), 9.

<sup>35</sup> Al-Tony Gilmore, “The Myth, Legend, and Folklore of Joe Louis: The Impression of Sport on Society,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 82.3 (1983): 256-268.

<sup>36</sup> Anthony O. Edmonds, *Joe Louis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1973); Kal Wagenheim, *Clemente* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973).

American university.<sup>37</sup> In the popular press, Bill Russell's autobiographical *Second Wind: The Memoirs of an Opinionated Man* (written with Taylor Branch) connected one of basketball's greatest players to the turbulent times in which he lived and the social changes he championed off the court.<sup>38</sup>

Significant to the field's development in the second-half of the 1970s, was the appearance of quality articles on the black sporting experience in the *Journal of Sport History*. G. B. McKinney's "Negro Professional Baseball Players in the Upper South in the Gilded Age" in 1976 and David K. Wiggins' "Good Times on the Old Plantation: Popular Recreations of the Black Slave in Antebellum South, 1810-1860," published the following year, extended critical analysis to the nineteenth century and to topics beyond the famous events and star figures that dominated previous works.<sup>39</sup> In 1979, Ronald K. Smith's "The Paul Robeson-Jackie Robinson Saga and a Political Collision" returned to the more familiar topics of the twentieth century but with a depth of research and degree of analysis not previously seen.<sup>40</sup>

During the 1980s, serious scholarly treatments of the black sporting experience multiplied and the field began to mature. The appearance of two book-length monographs written by scholars in 1983—*Papa Jack: Jack Johnson and the Era of White Hopes* by Randy Roberts and *Invisible Men: Life in Baseball's Negro Leagues* by

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<sup>37</sup> John Behee, *Hail to the Victors! Black Athletes at the University of Michigan* (Michigan: Swenk-Tuttle Press, 1974).

<sup>38</sup> Bill Russell and Taylor Branch, *Second Wind: The Memoirs of an Opinionated Man* (New York: Random House, 1979).

<sup>39</sup> G. B. McKinney, "Negro Professional Baseball Players in the Upper South in the Gilded Age," *Journal of Sport History* 3.3 (1976): 273-280; David K. Wiggins, "Good Times on the Old Plantation: Popular Recreations of the Black Slave in Antebellum South, 1810-1860," *Journal of Sport History* 4.3 (1977): 260-284.

<sup>40</sup> Ronald K. Smith, "The Paul Robeson-Jackie Robinson Saga and a Political Collision" *Journal of Sport History* 6.2 (1979): 5-27.

Donn Rogosin—pointed to the coming advances.<sup>41</sup> Later in the decade, the publication of Rob Ruck’s *Sandlot Seasons: Sport in Black Pittsburgh* and Jeffrey T. Sammons’ *Beyond the Ring: The Role of Boxing in American Society*, part of the University of Illinois Press’s Sport and Society Series, signaled the field’s arrival and its ability to produce sophisticated studies relevant to larger historical narratives.<sup>42</sup>

While monographs provided signposts of advancement, journal articles continued showcasing some of the most important scholarship. David K. Wiggins’ second article, “The Play of Slave Children in the Plantation Communities of the Old South, 1820-1860,” continued his earlier expansion of both the subject matter and the periodization of African-American sport history as he explored the ways in which slave children’s play transmitted cultural values from generation to generation.<sup>43</sup> One of the field’s most productive and important scholars, Wiggins produced a series of excellent articles on diverse topics during the first-half of the decade and his 1986 historiographical essay, “From Plantation to Playing Field: Historical Writings on the Black Athlete in American Sport,” provided a valuable assessment of the state of the field.<sup>44</sup> Dominic J. Capeci, Jr. and Martha Wilkerson’s 1983 article on Joe Louis demonstrated the powerful connections sports figures forged with the larger culture and

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<sup>41</sup> Randy Roberts, *Papa Jack: Jack Johnson and the Era of White Hopes* (New York: Free Press, 1983); Donn Rogosin, *Invisible Men: Life in Baseball’s Negro Leagues* (New York: Atheneum, 1983).

<sup>42</sup> Rob Ruck, *Sandlot Seasons: Sport in Black Pittsburgh* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Jeffrey T. Sammons, *Beyond the Ring: The Role of Boxing in American Society* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

<sup>43</sup> David K. Wiggins, “The Play of Slave Children in the Plantation Communities of the Old South, 1820-1860,” *Journal of Sport History* 7.2 (1980): 21-39.

<sup>44</sup> David K. Wiggins, “The 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin: The Response of America’s Black Press,” *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport* 54.3 (1983): 283-292; David K. Wiggins, “Wendell Smith, the *Pittsburgh Courier Journal* and the Campaign to Include Blacks in Organized Baseball, 1933-1945,” *Journal of Sport History* 10.2 (1983): 5-29; David K. Wiggins, “Peter Jackson and the Elusive Heavyweight Championship: A Black Athlete’s Struggle Against the Late Nineteenth Century Color Line,” *Journal of Sport History* 12.2 (1985): 143-168; David K. Wiggins, “From Plantation to Playing Field: Historical Writings on the Black Athlete in American Sport,” *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport* 57.2 (1986): 101-116.

the fruitful opportunities athletics offered for scholarly inquiry.<sup>45</sup> In 1988, the *Journal of Sport History* devoted an entire issue to the experience of black athletes. Articles by William H. Wiggins, Thomas G. Smith, Donald Spivey, and David Wiggins (who edited the issue) on boxing, professional football, and college football indicated how far the field had come and the broad range of quality scholarship it was capable of producing.<sup>46</sup> Three years later, Gwendolyn Captain filled an obvious gap in scholarship when her article “Enter Ladies and Gentlemen of Color: Gender, Sport, and the Ideal of African American Manhood and Womanhood During the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries” addressed issues of gender and touched on the experiences of African-American women in sports.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to work by academics, a handful of popular writers also published important analyses of the role of race in sport during the 1980s and early 1990s. In *Breaks of the Game*, journalist David Halberstam linked race relations in basketball to the nation’s long history of racial prejudice, producing a book that broadened a wide popular audience’s understanding of both.<sup>48</sup> Tennis star Arthur Ashe also made a significant contribution with his late-1980s publication of *A Hard Road to Glory*, a three-volume chronicle of African-American participation in American sports since 1619. While Ashe provided a wealth of information and brought narrative coherence to

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<sup>45</sup> Dominic Capeci, Jr. and Martha Wilkerson, “Multifarious Hero: Joe Louis, American Society and Race Relations During World Crisis, 1935-1945,” *Journal of Sport History* 10.3 (1983): 5-25.

<sup>46</sup> William H. Wiggins, Jr., “Boxing’s Sambo Twins: Stereotypes in Jack Johnson and Joe Louis Newspaper Cartoons, 1908-1938,” *Journal of Sport History* 15.3 (1988): 242-254; Thomas G. Smith, “Outside the Pale: The Exclusion of Blacks from the National Football League, 1934-1946,” *Journal of Sport History* 15.3 (1988): 255-281; Donald Spivey, “‘End Jim Crow in Sports’: The Protest at New York University, 1940-1941,” *Journal of Sport History* 15.3 (1988): 282-303; David K. Wiggins, “‘The Future of College Athletics is at Stake’: Black Athletes and Racial Turmoil on Three Predominantly White University Campuses, 1968-1972,” *Journal of Sport History* 15.3 (1988): 304-333.

<sup>47</sup> Gwendolyn Captain, “Enter Ladies and Gentlemen of Color: Gender, Sport, and the Ideal of African American Manhood and Womanhood During the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” *Journal of Sport History* 18.1 (1991): 81-102.

<sup>48</sup> David Halberstam, *Breaks of the Game* (New York: Knopf, 1981).

a broad swath of the black sports experience, his work highlighted the common critique that popular works do little to link that experience to the larger context of American history.<sup>49</sup> In 1990, journalist H. G. Bissinger published one of the most acclaimed and controversial popular works ever written about sport—*Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team, and a Dream*. A journalist from the East Coast, Bissinger immersed himself in the world of Texas high school football and emerged with a penetrating analysis of the state’s football culture, including the way the game reflected the complex racial hierarchies and traditions of Odessa, Texas.<sup>50</sup>

Beginning in the late-1980s and led by David K. Wiggins and Patrick B. Miller, an important vein of scholarship on sport and race began focusing on the ways in which, since the late-nineteenth century, whites had turned to scientific theories of biological difference when explaining the athletic achievements of African Americans.<sup>51</sup> In the period when racial exclusion allowed white athletes to dominate sport, success on the field demonstrated physical superiority as well as the possession of ideal manly virtues and often linked the star athlete to the grand vision of American national prowess. The emergence and indisputable successes of African-American athletes, however, forced the development of a new, more complex, narrative. For white athletes, athletic accomplishment continued to signify physical skill, but it also increasingly pointed to the possession of superior character traits such as hard-work, exceptional intelligence, and the ability to lead others. In contrast, by drawing on prevailing scientific theories of

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<sup>49</sup> Arthur R. Ashe Jr., *Hard Road to Glory: A History of the African-American Athlete* (New York: Warner Books, 1988).

<sup>50</sup> H. G. Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team, and a Dream* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1990).

<sup>51</sup> David K. Wiggins, “‘Great Speed but Little Stamina’: The Historical Debate Over Black Athletic Superiority,” *Journal of Sport History* 16.2 (1989): 158-185.

racial difference, white America explained the athletic (and artistic) successes of blacks with reference to innate biological advantages developed in the wilds of Africa or under the harsh regulations of plantation slavery.<sup>52</sup> Within this discourse, sports, far from serving as an integrating force proving the potential of black contributions to society as a whole, reinforced racial stereotypes and justified the exclusion of African Americans from the true power centers of American life.<sup>53</sup> The white male athlete—possessing skill, intelligence, determination, and courage—proved his readiness to assume positions of power and importance. His black counterpart proved only his race’s aptitude for performing manual labor.<sup>54</sup>

The story of the racial desegregation of college football in Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas in the decades after World War II provides one concrete historical example of the development of this more complex narrative of racial hierarchy. Until

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<sup>52</sup> Interviewed by David Zang in the *Journal of Sport History*, African-American former football star and Yale graduate Calvin Hill expressed similar views. According to Hill, the horrors of the Middle Passage and plantation slavery, which killed so many, produced survivors whose physical strength and mental toughness made them superior athletes. David Zang, “Calvin Hill Interview,” *Journal of Sport History* 15.3 (1988): 335, 347-348.

<sup>53</sup> In his controversial book *Darwin’s Athletes*, John Hoberman noted the willingness of many African Americans to join whites in accepting biological explanations of racial difference and glorifying black athleticism. The resulting overemphasis on the pursuit athletic stardom, Hoberman contended, ultimately harmed the black community. John Hoberman, *Darwin’s Athletes: How Sport Has Damaged Black America and Preserved the Myth of Race* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), 3-27.

<sup>54</sup> Patrick B. Miller, “The Anatomy of Scientific Racism: Racist Responses to Black Athletic Achievement,” *Journal of Sport History* 25.1 (1998): 119-151. Basketball star Isaiah Thomas summed up the frustrations of the black athlete in this regard when he discussed his accomplishments in comparison to those of his contemporary, Larry Bird. “When Bird makes a great play, it’s due to his thinking and his work habits. It’s all planned out by him,” Thomas observed in 1987. “It’s not the case for blacks. All we do is run and jump. We never practice or give a thought to how we play. It’s like I came dribbling out of my mother’s womb,” argued the two-time world champion. David K. Wiggins, “The Notion of Double-Consciousness and the Involvement of Black Athletes in American Sport.” In *Ethnicity and Sport in North American History and Culture*, ed. David K. Wiggins and George Eisen, 133-156, (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1994), 151; Miller, “Anatomy of Scientific Racism,” 338. Thomas’ 1981 NCAA title at Indiana University gave him three total championships, a number that compares favorably to Bird’s three NBA crowns. Both men also received recognition as one of the fifty greatest basketball players of all-time during the NBA’s fiftieth anniversary season and yet, in the public mind, Bird always seemed more deserving of credit. To the white mainstream, Thomas was a great player to be sure, but his talent for handling the ball, playing in the open court, and driving to the basket drew largely on his natural abilities, while Bird’s equally impressive performances stemmed from years of dedication and self-discipline.



the mid-1960s, segregation ensured the dominance of white players and protected the traditional view of athletic success as a symbol of both mental and physical superiority. The emergence of the black athlete in the second half of the decade, especially following Jerry LeVias's breakout 1966 season, forced a reassessment of what it meant to be a football star. The new and more nuanced cultural narratives emerging in the 1970s and beyond offered star black athletes some opportunities, but did so within strictly confined parameters. In a period when the behavior of white stars began receiving greater scrutiny, African Americans found themselves subjected to intense public oversight. The display of attitudes, styles, behaviors, or actions not conforming to accepted cultural standards could threaten a black athlete's career and ensure that their acceptance did not extend beyond the field of play. At the same time, the incorporation of a small number of elite black athletes into the cultural mainstream allowed the region's white majority to point with pride to the racial advances being made, even as the majority of blacks benefitted only marginally at best.

As the victories of the Civil Rights Movement achieved iconic status in the 1980s, scholarship concerning the intersection of race and sport often focused on the link between athletics and the African-American struggle to breakdown barriers and gain access to the mainstream. The literature on the topic reveals much about the potential pitfalls and possible rewards of writing sport history. At the level of popular history (typically produced by journalists and biographers), an abundance of works view sport as a critical cultural venue where the successes of a select few black athletes opened the way to expanded prospects for all African Americans and improved race

relations in society as a whole.<sup>55</sup> The best of these studies, however, recognizes the ambiguities and incremental pace of racial change while avoiding a simplistic, triumphalist narrative that ignores the disconnection between racial progress in sport and advances in the larger society. In 1983, Jules Tygiel established the standard for this area of scholarship with his definitive biography of sport's quintessential civil rights pioneer, *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy*.<sup>56</sup> More recently, excellent monographs by Amy Bass and Douglas Hartman analyze and contextualize the more controversial 1968 Olympic protest by American sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos.<sup>57</sup> The popularity of these topics will continue to drive the production of studies documenting the racial pioneers who challenged the color line in sports and the complex changes that resulted. Almost every sport and nearly every region has its own Jackie Robinson-like figure, an individual of exemplary character and intense determination who persevered against great odds and in the face of painful abuse to breakdown barriers. The desegregation of college football in the Southwest produced several such players—most notably Gault at Oklahoma and LeVias at SMU. While no protest figures like Smith and Carlos emerged, the early black athletes who brought desegregation to the region's major programs in the early-1970s faced many of the same obstacles and challenges the two iconic Black Power track stars protested against.

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<sup>55</sup> See for example: Jim Dent, *The Kids Got It Right: How the Texas All-Stars Kicked Down Racial Walls* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013); Don Haskins and Daniel Wetzel, *Glory Road: My Story of the 1966 NCAA Basketball Championship and How One Team Triumphed Against the Odds and Changed America Forever* (New York: Hyperion, 2006).

<sup>56</sup> Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

<sup>57</sup> Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle: The 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Douglas Hartman, *Race, Culture, and the Revolt of the Black Athlete: The 1968 Olympic Protests and Their Aftermath* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

During the first three decades of academic sports scholarship, studies of the rise of commercialized spectator sports in the United States focused primarily on the sports of boxing and baseball.<sup>58</sup> Beginning in the 1990s and continuing in the twenty-first century, scholars paid increasing attention to the history of football. Given the sport's immense popularity, this development seemed overdue. From its beginnings as a sport of the upper class played at elite Eastern universities in the 1880s, football spread to high schools and colleges throughout the country by the turn of the twentieth century. By the 1920s, the intercollegiate game emerged as a major spectator sport and professional leagues were established. After World War II, the game's popularity expanded rapidly and, over the course of the 1960s, football surpassed baseball as the nation's most popular spectator sport. The passion of Americans for the game has only increased in the decades since. Important studies of the development and staggering growth of professional football are just beginning to emerge; thus far, the largest body of scholarship focuses on the intercollegiate game.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Significant early works on the history of boxing include: Randy Roberts, *Jack Dempsey: The Manassa Mauler* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1979); Elliott J. Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986); Michael T. Isenberg, *John L. Sullivan and His America* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988). Foundational works on the history of baseball include: Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The Early Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960); Warren Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps: A History of Early Baseball* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989); George B. Kirsch, *The Creation of American Team Sports: Baseball and Cricket, 1838-72* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Peter Levine, *A.G. Spalding and the Rise of Baseball: The Promise of American Sport* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>59</sup> For monographs from academic presses on the history of professional football see: Michael Oriard, *Brand NFL: Making and Selling America's Favorite Sport* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Carl M. Becker, *Home & Away: The Rise and Fall of Professional Football on the Banks of the Ohio, 1919-1934* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1998); Craig R. Coenen, *From Sandlots to the Super Bowl: The National Football League, 1920-1967* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2005). John M. Carroll, *Red Grange and the Rise of Modern Football* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999) addresses a significant figure in the history of both the college and professional game. Academic studies of the racial integration of professional football include: John M. Carroll, *Fritz Pollard: Pioneer in Racial Advancement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Charles K. Ross, *Outside the Lines: African Americans and the Integration of the National Football League* (New York: New York University Press, 1999); Alan H. Levy, *Tackling Jim Crow: Racial Segregation in Professional Football* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2003); Thomas G. Smith, "Civil Rights on the Gridiron: The

Two early important monographs on college football focused on the game's development at an individual university. In 1993, Murray Sperber drew on previously untapped athletic department records to analyze the rise of Notre Dame, a small, undistinguished Midwestern Catholic school that became an elite college football power and capitalized on that fame to transform itself into a major American university. Sperber's account pulled back the veil on the sanitized version of college football history, showing that greed, corruption, low academic standards, and professionalism consumed the game even in the early-20<sup>th</sup> century. Sperber also debunks the myth that college football has been a financial windfall for the major universities engaged in it. Winning seasons may produce tidy profits, but in the long run most programs actually lose money.<sup>60</sup> A unique combination of circumstances—a strong athletic culture, an innovative coach, tremendous success, media support, and, most importantly, a national ethnic (Irish) and religious (Catholic) fan base—made Notre Dame's financial success the exception, not the rule.<sup>61</sup>

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Kennedy Administration and the Desegregation of the Washington Redskins," *Journal of Sport History* 14.2 (1987): 189-208.

<sup>60</sup> The work of higher education scholar J. Douglas Toma challenges Sperber's contention that major college football is not profitable for a majority of programs. Toma argues that football's bottom line is only one of several factors that determine the sport's value to a school. Major college football also contributes to the university by helping build campus life, generating alumni support and enthusiasm, and establishing connections to local and regional communities. Most importantly, Toma contends, football provides an avenue that allows what are essentially homogenous, regional institutions to differentiate themselves and build national brand recognition. J. Douglas Toma, *Football U.: Spectator Sports in the Life of the American University* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 1-15.

<sup>61</sup> Murray Sperber, *Shake Down the Thunder: The Creation of Notre Dame Football*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993). The financial records of the athletic department at Southern Methodist University tell a different side of the story. A small private school in Dallas, SMU competed nationally in football between the 1930s and 1980s. Doak Walker's breakout 1947 season ushered in an era of great profitability for the SMU athletic department, which produced over \$2.1 million in profits during the next decade. In 1953, athletics transferred its \$1.1 million surplus to the University. Between 1949 and 1962, however, total income remained relatively flat while expenses more than tripled. In 1958, the program lost money for the first time in twelve years. It then operated at a loss for eight of the ten years between 1961 and 1970. By the 1960s, maintaining a high-profile football program was putting a strain on other University resources. Disposition of Athletic Department Resources For Period 1945-46 thru 1969-1970, Faculty

Robin Lester's 1995 study, *Stagg's University*, traces the rise and fall of one of the early-twentieth century's most famous coaches and football programs—Amos Alonzo Stagg and the University of Chicago. With the help and support of University President William Rainey Harper, in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Stagg built a powerful football team that helped establish the new university's national reputation and transform college football into a mass entertainment industry. Like Sperber, Lester documents the impressive institution building power of college football as well as the professionalism and corruption that were a part of the sport from its earliest days. Stagg established a powerful position for himself as the director of an autonomous athletic department that ignored academic standards in the pursuit of top athletes. This contradiction at the heart of the game—the existence of a highly commercialized and professionalized sports organization being run within a university setting—ultimately led to Stagg's downfall at Chicago. President Robert Maynard Hutchins, who took over in 1929, led a faculty movement that forced Stagg out in 1933 and eliminated the football program entirely in 1939. To the surprise of reformers, alumni support and fundraising efforts for the university as a whole declined afterwards.<sup>62</sup>

A significant strain of scholarship regarding the history of college football joins Sperber and Lester in stressing the professionalism, corruption and scandal inherent to the game from its beginnings. Both Ronald A. Smith's 1988 monograph *Sports and Freedom: The Rise of Big-Time College Athletics* and John Sayle Watterson's *College*

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Governing Records, Box 29, Folder: Faculty Senate – Committees –Athletics Committee, 1970-1971, SMU Archives, Degolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas.

<sup>62</sup> Robin Lester, *Stagg's University: The Rise, Decline, and Fall of Big-Time Football at Chicago* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

*Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy*, which appeared over a decade later, emphasize this theme. Analyzing the emergence of crew, baseball, track, and especially football, Smith finds that “between 1852 and . . . 1905, the basis for the highly commercial and professional sports in colleges was established.” Furthermore, he argues, these “sports took on many of the features of the larger America and its capitalistic rush for wealth, power, recognition, and influence.” By the late nineteenth century, intercollegiate football contests produced tremendous revenue by attracting large crowds to fill giant stadiums. On the field, highly compensated, professional coaches directed well-funded players in the drive for individual and institutional athletic glory and profits. Newspapers publicized the events as a sports-hungry public fueled increased circulation figures.<sup>63</sup>

Watterson highlights many of these same themes and documents their enduring power throughout the twentieth century. At three different points, the contradictions inherent to big-time sport produced a crisis and spawned serious attempts at reform. Reform efforts made little real headway, however, and ironically each effort came just before or during a period when the game’s popularity expanded greatly. The arrival of television sparked much debate among those running college football, but ultimately brought the game to ever-larger audiences in the last three decades of the twentieth century. As the stakes grew, so did incentives to cheat and, consequently, corruption continued to make headlines—most infamously at Southern Methodist University

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<sup>63</sup> Ronald A. Smith, *Sports and Freedom: The Rise of Big-Time College Athletics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 4.

where a slush fund scandal led to the imposition of the so-called “death penalty” on the Mustang football program.<sup>64</sup>

By focusing on commercialism, corruption, and scandal, these studies emphasize the history and role of football inside institutions of higher learning. In contrast, football historian and literary scholar Michael Oriard focuses his attention on the sport’s place in the larger American culture and what it meant “to the actual millions who followed it.”<sup>65</sup> In three monographs published between 1993 and 2009, Oriard uses the tools of cultural analysis to examine the history of football and the many cultural narratives it has created. Oriard finds that these narratives reflect deeply held cultural values regarding work, character, class, ethnicity, race, and masculinity. He stresses the critical role of popular journalism in creating powerful, and often conflicting, themes that fueled the emergence of college football as a mass entertainment spectacle in the late-nineteenth century and as a central cultural institution in the twentieth century. Oriard concedes that, in most cases, historians cannot know what football meant to the individual fan. However, given the intense press coverage devoted to the sport, they can reconstruct the rich media world fans experienced “to understand what the public thought about football as it developed.”<sup>66</sup> Oriard finds that football provided a powerful source of local and regional identity and that it emphasized the coach as the true hero, while the football star emerged as a deeply ambivalent figure. He also suggests that the game reflected strongly held values regarding American masculinity and that it served as a democratizing and integrating

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<sup>64</sup> John Sayle Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

<sup>65</sup> Michael Oriard, *King Football: Sport and Spectacle in the Golden Age of Newsreels, Movies and Magazines, the Weekly & the Daily Press* ((Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 2.

<sup>66</sup> Oriard, *King Football*, 16.

force helping ethnic immigrants assimilate into the American middle-class mainstream. In regard to race, however, Oriard shows that narratives of football proved less willing to embrace equality and instead often served to reinforce popular stereotypes.<sup>67</sup>

Both Watterson and Oriard addressed the role of race in the history of college football a topic expanded on in recent years during what Sperber has labeled “a second generation of serious academic works about American college football.”<sup>68</sup> In a series of articles culminating in his monograph *Benching Jim Crow: The Rise and Fall of the Color Line in Southern College Sports, 1890-1980*, historian Charles H. Martin makes a significant contribution to this new scholarship by chronicling the long, uneven process by which racial segregation was challenged and ultimately defeated in college football and basketball throughout the South. Prior to World War II, Martin finds that college sport was not a sanctuary for racial democracy, but rather it reflected the deeply held prejudices and legal restrictions of the larger society. These barriers became embodied in the “Gentleman’s Agreement,” an informal rule banning blacks from participating against southern teams that northern colleges willingly collaborated in enforcing. In the South and large parts of the rest of the nation, college gridirons served as protected spaces for the acting out of white masculinity. Following the war, things slowly began to change. The Gentleman’s Agreement gradually became unenforceable as more and more schools refused to abide by it. In the 1960s and early-1970s, a handful of talented

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<sup>67</sup> Oriard, *King Football*, 18-19; Michael Oriard, *Reading Football: How the Popular Press Created an American Spectacle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Michael Oriard, *Bowled Over: Big-Time College Football from the Sixties to the BCS Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009). Taken together the three books cover the modern history of the sport and, though focused on college football, also address the game’s development at the high school and professional levels.

<sup>68</sup> Murray Sperber, review of *Integrating the Gridiron: Black Civil Rights and American College Football* by Lane Demas and *College Football and American Culture in the Cold War Era* by Kurt Edward Kemper. *American Historical Review* 115.5 (2010) 1500-1502.



pioneers slowly broke down the barriers to black participation. Desegregated teams often experienced success and, Martin argues, soon became unifying symbols of a new era as sports emerged as the most integrated activity in the South. Despite the advances, however, limitations remained as new stereotypes replaced old ones and structural inequalities endured into the present era.<sup>69</sup>

In his 2009 monograph, *College Football and American Culture in the Cold War Era*, Kurt Edward Kemper links the growing popularity of college football following World War II to the tensions of American Cold War culture. According to Kemper, Cold War political leaders and the men running college football formed a mutually-beneficial alliance that advanced the interests of both. Powerful politicians, including presidents, courted high-profile coaches and invoked the imagery of college football to garner partisan political support. At the same time, coaches and administrators advanced their cause by presenting the game as an embodiment of the best American values and a crucial component in the nation's vigorous prosecution of the Cold War. The college football player—young, hardworking, committed to the team, willing to accept and deliver physical pain, and struggling to overcome the toughest of opposition—represented the ideal of American manhood, and the game, its supporters all agreed, put forth the best characteristics of American culture.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Charles H. Martin, *Benching Jim Crow: The Rise and Fall of the Color Line in Southern College Sports, 1890-1980* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Charles H. Martin, "The Color Line in Midwestern Sports, 1890-1960," *Indiana Magazine of History* 98.2 (2002): 85-112; Charles H. Martin, "The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow in Southern College Sports: The Case of the Atlantic Coast Conference," *North Carolina Historical Review* 76.3 (1999): 253-284; Charles H. Martin, "Integrating New Year's Day: The Racial Politics of College Bowl Games in the American South," *Journal of Sport History* 24.3 (1997): 358-377; Charles H. Martin, "Racial Change and 'Big-Time' College Football in Georgia: The Age of Segregation, 1892-1957," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 79.3 (1995): 532-562.

<sup>70</sup> Kurt Edward Kemper, *College Football and American Culture in the Cold War Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

Within the context of the struggle with the Soviet Union, college football served as a unifying force in American society, but within the framework of race relations it could be a source of division. For Southerners, it could also be a source of isolation. By analyzing early-1960s debates at Louisiana State University and the University of Alabama concerning the possibilities of competing against integrated teams, Kemper demonstrates one of the underlying realities of racial change in college football—progress occurred when it aligned with the self-interest of the majority of white fans, not out of any sense of the need to achieve racial justice. As more and more teams nationally added black players to their rosters, Southern schools that refused to compete against African Americans found scheduling games increasingly difficult. Even worse, because the top teams from other regions were almost all desegregated, the ban often frustrated Southerners’ desire to see their teams compete at the game highest levels and win national recognition, especially in postseason bowl games. Diehard segregationists in the region maintained their staunch opposition to any form of desegregation, but Kemper documents the slow process (and sometimes tortured logic) by which mainstream Southerners finally accepted competition against blacks.<sup>71</sup> Kemper’s argument reinforces what Howard Zinn first noted in 1959: when the inability of their beloved teams to compete for national bragging rights became “a fate worse than integration,” Southerners grudgingly accepted games against integrated opponents.<sup>72</sup>

In his 2010 book, *Integrating the Gridiron: Black Civil Rights and American College Football*, Lane Demas provides an important reassessment of the historiography of race and sport and demonstrates how the integration of intercollegiate

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<sup>71</sup> Kemper, *College Football*, 80-154.

<sup>72</sup> Howard Zinn, “A Fate Worse than Integration,” *Harper’s Magazine* 219 (August 1959): 53-56.

football can add to discussions of the topic. Demas employs an episodic framework to analyze the “tediously slow and arduous process” of integration in college football. He argues that the path to racial change in the game differed from that in professional sports in that there was no single moment and no Jackie Robinson or Joe Louis to lead the way. Instead, it “spanned eighty years” and involved “countless players.” As a starting point for exploring this more complex history, Demas offers a detailed account of four familiar incidents in the integration story: the acceptance of African-American players at UCLA in the late-1930s, the physical assault on Johnny Bright of Drake in 1951, the fight to integrate the Sugar Bowl in 1956, and the revolt of the University of Wyoming’s black players in 1969.<sup>73</sup>

According to Demas, the focus of scholars on star professional athletes and their “clear and powerful individual stories of integration” creates a simplistic narrative that masks the complex progression of racial change in the country. “Mimic(ing) the mainstream historiography of the civil rights movement,” Demas says, sport historians too often satisfy “our desire to create stark racial barriers in order to see them broken down.” According to Demas, the more complex racial history of college football pushes the field “beyond Jackie Robinson” and “provides a more nuanced and sobering portrait of desegregation,” one “that better exemplifies the true struggle behind the story of African American civil rights in the twentieth century.” Over the course of eight decades, Demas asserts no less heroically, a largely unheralded group of young black

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<sup>73</sup> Lane Demas, *Integrating the Gridiron: Black Civil Rights and American College Football* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 6, 139.

students “used college football to both change the racial landscape at America’s universities and reconfigure the role of African Americans in the public sphere.”<sup>74</sup>

Additional research and writing will provide a broader understanding of the complex and uneven process Demas begins to outline. It also may lead to some modification. For example, the integration of college football in the Southwest did have its own Jackie Robinson-like figures (Gault and LeVias most prominently) and a full telling of their stories—far from simplifying and sanitizing the desegregation narrative—highlights many aspects of its complexity. The struggles they faced, as whites tried to limit desegregation to the greatest degree possible, highlight the gradual, piecemeal fashion in which a deeply engrained institution such as segregation was overcome.

As the following six chapters will show, the integration of major college football in the Southwest occurred haltingly, against a backdrop of changing conceptions of race and manhood, and on a dramatic stage that captivated significant portions of the region’s population. Always more than just a game, football provided an arena that, for its adherents, helped define personal identity and shaped their view of the world. As a central focus of the dominant white culture, college football resisted desegregation in stern and often dramatic ways. It also, at times, served in the vanguard of racial change, demonstrating at several critical points that civic pride, the pursuit of profits, and the desire to compete at the game’s highest levels could trump the strong traditions of racial separation. The game itself became a canvas on which opposing sides engaged in a cultural debate over the relative merits and meanings of both segregation and integration. In its best moments, college football helped promote significant changes in

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<sup>74</sup> Demas, *Integrating the Gridiron*, 6, 11-12 18-22, 27, 139.

racial attitudes and expanded definitions of acceptable masculinity. At its worst, it provided powerful confirmation of the negative stereotypes assigned to those outside the mainstream. Black athletes transformed the game on the field and football provided a few black men an avenue into the region's public life. Despite this progress, however, old stereotypes and enduring prejudices remained, and, in some sense, grew even stronger.

Ultimately, the motivations that brought racial change to college football in the Southwest reflected the desires of mainstream whites for economic advancement and cultural validation rather than an egalitarian impulse to create a more just society. When SMU and Doak Walker emerged as national contenders after World War II, Cotton Bowl officials and Dallas residents accepted an integrated game against Penn State because of the potential profits and football glory it could bring to the city, not because they wanted to give two young black men an opportunity to play in a premier sporting event. Even after the advances of the Civil Rights era, base motivations continued to dominate in the early-1970s when all the region's teams began embracing African-American athletes. The undeniable talent of these players coupled with the institution-building impulses of coaches and administrators as well as the fan base's overwhelming desire to win football games explains the rapid move to racial inclusion more fully than does any concern for racial justice.

The transformative impact of the black athlete emerged as one of the most striking developments in the history of college football during this period, both in the Southwest and nationally. Beginning slowly after World War II and reaching critical mass during the 1970s, given increasing opportunities to participate, black athletes

raised the level of competition on the field and achieved success at rates disproportionate to their numbers. By the mid-1970s, no matter what their racial attitudes were, coaches and programs had to accept African Americans if they hoped to remain competitive. To reach the top levels of national competition, they had to follow Switzer's Sooners in removing all racial restrictions and allowing the best athletes to play each position.

Beyond the fields of sport, during the second half of the twentieth century, African-American athletes achieved a degree of social acceptance and cultural influence experienced by few others in the history of their race. At a time when white Southerners abandoned the strategy of de jure segregation and depended on the more subtle economic barriers created by suburbanization and white flight to maintain de facto segregation, they also, perhaps paradoxically, invited the elite black athlete to join the mainstream of the region's cultural life.<sup>75</sup> Black stars of the 1970s, such as Joe Washington, Greg Pruitt, the Selmon brothers, Roosevelt Leaks, Earl Campbell, Jerry Eckwood, and others, joined early pioneers like Gault and LeVias in becoming household names among football fans in the region.

The African-American athletes who starred during the first generation of integration laid the foundation for not only their successors, but also the building of a more inclusive public sphere. For a younger generation of whites, the desegregation of public education and daily life, in combination with this new acceptance of a limited number of African-American public figures, produced a willingness to contemplate a more integrated social order. While true integration remained a lofty and unachieved

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<sup>75</sup> On suburbanization and white flight as methods of establishing and reinforcing de facto segregation in the face of gains made during the Civil Rights Era see: Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

goal, by the late-1970s, the decades-old system of Jim Crow was gone and new models of regional life began to emerge. Though still faced with overcoming a myriad of day-to-day prejudices and structural inequities, a limited but significant number of African Americans now found a wider range of opportunities open to them and the pathway to the American middle class more realistically accessible.

Intertwined with issues of race, the 1960s and 1970s were also a period when one pillar of Southern (and American) manhood—the football coach—confronted a changing world that confounded his previously unquestioned authority. Against the backdrop of the civil rights and student movements; in the face of countercultural, black power, and anti-war protests; and confronted with the emergence of the women’s and gay liberation movements; the centuries old edifice of American patriarchy crumbled almost as rapidly (if not as completely) as the Jim Crow system. Not only did the once unquestioned authority of the coach face the challenge of managing the new black athlete, he also confronted white players’ increasing unwillingness to buckle to higher authority. Long hair, individualistic dress styles, participation in protest marches, and drug use served as the outward signs of a fundamental shift in American manhood. The monosyllabic conformity of the post-World War II era gave way to a more open and fluid definition of acceptable masculine styles. Coaches who had difficulty adapting struggled in the new era and both Royal and Broyles soon retired. Others, such as Switzer, prospered in the new climate of desegregation and loosened authority, using these new opportunities to win glory for themselves and their schools.

In the end, it was the universities themselves that controlled the pace of change and directed the desegregation of college football in the Southwest. Moreover,

throughout the process, they operated within the confines of dominant cultural discourses within their states. Civil rights stories by their very nature lend themselves to becoming morality tales in which individual actors are praised or vilified for their actions. In the desegregation drama of Southwest college football, individuals such as Broyles and Royal played obstructionist roles and slowed the pace of change; in the present-day retelling especially, they often serve as villains blocking the creation of a more just society. This story, however, places too much blame on the single individual and ignores the larger, socially constructed barriers that shaped the decades long process of football desegregation. Individual coaches worked within larger institutions, and those institutions—the universities—served a broader public constituency, a constituency that linked them to the social and cultural power centers of their states. If they had been more proactive and more willing to accept racial change, coaches such as Broyles and Royal may have been able to make desegregation a reality a few years earlier. It seems highly unlikely, however, that either could have done so prior to the mid-1960s; in fact, state laws, university regulations, and powerful social customs would have prevented it. Ultimately, it was the region's long history and its evolving attitudes toward race that shaped the desegregation of college football in Texas, Arkansas, and Oklahoma.



## Chapter One

### The Winds of Change: The 1948 Cotton Bowl—Black Athletes on the Texas

#### Gridiron

Prior to the end of World War II, the college football gridirons of the Southwest stood as bastions of white male privilege, rigidly segregated spaces where young black athletes could not compete. Just over two years after the war, however, a surprising breakthrough took place in Texas. With little forethought and even less publicity the state's long tradition of strictly segregated college football abruptly ended. For an afternoon on the first day of 1948, two African Americans played in one of the region's annual showcase events, the Cotton Bowl game in Dallas. It was only the second integrated college football game in the history of the states of the old Confederacy, and as a bowl game it held much greater significance to the public at-large.<sup>1</sup> In Dallas, a core constituency of community leaders and boosters, presented with the potential benefits of a racially integrated game, worked behind the scenes to smoothly overcome traditional prejudices and make the contest a reality. City leaders and the local press, however, did little to highlight the racial implications of the event. African Americans, both locally and nationally, eagerly embraced the game, and the black press provided the most detailed analysis of the event and its significance. In all, the 1948 Cotton Bowl and the events surrounding it suggested some of the possibilities for and

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<sup>1</sup> Less than three months earlier, the long tradition of Jim Crow college football in the South came to an end when Harvard and African-American tackle Chester Pierce took on the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. Before scheduling the game, Virginia athletic director Norton T. Pritchett put the matter to a vote of the players, because, as he put it, "at Virginia no man is required to participate in a game against his will." After receiving the team's unanimous approval, Pritchett signed a contract with Harvard in which "each school agreed to abide by its own eligibility standards." The color line fell, but the much-anticipated intersectional contest between two undefeated teams proved anti-climactic when Virginia routed the Crimson, 47-0, on October 11, 1947. *Pittsburgh Courier*, 4 October 1947, pg. 13.

limitations of racial change in the new postwar era.<sup>2</sup>

The Cotton Bowl stadium sits just east of downtown Dallas, a concrete and steel reminder of the days when the Southwest Conference and the annual bowl game hosted by its champion played a major role in the world of college football. Originally named the Fair Park Bowl and opened during the depths of the Great Depression in 1932, the stadium still serves as a centerpiece for Dallas's Fair Park grounds, the site, for three weeks each October, of the State Fair of Texas.<sup>3</sup> Bankrolled by Texas oilman J. Curtis Stanford, the first Cotton Bowl game took place on January 1, 1937 when 17,000 fans watched Texas Christian and senior All-American quarterback Sammy Baugh defeat the Avalanche from Marquette University, 16-6.<sup>4</sup> The following year's game attracted a much larger crowd of 37,000 to watch Rice hand the University of Colorado and its star player, future Supreme Court Justice, Byron "Whizzer" White, a 28-14 defeat.<sup>5</sup> In 1940, prominent Dallas business and community leaders, serving as members of the Cotton Bowl Athletic Association, took over control of the game. Beginning in 1941,

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<sup>2</sup> The egalitarian creed the United States adopted and fought for during the Second World War and the ideological confrontations of the Cold War put tremendous pressure on the Southern racial caste system and often provided critical support to the Civil Rights Movement. At the same time, African Americans increasingly linked the fight for democracy on the world stage to efforts to secure equal rights at home adding strength to the movement. For the impact of world events on American race relations in this period see: Daniel Kryder, *Divided Arsenal: Race and the American State during World War Two* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Penny Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Construction of the stadium began in 1930, and eventually cost the city of Dallas \$350,943.41 to complete. The project occurred within the context of a larger civic embrace of sports taking place in Dallas and other American cities in the early twentieth century. According to historian Harry Jebsen, Jr., progressive city leaders, rejecting nineteenth-century notions of athletics as immoral and frivolous, embraced sport as "a positive force" and "a means of organizing and controlling the populace in a rapidly urbanizing society." In this view, sports provided leisure-time activities, created happy citizens, and, in the case of the large new stadium, offered a significant boost to the local economy. Harry Jebsen, Jr., "The Public Acceptance of Sports in Dallas, 1880-1930," *Journal of Sport History* 6 (1979): 5-19.

<sup>4</sup> *New York Times*, 2 January 1937, pg. 16; *Washington Post*, 2 January 1937, pg. 15, 17.

<sup>5</sup> *New York Times*, 2 January 1938, pg. 63.

the Southwest Conference champion annually hosted another top national team in a game that, along with the Rose, Sugar, and Orange Bowls, constituted the dramatic finale of each college football season.

By 1947, the Cotton Bowl was a New Year's Day tradition in Dallas, a showcase event for the region's best team and a fast-growing city intent on enhancing its status on the national scene. One potential impediment to this image building, however, came from an honest assessment of the city's history. A Southern city built on a firm foundation of racial exploitation and subjugation in the nineteenth century, Dallas in the early twentieth century featured a strict Jim Crow system held in place by the underlying threat of racial violence.<sup>6</sup> In the 1920s, the city became "the epicenter of a national KKK (Ku Klux Klan) revival." Its Dallas Klan No. 66 was the largest Klan chapter in the country with 13,000 members and a special day devoted to the Klan at 1923 Texas State Fair attracted more than 150,000 visitors. The Klan dominated Dallas politics in the first-half of the 1920s and produced leader Hiram Wesley Evans, a local dentist who became Imperial Wizard of the national Klan in 1922.<sup>7</sup> An open shop city with a long history of opposition to workers' causes and union organizing, Dallas also experienced bitter anti-labor violence during the 1930s.<sup>8</sup>

Despite this history, Dallas preferred to see (and promote) itself as a progressive

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<sup>6</sup> On the critical role of race and class in shaping the history of Dallas see: Michael Phillips, *White Metropolis: Race, Ethnicity, and Religion in Dallas, 1841-2001* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Phillips, *White Metropolis*, 83-86.

<sup>8</sup> In August 1937, a group of Ford Motor Company strikebreakers violently attacked organizers at an outdoor Congress of Industrial Organizations rally in Dallas. The attackers broke up the event, destroyed a union film projector, and violently abducted and tar-and-feathered one rally organizer. Stephen H. Norwood, *Strikebreaking & Intimidation: Mercenaries and Masculinity in Twentieth Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 171-172.

urban center in a vital and expanding New South.<sup>9</sup> A key component of the postwar New South creed, adopted by cities like Dallas and Atlanta, involved a supposedly less harsh and more harmonious form of race relations that distinguished them from the overt prejudice and discrimination practiced in the rest of the region. This popular self-image masked gross racial inequities and many incidents of both structural and overt racial injustice in these and other Southern urban areas. However, on occasion, these sentiments could open the door to a less restrictive environment and open up the opportunity for incremental racial change.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> “New South” is a nebulous term used to describe the South (defined by one of its imminent historians, C. Vann Woodward, as “the eleven former Confederate states plus Kentucky and, after it became a state, Oklahoma”) at any time after the Civil War. Generally, and in a wide variety of contexts, the term is used to describe a fundamental shift in Southern society—from an “Old South” dominated by plantation agricultural and slavery, to a new, more urban and progressive region seeking integration into the national industrial economy. In the late-19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the New South creed included a virulent racism that fully participated in and embraced the building of the Jim Crow system and the relegation of African Americans to second-class citizenship. On the New South in this period see: C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), x; Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Walter L. Buenger, *The Path to a Modern South: Northeast Texas Between Reconstruction and the Great Depression* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001). The tumultuous years of the Great Depression and Second World War began a fundamental shift in the New South vision of racial relations. Increasingly in the postwar period, Southern liberals and business-oriented members of the region’s growing urban middle class turned against *de jure* segregation and incorporated a more meritocratic, racially open public sphere into their version of the New South. Initially less powerful than traditional conservatives, these groups gained strength as rapid demographic changes reshaped the region in the 1940s and 1950s. By the 1960s, these “metropolitan moderates” and their urban constituents dominated regional politics and oversaw a fundamental redefinition of regional race relations. While more inclusive, this new racial order did not signify the end of Southern racism as many whites embraced suburbanization as a means of limiting and controlling integration and maintaining a system of widespread *de facto* segregation. Numan V. Bartley, *The New South, 1945-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 261.

<sup>10</sup> In a similar vein, historian Brian Behnken argues that, later, during the Civil Rights Movement, influential civic leaders in Dallas, hoping to protect the city’s image and encourage business growth, moved to bring down the mandates of legal segregation ahead of the massive, direct-action protests that forced changes in other parts of the South. A well-organized local civil rights movement joined forces with government and business leaders to bring down barriers the “Dallas Way” and promote the city’s image as a progressive bastion of the New South. Brian D. Behnken, “The ‘Dallas Way’: Protest, Response, and the Civil Rights Experience in Big D and Beyond,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 111 (2007): 1-29. In San Antonio, a city with a small black population on the Southern periphery, state and local leaders similarly emphasized a “Texas way” where desegregation emerged through official mandate and forestalled the potential for protests that might hurt the city’s reputation. Robert A. Goldberg, “Racial Change on the Southern Periphery: The Case of San Antonio, Texas, 1960-1965,” *Journal of Southern History* 49 (1983): 349-374.

Played on January 1, the 1948 Cotton Bowl game between Southern Methodist University and Pennsylvania State University provided one such occasion for a loosening of racial mores. When the hometown Mustangs suddenly re-emerged as a national football contender and their best potential bowl opponent, the Nittany Lions, featured two African Americans in their line-up, the citizens of Dallas collectively turned their backs on the mandates of Jim Crow and embraced an integrated game. Their motivations for doing so, however, centered more on the potential for financial gain and the desire to see the Mustangs succeed at college football's highest level, than any desire to establish racial justice. In fact, a concerted effort went into limiting integration to the football field and to preventing this instance of inclusion from spilling over into the myriad of other civic festivities accompanying the bowl contest. Still, with these limitations in mind, the 1948 Cotton Bowl, played just months after Jackie Robinson's initial appearance in a Brooklyn Dodger uniform, represented a significant step forward as African-American athletes competed for the first time on the southwestern gridiron's biggest stage.

The events leading to the desegregated bowl game began in the fall of 1947, when Southern Methodist University, Dallas's only major university, fielded its best football team since before of the Second World War. Coach William Madison "Matty" Bell, the Mustang's head coach since 1935, returned from three seasons of military service in 1945 to rebuild a program he led to national prominence in the second-half of the 1930s. Entering the 1947 season, Bell felt his team was still a year away from re-emerging as a national power, but he began the campaign with a talented group and hoped to be competitive in the Southwest Conference. Central to Bell's plans was the

return to school of a versatile and talented sophomore named Ewell Doak Walker, Jr. from Highland Park High School, a school located just blocks from the SMU campus in the affluent North Dallas suburbs.<sup>11</sup>

In the summer of 1947, few people beyond the SMU campus and practically no

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<sup>11</sup> In Dallas, local lore maintains that the day after Doak Walker was born on New Year's Day, 1927, his father, Ewell Sr. exclaimed to his English class at North Dallas High School: "Great news! Yesterday, an All-American quarterback was born." Bill Pennington, *The Heisman: Great American Stories of the Men Who Won* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005), 316. While that story might be exaggerated, Ewell Sr., a football letterman at Austin College in Sherman, Texas and a Dallas public school official, did introduce his son to the game both loved at an early age. He started teaching Doak to drop kick a football over the family's laundry line at age three and soon let him roam the field during practices at North Dallas High, where the elder Walker also coached. Young Doak demonstrated his potential for football success at an early age, playing on an organized fifth-grade team for three years beginning in the third grade.

During his years at Highland Park, Walker joined with two individuals who would have a profound impact on both his life and football career: Robert Lawrence "Bobby" Layne and Harvey N. "Rusty" Russell. Layne, a year ahead of Walker in school, served as his teammate in high school and professional football, his rival during their college days, and a lifelong friend and companion. Both Layne and Walker would end their careers in the Pro Football Hall of Fame, but at Highland Park, they were merely two teenagers with a passion for sports. During Layne's senior season, the duo powered the Scots to the semifinal round of the Texas state playoffs where they lost to San Angelo in a thrilling 21-20 contest still remembered as one of the greatest games in Texas schoolboy history. Layne ran for two touchdowns and threw to Walker for another as the Scots built a 20-7 lead, but a long, fourth-quarter drive by San Angelo capped a comeback victory for the eventual state champions.

In 1942, Walker's sophomore year, Highland Park hired Rusty Russell, the long-time coach of the Fort Worth Masonic Home, an orphanage and Texas football powerhouse, to replace its coach, who was leaving for military duty. A devoted student and teacher of the game, Russell utilized a wide-open offensive attack perfectly suited to Walker's diverse skills. An innovative offensive thinker, Russell was one of the first coaches to spread opposing defenses across the field and then attack the gaps this created. Harold V. Ratliff, *Autumn's Mightiest Legions: History of Texas Schoolboy Football* (Waco: Texian Press, 1963), 94. His passion for football quickly spread to his young charges and soon Walker, Layne, and several teammates spent much of their free time at Russell's house working on offensive plays and studying the game. "I learned an awful lot of football from Rusty," Walker later remembered. "We would go over there after school and go over offenses and formations and concepts until it was time to go home for supper. Rusty never tired of it, and he approached it like he was teaching a class. You didn't just get some pointers from him—you absorbed it." For his part, Russell grew increasingly impressed with his new star. "He started out as a little kid playing the game because he loved it," Russell recalled late in life, "but he always wanted to improve himself and worked at it every day. He was never big...but when the chips were down you could always depend on him." Canning, *Doak Walker*, 21, 31-33.

With Layne graduated and enrolled at the University of Texas, Walker once again led the Scots deep into the state playoffs in 1944. In the quarterfinals against Sunset High School of Dallas, he scored all of the game's points by rushing for two touchdowns, passing for another, and kicking both extra points in a 20-0 Highland Park victory. The following week in the semifinals, Walker almost single-handedly avenged the previous year's season-ending defeat to San Angelo, a team favored to repeat as state champions. In front of 19,000 fans, he threw for four touchdowns and scored another himself as the Scots capitalized on San Angelo turnovers and rolled to a 39-6 victory. Unfortunately, Highland Park's title hopes ended the following week in front of 13,000 fans on the campus of the University of Texas. The Port Arthur defense completely shutdown the Scots' running game and, even though Walker passed for 191 yards and a score, the more physical Port Arthur team claimed the championship with a 20-7 victory. Ratliff, *Autumn's Mightiest Legions*, 94-95.

one outside of Texas knew the name Doak Walker. By the end of the year, however, the twenty year-old Walker would be well on the way to establishing himself as one of the legendary figures in the history of college football, an athlete noted sportswriter Dan Jenkins once judged “the greatest college player who ever lived.” Walker combined rugged good looks, outstanding all-around football skills, and a knack for making the big play at the game’s most critical moment, to become one of the most recognized athletes of the postwar era. Walker “was a graceful, winning, do-everything athlete...” Jenkins later remembered. “He seemed to thrive on the suspense, the drama, of a close game. He was movie-star handsome, incredibly photogenic... easily the most publicized college player ever.”<sup>12</sup> Walker was the only player in the history of the Southwest Conference named All-American three years in a row, and, after the 1948 season, he became only the second junior to win the Heisman Trophy.<sup>13</sup> An injury plagued senior season kept Walker from challenging for the Heisman again, but, even with limited playing time, he was impressive enough to once again be a consensus All-American selection.

In January 1945, Walker graduated from Highland Park, joined the Merchant Marines, and left Texas to begin training for his role in the American war effort. The war was almost over, however, and, by the fall, Walker was on his way back to Texas. In New Orleans with his friend and former Highland Park teammate Bobby Layne who attended the University of Texas, Walker toyed with the idea of following Layne back to Austin and playing there. Thanks to the skillful maneuvering of his former high school coach Rusty Russell—who was also in New Orleans and who had been hired as

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<sup>12</sup> Dan Jenkins, *I'll Tell You One Thing: The Truth about Texas, America, and College Football, With Pictures to Prove It* (Emeryville, CA: Woodford Press, 1999), 99.

<sup>13</sup> In 1945, Army fullback Felix Anthony “Doc” Blanchard won the Heisman during his junior season.

an assistant at SMU—however, Walker returned to Dallas and enrolled at SMU. He joined the Mustangs for their final five games that season and quickly established himself as the team’s premier player. He rushed for 289 yards, passed for 387, intercepted two passes, and scored five touchdowns while earning All-Southwest Conference honors and leading the Ponies to impressive, blowout wins over Arkansas, Baylor, and Texas Christian to close their season. Under Walker’s leadership, SMU salvaged a 5-6 season by posting a 4-2 conference record and finishing alone in second place in the final conference standings. Called away for a year of mandatory military duty, Walker returned to school in 1947, and the SMU campus buzzed with anticipation for the start of the gridiron season. “That year,” remembered Raleigh Blakely, one of Walker’s SMU teammates and a war veteran who arrived on campus in 1946, “all I kept hearing was, ‘Doak Walker is coming back.’ That’s about all anybody talked about—including Matty...”<sup>14</sup>

Walker returned to campus late in the summer of 1947 and joined the team as they began practicing for the upcoming season. That fall, the Ponies started their campaign with a late September trip to California, where they defeated Santa Clara, 22-6. Walker immediately began to build his national reputation by scoring on a 97-yard kickoff return and a 44-yard run from scrimmage, while personally accounting for twenty of his team’s total points.<sup>15</sup> The next weekend, SMU posted a 35-19 victory in their home opener over Missouri and again Walker scored on two long runs, this time for 76 and 57 yards. A seven-point victory at Oklahoma State and a 14-0 win in their Southwest Conference opener against Rice propelled the Ponies to a 4-0 start, their best

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<sup>14</sup> Whit Canning, *Doak Walker: More Than a Hero* (Indianapolis: Masters Press, 1997), 43.

<sup>15</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 28 September 1947, pg. A7; *New York Times*, 28 September 1947, pg. S7.



since their Rose Bowl season in 1935. A return trip to California, and a 7-0 shutout victory over sixteenth-ranked UCLA boosted the 5-0 Mustangs into the eighth spot in the Associated Press poll as they prepared for a showdown with fellow unbeaten Texas in early November. With a Cotton Bowl birth and supremacy in the Southwest on the line, this would be the game of the year in Texas. The Longhorns, loaded with talent and led by Walker's old teammate at Highland Park, quarterback Bobby Layne, and a young fullback from Mission, Texas, named Tom Landry, entered the game as the third-ranked team in the nation and the favorites. When demand for tickets to the game surged past the capacity of SMU's Ownby Stadium, administrators arranged to move the contest to the Cotton Bowl to take advantage of its greater seating capacity. SMU had done this on occasion for big games for more than a decade, but, with Doak Walker in the lineup, the demand for tickets proved so strong that even the Cotton Bowl could not completely fulfill the public's desire to see the Mustangs play and a standing-room-only, capacity crowd was expected on game day.

For the 45,500 fans that packed the Cotton Bowl on November 1, the game lived up to all expectations.<sup>16</sup> SMU won a dramatic defensive struggle that featured big plays

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<sup>16</sup> On the opening kickoff, SMU's Paul Page took a lateral from teammate Frank Payne and streaked down the sideline to the Texas 19-yard line. Six plays later, after a critical fourth-and-eight completion from Walker to fullback Dick McKissack, Page ran around left end for a touchdown and Walker's extra point gave the Mustangs a quick, 7-0 lead three minutes into the game. The Longhorns battled back, however, with Layne's passing setting up a Landry rushing touchdown that tied the score early in the second quarter. SMU quickly struck again when substitute back Gilbert Johnson completed a long pass to the versatile Walker. Walker made a finger-tip grab at the Texas 20-yard line and then sprinted toward the end zone before a Texas defender pushed him out-of-bounds at the one. McKissack scored on the following play and another Walker extra point gave the Ponies a 14-7 lead as they went to the locker room for halftime.

The game turned into a defensive struggle during the third quarter, but late in the fourth Layne took control and demonstrated the quarterbacking skills that would later help him guide the Detroit Lions to professional football championships. After leading Texas down the field with completions of 21 and 26 yards, Layne found teammate Byron Gilroy for a 15-yard scoring strike that gave the Longhorns a chance to even the contest. Running back Frank Guess's extra point attempt sailed wide of the uprights, however, and left Texas trailing 14-13 in the game's final minutes. Both defenses stifled their opponents

from both sides and was ultimately decided by a missed extra point. Walker's leadership, all-around play, and two critical extra points won him praise in the press and a victory in the individual battle against Layne. Undefeated and alone atop the Southwest Conference standings, the 6-0 Mustangs now found themselves with an inside track to the Cotton Bowl. With four games left to play, all they needed to do was win them all and they would be playing on New Year's Day.<sup>17</sup>

The tremendous demand for tickets generated by the big game, coupled with the Mustang win and the additional excitement it created, demonstrated the box office potential of marquee college football matchups, especially those involving Doak Walker and the SMU Mustangs. On November 1, the same day the Mustangs took control of the race for the Cotton Bowl, the Cotton Bowl Athletic Association began accepting ticket applications for four days for their upcoming January 1 game. The outpouring of demand proved staggering; the Association received more than 20,000 requests for tickets and "99 per cent of these asked for the maximum number of tickets, four." In four days, the Association received enough ticket requests to fill all of the Cotton Bowl's 45,507 seats twice. Unfortunately, they only expected to be able to fulfill about one-fourth of the requests because "approximately 22,000 tickets" would have to be reserved for the two universities competing in the event. Before the crowning of a Southwest Conference champion or any discussion of potential opponents then, bowl officials already knew their 1948 game would be a sellout.<sup>18</sup> Going forward they focused on two goals. One focused on the long-term: expanding their stadium to meet

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the rest of the way and the Mustangs emerged with a thrilling one-point victory in the contest for regional supremacy. *New York Times*, 2 November 1947, pg. S1; *Chicago Tribune*, 2 November 1947, pg. A7.

<sup>17</sup> *New York Times*, 2 November 1947, pg. S1; *Chicago Tribune*, 2 November 1947, pg. A7.

<sup>18</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 6 November 1947, pg. B8.

the surging demand for college football in the Southwest. The other focused on the coming month: securing the best possible matchup for 1948 and further enhancing the Cotton Bowl's reputation and their city's prestige.

Further north in State College, Pennsylvania, the team SMU would eventually meet in the 1948 Cotton Bowl, the Penn State Nittany Lions, embarked on their first bowl season in twenty-five years. Comprised primarily of the sons of Polish, Scandinavian, and Slavic miners from Western Pennsylvania, the rugged Lions of Coach Bob Higgins played a straightforward, smash-mouth brand of football that dominated their eastern opponents during the regular season and won them the Lambert Memorial Trophy as the best team in the East.<sup>19</sup> Convincing victories of 54-0 over Bucknell, 75-0 over Fordham, 46-0 over Colgate, and a season-ending 29-0 win at Pittsburgh, highlighted a campaign in which they registered six shutouts and outscored their opponents 319-27. Led by a massive frontline dubbed "the seven mountains," the Lions set a national record by holding their opponents to an average of only seventeen rushing yards per game. (On the season, they yielded a miniscule 22.3 inches per rushing attempt.) With All-American guard, Steve Suhey and 228-pound tackle John Nolau leading the way, "the seven mountains" also produced over 300 rushing yards per game for their own team. Higgins told the press that, "Never, in all my years of coaching, have I seen a line that combined offensive and defensive talents to the degree that this one does," and asserted that this was his best team in seventeen years at Penn State.<sup>20</sup> Critics noted that as an eastern team the Lions played a less competitive schedule and that they had not defeated a ranked team all season; still, their perfect

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<sup>19</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 1 January 1948, pg. A1.

<sup>20</sup> *Daily Oklahoman*, 3 December 1947, pg. 22; *New York Times*, 4 December 1947, pg. 49.

record propelled them to fourth in the Associated Press poll and made them the highest-ranked team available for the postseason bowls. With SMU third in the same poll, and the Southwest Conference champion committed to the Cotton Bowl, a match-up in Dallas between the premier teams in the East and Southwest looked like an excellent football game and a marquee bowl-game pairing.<sup>21</sup>

By late November, only two obstacles stood in the way of making this dream Cotton Bowl contest a reality: SMU's need to complete its schedule and clinch the Southwest Conference title, and the fact that the Penn State roster included two African-Americans who coach Higgins and the school insisted would play in any postseason contest the team entered. The Mustangs still had to face a 4-5-1 Texas Christian squad in a season-ending rivalry matchup on November 29th. Technically, if SMU lost to their Fort Worth rivals, and Texas defeated Texas A&M in their final game, then the Longhorns and Ponies would share the Southwest title with identical 5-1 records. A vote of conference members would then be required to determine which team would advance to the Cotton Bowl. This obstacle disappeared on November 24th when Dana X. Bible, the Texas athletic director, announced that because the Mustangs defeated the Longhorns during the regular season, Texas would do the honorable and traditional thing and "yield to Southern Methodist University in the Cotton Bowl picture" if the two teams tied in the final standings.<sup>22</sup> Bible's sportsmanship was no doubt encouraged by the well-known fact that the 8-1 Longhorns were the first choice to play as visitors in

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<sup>21</sup> The number one team in the AP poll, Notre Dame, did not play in postseason games between 1925 and 1970. Because of their conference affiliation, Number 2 Michigan was committed to appear in the Rose Bowl where they eventually soundly defeated the eighth-ranked University of Southern California, 49-0.

<sup>22</sup> *New York Times*, 25 November 1947, pg. 41.

the Sugar Bowl if they defeated the Aggies.<sup>23</sup>

In the case of the other obstacle, however, Texas's long history of racial segregation seemed to pose a more serious potential problem. In addition to living with the everyday realities of a racially segregated society, white and black Texans had never played football against one another on the college level in the state. Furthermore, only on rare occasions had they done so outside of its borders. In the middle of the 1930s, one of the state's less prestigious programs, Texas Technical College in Lubbock, a member of the now long-defunct Border Conference, traveled to the West Coast to play Loyola Marymount and their outstanding African-American tackle Al Duvall. Between 1934 and 1936, Tech lost to Duvall and his teammates three times in Los Angeles. According to reports, the Texans exhibited excellent sportsmanship and thought enough of Duvall to elect him to their all-opponent team at the end of all three seasons.<sup>24</sup>

Bell and SMU also played a pioneering role in competing against African Americans outside of the state. The Mustangs became the first Southwest Conference member to violate the taboo against interracial competition when they traveled to California in 1937 to play a UCLA team with two prominent African-American stars—Kenny Washington and Woody Strode.<sup>25</sup> In deference to Southern traditions, the California school initially contacted Bell and offered to bench its black players for the game. Bell said he would let his players decide the issue, however, and under his guidance the Mustang squad voted unanimously to allow the Bruins to utilize the two

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<sup>23</sup> *New York Times*, 27 November 1947, pg. 51.

<sup>24</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 20 November 1937, pg. A9-10.

<sup>25</sup> Neither Washington nor Strode played for UCLA when the SMU Faculty Committee on Athletics accepted the contest in February 1936. While race was not a factor in their decision, the financial prospects of the game may have been. UCLA offered SMU a \$5,000 guarantee or the option of 50% of the gate receipts. Meeting of the Faculty Committee on Athletics, February 13, 1936, Athletic Committee, Box 8, Folder: Faculty Committee on Athletics—Minutes, 9/35 to 5/39, SMU Archives, Degolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas.

men who almost a decade later would break the color barrier in the NFL.<sup>26</sup> Washington turned in an outstanding performance in a 26-13 Bruin defeat, earning the respect of the contingent of SMU fans who traveled west for the game and who “gave him an ovation that made the walls quiver” when he left the field exhausted in the second half.<sup>27</sup> At the end of the season, the SMU players voted both Washington and Strode to their all-opponent team and at the best-attended Mustang Club booster meeting of the year “local businessmen” watched the game film of the contest and were impressed as “both Washington and Strode played noticeably outstanding football.”<sup>28</sup>

During his three decades at SMU, Madison Bell played an important role in bringing racial change to the Texas college gridiron. His ideas about the fairness of integration were well developed by the late-1930s, decades ahead of his peers. Born in Ft. Worth, Texas in 1899, Bell came from a family steeped in Southern traditions and he proudly pointed to the fact that his grandfather fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War. The future Mustang coach left Ft. Worth with his high school football mentor Robert L. “Chief” Myers and starred as an end at Centre College from 1916 to 1920, on some of the great Bo McMillan-led teams at the small, giant-killing Kentucky school. Bell landed his first head-coaching job at Haskell Institute where he led Native American players during the first two years of the school’s football glory days of the 1920s.<sup>29</sup> Bell also played professional football in the early 1920s and competed with and against African-American stars such as Fritz Pollard, Paul Robeson, and Duke

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<sup>26</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 20 November 1937, pg. A9-10.

<sup>27</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 4 December 1937, pg. 16.

<sup>28</sup> Unidentified newspaper clipping, 7 December 1937, Football, 1937-1949, Box 4, Folder: 1937, SMU Archives, Degolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas.

<sup>29</sup> For the fascinating, and ultimately tragic, story of major college football at Haskell Institute see: Raymond Schmidt, “Lords of the Prairie: Haskell Indian School Football, 1919-1930,” *Journal of Sport History* 28 (2001): 403-426.

Slater. After ten seasons of coaching in the Southwest Conference, first at TCU, then at Texas A&M, Bell came to SMU as an assistant in 1934. Promoted to head coach the following year, he promptly led the Mustangs to an undefeated 12-0 season and a birth in the Rose Bowl. SMU became the first football program from the region to play in the prestigious postseason contest when they lost 7-0 to Stanford on New Year's Day, 1936. Bell coached the Mustangs until 1949 and served as the school's athletic director from 1947 until 1964. As the architect of SMU's football success, Bell became a respected and influential figure among the North Dallas elite. At a 1948 gathering of Mustang supporters, Professor Edwin D. Mouzon, Jr., a member of the Department of Mathematics and the chairman of the Faculty Athletic Committee, described Bell as "one of those rare individuals who, by their own example and their teaching, can build character into the young men who come under their tutelage."<sup>30</sup>

In 1938, the Mustangs travelled to Pittsburgh to take on a second integrated opponent—the University of Pittsburgh. Before the game, Bell discussed his ideas and attitudes about the desegregation of sport with Wendell Smith of the *Pittsburgh Courier*.<sup>31</sup> Probably understanding that he was speaking to a small, almost all black—though national—audience, Bell freely expressed his integrationist impulses.<sup>32</sup> "I don't

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<sup>30</sup> Letter: Edwin D. Mouzon, Jr. to Madison Bell, September 17, 1948, Athletic Committee, Box 1, Folder: SMU Miscellaneous File, 44-53, SMU Archives, Degolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas.

<sup>31</sup> At the time of the interview, Smith, himself, had recently joined the newspaper's staff and was bringing new vigor to its long-standing publicity campaign designed to force the integration of professional baseball. While Branch Rickey and the white press often receive much of the credit for achieving the eventual acceptance of integration, historian David K. Wiggins argues that the *Courier*, and Smith in particular, deserve at least as much credit. David K. Wiggins, "Wendell Smith, the *Pittsburgh Courier-Journal*, and the Campaign to Include Blacks in Organized Baseball, 1933-1945," *Journal of Sport History* 10 (1983): 5-29.

<sup>32</sup> When the newspaper launched its campaign against Jim Crow in baseball in 1933, its circulation stood at 46,000. By the time that campaign succeeded in 1945, the paper's circulation reached almost 260,000, making it the most widely circulated black newspaper of the period, by nearly 100,000 copies. Wiggins,

believe in drawing the color-line in sports,” he told Smith, “because when you do it takes something out of it. I think that every boy should have his chance to participate regardless of his color.” Asked by Smith if Southern schools would be able to continue forcing the exclusion of blacks, Bell, somewhat optimistically, said he felt the era of segregation would soon end. “Southern schools must realize that they cannot keep on making such demands,” he said. “It not only weakens teams when they must bench these Colored stars, but also creates a lot of ill feeling.”<sup>33</sup> On the eve of the Second World War and almost three decades before the integration of college football in Texas became a reality, Madison Bell spoke out on the side of equal opportunity for deserving young athletes of all races.

Moreover, Bell understood, or at least was beginning to articulate, the two primary advantages of integration—stronger teams on the field and a more democratic society beyond it. Segregation “weakens teams,” as Bell put it, and while he was referring to teams such as UCLA and Pittsburgh from outside of the South forced to bench their black stars against Southern opponents, the criticism could easily be extended to the rest of college football as well. Bell recognized that the best black athletes could make a team stronger. He praised black halfback Myles Anderson from segregated Texas College, telling Smith and his national black audience that “he (Anderson) is better than any backfield man I have here with me today” and indicating that he would love to have him play for the Mustangs.<sup>34</sup> Despite his frankness on this occasion, for the next twenty-five years as a coach and athletic director Bell watched

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“Wendell Smith,” 6. With this in mind, Bell’s optimism and willingness to discuss these issues stemmed, in part, from the realization that few whites would read or hear about what he had to say.

<sup>33</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 29 October 1938, pg. 17.

<sup>34</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 29 October 1938, pg. 17.



generations of great black Texas athletes—knowing that at least a few had the talent and the academic skills to make significant contributions to the SMU football program—without being able to offer a scholarship to a single one. The enduring strength of racial prejudice in the region, as well as Bell’s hesitancy to push for equality in the larger forum of mainstream public opinion, prevented him from acting on this knowledge.

When he spoke of the “ill feeling” created by the exclusion of blacks, Bell pointed to the second advantage of greater racial inclusion—removing the moral contradiction at the heart of segregated college football. In the late-1930s when Bell talked to Smith, few whites recognized the ambiguity; but, over the next three decades, the exclusion of an entire segment of the population from a supposedly meritocratic sport that theoretically, at the college level especially, reflected some of the highest ideals of American society grew into a blight that a majority would no longer tolerate. As the specter of Nazism and total war in Europe emerged and then became a reality in the following years, this contradiction seemed increasingly un-American, and writers like Smith, and others in the black press, increasingly used it to advance their case.<sup>35</sup> The ideological battles of the Cold War only intensified the American desire to present their nation as a beacon of freedom and democracy in the world. Time and again, the exclusion and mistreatment of African Americans, whether in the classroom, on the bus, at the lunch counter, or on the athletic field, damaged this image by contradicting the very ideals the nation claimed to stand for. As much as any other factor, it was this contradiction that ultimately brought an end to the Jim Crow system—in college football and in the rest of American society as well.

Playing against African-American opponents seemed to create a more tolerant

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<sup>35</sup> Wiggins, “Wendell Smith,” 11.

racial atmosphere in the SMU football program. During the trip to Pittsburgh, Smith also interviewed Jimmie Stewart, a former SMU player and coach and the school's long-time Athletic Director, about interracial competition. Stewart not only endorsed, as Smith put it, "Colored boys playing in games against Southern schools," but also made the probably exaggerated claim that "we have been trying to get U.C.L.A. to play us down in Dallas."<sup>36</sup> Stewart told Smith the game did not take place because of scheduling conflicts on UCLA's part, seemingly confident that, had the Californians agreed, SMU would have broken the color barrier on Southern major college gridirons almost a full decade before it actually fell. Also demonstrating a more open attitude on race was Mustang captain, Charlie Sprague, the youngest son of Dallas mayor George Able Sprague and the fourth son in his family to play football for SMU. Sprague called Washington "the best back I have ever played against" and told Smith that he had no objections to blacks competing against white Southern colleges. When asked about the decision to take on UCLA, black players and all, he explained that the team voted unanimously to do so because "we figured we wouldn't get much credit for beating U.C.L.A. without Washington and Strode."<sup>37</sup> In the late-1930s, because of their willingness to take on African-American opponents, Sprague and SMU began to understand something it would take the white majority in Southern college football nearly three more decades to recognize: to claim greatness and win championships in the court of national public opinion, teams needed to compete against and defeat the best opponents—including those with African Americans.

While these small examples of racial tolerance reflected well on both the schools

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<sup>36</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 29 October 1938, pg. 17.

<sup>37</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 29 October 1938, pg. 17.

and individuals involved, having black athletes participate in the Cotton Bowl challenged Southern mores on a much larger scale. Hosting a team with African Americans would not only bring integration to the game itself, but would also raise questions about racial inclusiveness in the strictly segregated hotels, restaurants, and other venues where the activities surrounding the game would take place. It was one thing to ask a small group of college students and the wealthy alumni who traveled in support of their school's team to embrace interracial competition on the playing field, it was another matter entirely to expect a broad cross-section of the population of a large Southern city to accept racial equality in some of its most beloved public spaces.

City leaders might be expected to hold opinions similar to the public on these issues, or at least they had previously. Late in 1939, Curtis Stanford and the Cotton Bowl Athletic Association enforced the color line when they invited Boston College to take on Clemson in their January 1, 1940 contest. During negotiations with a newly emerging football power seeking its first-ever bowl bid, bowl officials bluntly told Boston College officials they would have to play without star black halfback Lou Montgomery. Seeking to build their institution by capitalizing on football glory, Boston College officials, who had already withheld their black star twice during the season, readily agreed.<sup>38</sup> "In view of the general attitude toward Negroes in Texas," Stanford explained to the press, "it was deemed advisable that Montgomery refrain from playing."<sup>39</sup> The black star could make the trip to Dallas with his teammates, Bill Parker the Cotton Bowl's publicity director announced, "but will not be permitted to appear in

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<sup>38</sup> In earlier games against Florida and Auburn, both played in Boston, Boston College acquiesced to Southern prejudice and benched Montgomery. In both cases, losing their star player hurt the team's performance, and their only regular season defeat came against Florida, 7-0, on October 12.

<sup>39</sup> *New York Times*, 17 December 1939, pg. 85.

uniform.”<sup>40</sup>

Students, sportswriters, and fans in the North, and even Montgomery’s coach, former Notre Dame star Frank Leahy, condemned this action as “un-American,” and criticized both Boston College and officials in Dallas for making it. In a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, one fan captured their outrage when he complained bitterly about the “out-and-out cowardice and an utter disregard of scruples on the part of the Boston College authorities,” who he judged to be “out for all the mercenary gain that playing in a Bowl game means.”<sup>41</sup> The African-American press covered the incident closely and similarly expressed outrage at the “rubber-legged policy” of participants.<sup>42</sup> Columnist J. Don Davis, of the *Chicago Defender*, called the decision “an atrocious un-American act” and said that it delivered “a black eye to the progressive strides made by Dallas” in the past.<sup>43</sup> Eventually, Montgomery registered his own protest by choosing not to accompany his teammates on the trip to Dallas and, on January 1, 1940, Boston College suffered a 6-3 defeat that must have left some wondering how the team might have performed with their star player.<sup>44</sup>

The whole experience also introduced Cotton Bowl officials to the perils and potential pitfalls of racial politics and New Year’s Day football. “Liberal elements of white Texas are being deluged with letters from both races,” Davis, with perhaps a bit of wishful exaggeration, reported, “asking if Texas is not as much a part of America” as

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<sup>40</sup> *Chicago Defender*, 23 December 1939, pg. 22.

<sup>41</sup> *New York Times*, 23 December 1939, pg. 20.

<sup>42</sup> *New York Amsterdam News*, 23 December 1939, pg. 18.

<sup>43</sup> *Chicago Defender*, 23 December 1939, pg. 22. Davis pointed to the appearance of Jesse Owens and Ralph Metcalfe in Dallas, as part of an integrated track and field competition at the 1937 Greater Texas and Pan-American Exposition, as a time when the city made great strides in promoting a progressive image to a national audience.

<sup>44</sup> Boston College officials, however, were unmoved as they withheld Montgomery again the following year in the 1941 Sugar Bowl. In that game, the Eagles, minus Montgomery completed a perfect season with a 19-13 victory over previously undefeated Tennessee.

other places, such as Los Angeles and Evanston, Illinois, where interracial competition is allowed.<sup>45</sup> With the weight of the long traditions of Jim Crow in Texas on their side, the Cotton Bowl Athletic Association certainly possessed the power to enforce segregation in their game. Doing so, however, could be hazardous to the city's reputation and undermine the very promotional efforts that motivated boosters to sponsor the game in the first place. A restrictive racial policy might also damage the bowl's ability to attract top teams, since not all schools were likely to forgo ethical concerns to the same degree as Boston College.

On the SMU campus, the issue of race and competing against African Americans seemed to matter little in the fall of 1947. On November 24, the same afternoon Bible announced that Texas would defer to SMU in case of a tie, the Mustang players gathered for a meeting called by Bell to vote on their choice of a potential Cotton Bowl opponent. Bowl officials promised to honor "the wishes of the host players...as far as it is possible...in working out satisfactory arrangements for the game."<sup>46</sup> While ninth-ranked Georgia Tech and fifteenth-ranked Mississippi (both with one loss each) received some consideration, the squad overwhelmingly chose Penn State, black players and all, as the team they would prefer to face. A reporter stationed outside the Ponies practice facilities questioned thirty squad members as they arrived and all said they preferred to play the Nittany Lions. Coach Bell, for his part, once again indicated a willingness to let his players pick their opponent and spoke for the University as a whole when he said that SMU would not have a problem competing

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<sup>45</sup> *Chicago Defender*, 23 December 1939, pg. 22. Earlier in 1939, Texas Christian opened the season against UCLA in Los Angeles and lost, 6-2, in a game where, according to Davis, "Kenny Washington and Jackie Robinson were the difference between victory and defeat." One week later, the University of Oklahoma traveled to Evanston and defeated an integrated Northwestern team 23-0.

<sup>46</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 24 November 1947, pg. B6.

against African Americans. “We have no objections, ourselves,” he explained, “SMU has broken precedent before. We were the first school of the Southwest Conference to play against Negroes in other sections. After all, we’re supposed to live in a democracy.”<sup>47</sup> Bell also offered his opinion that the Cotton Bowl Athletic Association would not object to putting black athletes on the biggest stage of the Texas gridiron season. When asked about possible problems that might emerge housing and entertaining the integrated team, however, Bell abdicated responsibility and maintained, “That’s a problem for the Cotton Bowl officials.”<sup>48</sup>

Enthusiasm for an integrated Cotton Bowl match-up extended beyond the team and reached the rest of the campus and the larger SMU community as well. When alumni heard of the Mustang players’ willingness to accept a game against Penn State, dozens sent telegrams supporting the decision.<sup>49</sup> The student newspaper reported that the large majority of students on campus hoped their team would play Penn State. It also criticized those it labeled “the southwestern members of the Tri-K (KKK) club” for “worrying about ‘public reactions’ here in the South” and opposing “what would probably be the best bowl game in the country.”<sup>50</sup> While racism and racial discrimination played a key role in the everyday life of the city and state, the attitudes at SMU demonstrated that if the stakes were high enough and the subject was important enough (and, for Texans, very few things were more important than high-level college football) even the strong taboos against interracial competition might disappear.

Despite the optimism at SMU, Cotton Bowl officials hesitated for two days,

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<sup>47</sup> *Atlanta Daily World*, 28 November 1947, pg. 5.

<sup>48</sup> *New York Times*, 25 November 1947, pg. 41; *New York Times*, 26 November 1947, pg. 30; *Atlanta Daily World*, 28 November 1947, pg. 5.

<sup>49</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 6 December 1947, pg. 1.

<sup>50</sup> *SMU Campus*, 26 November 1947, pg. 4.

delaying their decision because of, as the press described it, “a series of complications that arose” and fueling speculation that they might choose another team instead.<sup>51</sup> In addition to Penn State, Georgia Tech, Mississippi, and Kansas, (an undefeated, but twice tied—by TCU and Oklahoma—team ranked thirteenth in the latest poll) reportedly all had support from some members of the Cotton Bowl board. The three other teams all offered the convenience of having all-white rosters, but pairing SMU with a lower-ranked opponent with a blemished record created a less appealing contest.<sup>52</sup>

Behind the scenes, key leaders in charge of the bowl game contemplated securing the best possible opponent and challenging the traditions of Jim Crow. In a phone conversation with Penn State coach Higgins, Dan D. Rogers, chairman of the Cotton Bowl Athletic Association, indicated their willingness to do so. “We are anxious to break this thing (discrimination) up,” Rogers reportedly told Higgins, “and Texas wants to be the first one to do it.”<sup>53</sup> Ultimately, the desire for a more prestigious game won out and, on November 26th, Rogers made the official announcement that Penn State and SMU would indeed play in the January 1st contest. Officials beamed as they looked forward to the possibility of their bowl being the only one to match two undefeated untied teams and, publicly at least, they expressed little concern that the event would mark the first time that blacks and whites competed against one another on the Texas college gridiron. “Adequate provisions,” the Associated Press reported,

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<sup>51</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 26 November 1947, pg. B7; *New York Times*, 26 November 1947, pg. 30.

<sup>52</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 26 November 1947, pg. B7.

<sup>53</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 6 December 1947, pg. 14. After his conversation with Rogers, Higgins told the *Pittsburgh Courier*, “It was gratifying to find a Texan who took the same stand as I did on this issue.”

“were made to handle the situation without incident.”<sup>54</sup>

A critical part of the plan to avoid controversy included the decision to bow to local customs in planning for Penn State’s off-field activities and the events surrounding the big game. At the press conference, Rogers announced that the Pennsylvanians would stay at the Dallas Naval Air Station during their trip to the city. Securing lodging on a military base, a tactic sometimes adopted by integrated northern college teams traveling south during the postwar period, would avoid potentially controversial violations of local segregation laws. It eliminated any outrage that might arise from trying to house the Nittany Lions at a major Dallas hotel by confining them to an area where integration was at least grudgingly accepted.<sup>55</sup> Conveniently, the base also included a football field where the team could prepare for the upcoming game without infringing on the practice fields of the white public schools. As a tactical concession, this decision undoubtedly pleased bowl officials and may have even made sense to the

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<sup>54</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 27 November 1947, pg. 18; *Washington Post*, 27 November 1947, pg. B5.

<sup>55</sup> The first major league baseball teams to integrate faced similar issues of housing and feeding their African-American players when they traveled south for spring training. During Jackie Robinson’s first training camp in Daytona Beach, Florida in 1946, the Brooklyn Dodgers arranged for him to stay with the family of a prominent local black politician. Prior to Robinson’s first major league season in 1947, the Dodgers moved their training camp to Havana, Cuba in an effort to avoid any controversial confrontations with Jim Crow laws. Even though segregated accommodations were not required in Cuba, General Manager Branch Rickey cautiously decided to employ them anyway. While the club’s white players enjoyed fine dining and luxurious accommodations at two different locations, Robinson and the three other black Dodgers were relegated to a lesser hotel and given a meal allowance. In 1948, Cleveland Indians owner Bill Veeck moved his team’s first spring training with African-American Larry Doby from Florida to Tucson, Arizona to avoid challenging Southern segregation. In Tucson, however, the team’s hotel refused to accommodate Doby and he was forced to stay with a local black family. In 1950, Lorenzo “Piper” Davis attended spring training with the Boston Red Sox in Cocoa, Florida, but was not allowed to reside or eat with the team. Instead, he ate with the wait staff at the team hotel and lived at the home of one of the waiters. Davis later spent the 1957 season with Fort Worth of the Texas League where he was not allowed to lodge or eat with his teammates; when they traveled to Shreveport, he was not even allowed to play. As African-American players began making inroads in the Southern minor leagues during the 1950s, local segregation laws and customs required that they be housed and fed separately. On the road, black players waited on the bus while their white teammates ate in restaurants and then brought out their meals. Whites usually stayed at a nicer hotel with air conditioning, while blacks stayed in the older, non-air conditioned hotels of the black community. Jules Tygiel, *Baseball’s Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 102, 165, 235, 262-263; Bruce Adelson, *Brushing Back Jim Crow: The Integration of Minor League Baseball in the American South* (Charlottesville VA: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 12, 17.



Penn State administration, but for the majority of Nittany Lion players it must have seemed a grave injustice. For the sons of working-class western Pennsylvanians, playing football undoubtedly brought a great deal of pleasure, but it also provided a means to social mobility. One of the advantages gained by playing major college football on one of the nation's best teams was the opportunity during bowl season to travel to a prestigious Southern city and enjoy the best lodging and dining it had to offer. Now, after completing a perfect season, the Nittany Lions, many of who were veterans who served in the military during the war, found themselves relegated to military barracks and a Navy chow hall for their big trip to Dallas.<sup>56</sup>

To make matters worse, in a major break from bowl game traditions, the Association also announced that the usual social gatherings and celebrations that went along with bowl games would not be part of this season's Cotton Bowl festivities. "Coaches of both teams expressed the desire there be no big dinners or entertainments with the two teams present," the Association contended.<sup>57</sup> Instead, both coaches and officials from the respective universities would represent the teams at any social functions. It seems unlikely that either Bell or Higgins suggested cancelling the bowl-game festivities or that they agreed to the plan for any reason other than as an expedient concession to the prejudices of the region and a willingness to advance their coaching careers. Integration at such major Dallas social gatherings was simply unthinkable, and the players, especially those from out-of-town, would be the ones to suffer on this occasion. Higgins, in particular, insisted that his black players play in any bowl game, but stopped short of demanding that they receive truly equal treatment while advancing

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<sup>56</sup> *New York Times*, 27 November 1947, pg. 51; *Los Angeles Times*, 27 November 1947, pg. 18; *Washington Post*, 27 November 1947, pg. B5.

<sup>57</sup> *New York Times*, 27 November 1947, pg. 51.

his and Penn State's interests and reputations.<sup>58</sup>

Higgins' and Penn State's demand that the Nittany Lions utilize all of their players in any bowl game they participated in resulted from a conscious decision by the University community to oppose segregation whenever and wherever their teams encountered it. This level of politicization on a quiet campus not usually associated with activism clearly demonstrated the growing postwar willingness of northern students to challenge the South's racial caste system.<sup>59</sup> Even before the war, Penn State and its students started to stand up in the face of discrimination on the athletic field. In 1940, a track meet scheduled to take place at the Naval Academy between the Nittany Lions and the Midshipmen aroused controversy when officials at the Academy refused to let Penn State's African-American sprinter Barney Ewell compete. The two schools compromised by moving the meet to Penn State and allowing Ewell to run, but in State College the will to resist Southern racial divisions and stand up for democratic principles gained a powerful precedent.<sup>60</sup>

The race issue in the Penn State football program came to the forefront during the 1946 season when the team and its two African-American players, back Wallace Triplett and end Dennis Hoggard Jr., were scheduled to travel to Florida for a regular season game in the Orange Bowl against the University of Miami. Informed that local laws and customs would prevent Triplett and Hoggard from participating in the game, the Nittany Lions refused to submit to the prejudices of the South and eventually cancelled the contest and their trip. The incident produced outrage throughout the Penn

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<sup>58</sup> *New York Times*, 27 November 1947, pg. 51; *Los Angeles Times*, 27 November 1947, pg. 18; *Washington Post*, 27 November 1947, pg. B5.

<sup>59</sup> Charles H. Martin, "Integrating New Year's Day: The Racial Politics of College Bowl Games in the American South," *Journal of Sport History* 24.3 (1997), 363.

<sup>60</sup> Martin, "Integrating New Year's Day," 363.

State community, and the squad itself, with the support of Higgins and the administration, made the final decision and voted to forego the trip, even though, as “college-sports publicity chief” Jim Coogan put it, “most...come from the poor Polish, Slav and Scandinavian mining families of Western Pennsylvania...[and] may never have a chance to go to Florida....”<sup>61</sup>

While their backgrounds may have led them to covet a Florida vacation, the players’ upbringings may have also contributed to their willingness to fight for racial equality. Many African Americans worked alongside their friends and family members in the coalmines of Western Pennsylvania and the United Mine Workers of America (UMW) had welcome black members for decades. In the 1930s and 1940s, the UMW played a critical part in the founding of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), the first union to organize industrial workers. Influenced by the traditions of the UMW, the CIO accepted black workers on an equal footing with whites and more than half a million African Americans joined during World War II. While racial discrimination did not disappear, the union supported civil rights groups and played an important role in

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<sup>61</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 13 December 1947, pg.14. The incident also proved a blow to the University of Miami’s football fortunes and its image and demonstrated the increasing tenuousness of defending Jim Crow in the postwar era. Following the cancellation of the Penn State game, the press reported that the Orange Bowl selection committee had dropped 6-2 Miami from the list of teams being considered for its January 1, 1947 contest. *Daily Collegian* (Penn State), 21 November 1946, pg. 1. Moreover, while many on campus and even more in the larger Miami community no doubt supported the laws barring black athletes, the incident also inspired internal criticism of the Southern racial caste system, particularly among the University’s faculty. English instructor James Hoffman resigned his position after administrators blocked the publication of an article he had written for a Miami magazine critical of their decisions. Two faculty members in Government, Associate Professor Winchester H. Heicher and Instructor Daniel Monaco addressed a public letter to University President Bowman Ashe criticizing the cancellation of the game. Noting that their positions at the University were “the first we have held since discharge from the armed services,” Heicher and Monaco said they found it “discouraging and alarming ... that a university administration can follow such procedures so shortly after a conflict in which we all struggled for practical democracy.” *Daily Collegian* (Penn State University), 19 November 1946, pg. 2.

setting the stage for racial change in the postwar period.<sup>62</sup>

Remembering Penn State's decision not to go to Miami years later, Triplett gave credit to the team's leaders, a group of older war veterans, who decided that some principles were more important than exciting trips and football glory. At the team meeting called to discuss the decision, Triplett recalled that Higgins and the other coaches initially recommended bowing to the demands of the Southerners and making the trip. However, as the players discussed the decision, two of the team captains rose to register their dissent. Saying, "this stuff has got to stop," the two leaders, one from western Pennsylvania and the other from New York, stood on principal and convinced their teammates that canceling the trip was the morally correct decision to make. The whole team then voted and, while the action was not unanimous, a large majority of Triplett's teammates slowly extended their arms signaling their approval. Triplett later described the meeting as "one of the high points of my life."<sup>63</sup>

On the larger campus, Penn State students also put principle before football and strongly endorsed the players' position because, as one student told the campus newspaper, "the ideals of Democracy are more important than any football game."<sup>64</sup> The whole incident made such an impression that at the end of 1946 the Penn State administration felt compelled to issue a formal statement announcing, "It is the policy of the college to compete only under circumstances which will permit the playing of

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<sup>62</sup> Herbert Gutman, "The Negro and the United Mine Workers of America: The Career and Letters of Richard L. Davis and Something of Their Meaning, 1890-1900," in *The Negro and the American Labor Movement*, ed. Julius Jacobson (New York: Anchor Books, 1968), 49-127; Herbert Hill, "Myth-Making as Labor History: Herbert Gutman and the United Mine Workers of America," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 2.2 (1988): 132-200; Robert H. Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955* (Chapel Hill University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

<sup>63</sup> Robert W. Peterson, *Pigskin: The Early Years of Pro Football* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 187.

<sup>64</sup> Martin, "Integrating New Year's Day," 363.

any or all members of its athletic teams.”<sup>65</sup> When Triplett and Hoggard returned to the team for its 1947 campaign, the University community stood committed to the idea that the Nittany Lions would play only where their entire squad could take the field.<sup>66</sup>

Unlike their working-class teammates from the western mines, Triplett and Hoggard hailed from the more comfortable, middle-class confines of the urban Philadelphia area; in fact, Hoggard belonged to a family that was among the city’s African-American elite. His father, Dennis Hoggard Sr., pastor of Philadelphia’s Mount Carmel Baptist Church, served in the Pennsylvania state legislature between 1942 and 1946 and was an important civic and religious leader in the city’s black community. Many felt that Dennis Jr., a pre-law major who the black press described as intelligent and quietly confident, would follow in his father’s footsteps and go into politics. After graduating from Philadelphia’s Overbrook High School, the younger Hoggard enrolled at Penn State where he excelled in the classroom and on the freshman football team. After his first year in school, Hoggard interrupted his studies and joined the army. Like the large majority of African-American soldiers, he contributed to the war effort by supplying the hard labor necessary to run a modern army as prejudice and military policy relegated blacks to segregated, non-combat units. For Hoggard, this meant spending nearly three years serving at an Air Transport Command base in India. Returning home afterwards, Hoggard resumed his studies and rejoined the football team. At 6-feet and 185 pounds, he drew the attention of varsity coaches impressed with his combination of size, athleticism, and speed. His position coach, Earle Edwards, noted that Hoggard was the fastest of the team’s ends and that, in addition to

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<sup>65</sup> Martin, “Integrating New Year’s Day,” 363.

<sup>66</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 13 December 1947, pg.14.

being one of its best receivers, he was faster than most of the Nittany Lion backs as well. During the 1947 campaign, he earned significant playing time as a reserve end, catching four passes for 103 yards and scoring one touchdown. At the end of the year, Coach Higgins called him the team's most improved player. With the Cotton Bowl approaching, Hoggard looked forward to the challenge and seemed unconcerned that his Southern opponents might target him during the game. "We've played plenty of tough ball clubs and we have seen plenty of rough stuff," he explained. "We can take care of ourselves...I am not the least concerned about playing in the South." Having played against Southerners in the past, the Lion end noted that, as opponents, they were "generally...good sports," but that "some... (were) pretty rough," though this did not bother him. "That's the way I like it," he explained.<sup>67</sup>

Triplett came from a more modest background than Hoggard, but emerged as a central figure in Penn State's 1947 success. The son of a Philadelphia postal worker, "Trip" as his teammates called him starred in both football and basketball at Cheltenham High School in suburban LaMott. From a large family—all five of his brothers were also athletes at Cheltenham—Triplett avoided wartime service when the Army rejected him because of the poor eyesight that forced him to wear corrective lenses. Arriving at State College with what one instructor called "a personality defect" because he did not seem very self-assured, Triplett adjusted to his new surroundings. Though not the same caliber of student as Hoggard, he quickly settled in to academic and social life at Penn State. He also established himself as an outstanding all-around football player and a critical part of the Lions' team. Coach Higgins considered him one of the best athletes on campus and he became the first African American to play at

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<sup>67</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 20 December 1947, pg. 13.

Penn State in 1946. A junior in 1947, Triplett started at right halfback in the Lions single-wing offense, a position that capitalized on his running, receiving, and passing abilities by stationing him on the edge of the offensive backfield. On defense, he also played right halfback where his “lightning-fast” speed made him an excellent pass defender and his toughness made him a valuable asset to the Penn State run defense. Triplett’s success was even more impressive given his small stature—at 5 feet 9 and one-half inches and 169 pounds he was almost always one of the smallest players on the field. The versatile Triplett also kicked and returned punts and kickoffs for the Lions. Like Hoggard, he showed little concern about the upcoming trip to Dallas. “I have played against Southern boys before. They are usually nice guys....I don’t worry about any ‘problems,’” he told reporters. Triplett also told the press he did not mind missing the banquets and other social events that the Cotton Bowl Association cancelled to avoid potential conflicts over integration. “It doesn’t matter to me anyway, since I want to rush back to Philadelphia for a few days with my girl before she returns to her college, Virginia Union. I hope I can leave right after the game,” he explained.<sup>68</sup>

With the Nittany Lions, the Cotton Bowl, and a nation of football fans focused on the impending January 1 showdown, SMU still needed to beat TCU to finish their perfect season. The Mustangs were looking ahead as much as everybody else and soon found themselves in a heated contest against an intense rival with nothing to lose. The 30,000 fans packed into an overflowing TCU Stadium in Fort Worth on this late November afternoon witnessed what the Associated Press called, with only a little exaggeration, “one of the thrillers of Southwest Conference history.”<sup>69</sup> They also saw a

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<sup>68</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 13 December 1947, pg. 14.

<sup>69</sup> *New York Times*, 30 November 1947, pg. S1.

game that added another chapter to the growing legend of Doak Walker, a game that some later remembered as his greatest ever.<sup>70</sup> The first quarter and a half of the contest, however, belonged to TCU as the Horned Frogs led by quarterback Lindy Berry and running back Pete Stout jumped out to a 12-0 lead. Late in the second quarter, Walker made his first big play of the day when he dropped back to pass and ended up scrambling 62-yards around right end and through the Horned Frog defense for a dramatic touchdown. Walker's extra point made the score 12-7, and there it remained until the end of the third period, when the Mustang's star once again demonstrated his gridiron brilliance. Guiding the Ponies to a go-ahead touchdown on the last play of the quarter, Walker passed for the first fifty-one yards of the drive and then gained the last six on the ground himself. A missed Walker extra point left the score 13-12 in favor of SMU as the fourth quarter began.

Late in the game, with a TCU drive stalled deep in their own territory, it looked like the Mustangs might escape with a narrow victory. Suddenly, however, the game changed on another dramatic play when Berry connected on a long pass to end Morris Bailey. Bailey ran to the Mustang 20, and then, as he was being brought down, tossed the ball blindly behind him, where Horned Frog teammate Randy Jackson picked it up and ran it to the Mustang 7. Stout's third rushing touchdown of the game quickly followed and TCU's first successful extra point kick of the day gave the underdogs a 19-13 lead with a minute and thirty-five seconds left to play. As the home crowd celebrated what appeared to be a monumental upset in the making, Walker once again delivered on a game-changing big play. Fielding the ensuing kickoff at his own nine, he raced 55 yards to the opposing 36, giving the Ponies new life. A 27-yard pass

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<sup>70</sup> Jenkins, *I'll Tell You One Thing*, 105.



completion to Walker three plays later pushed the Mustangs inside the TCU 10, and a touchdown pass from Gil Johnson to Sid Halliday evened the score with only seconds remaining. An extra point by the versatile Walker would seal SMU's come-from-behind victory and a perfect season, but it was not to be. In a contest that had already witnessed three failed conversions and in an era where the extra point kick was far less automatic than today, Walker barely missed the final one and the game ended in a 19-19 tie.<sup>71</sup> While the Mustangs' bid for a perfect season collapsed, bowl officials, the team, and football fans of Dallas breathed a collective sigh of relief, Walker's last minute heroics saved the day and an undefeated season. The Mustangs briefly dropped to number four in the polls, but then returned to the third slot the following week when top-ranked Notre Dame decisively defeated the new number three, Southern California, ensuring that a battle of the undefeated third and fourth-ranked teams in the Cotton Bowl would be one of the premier games of the college football season.

The bowl's successful pairing of two of the top teams in the country produced a huge box office demand that quickly justified the desire of business leaders to push for desegregation. In Pennsylvania, officials reported that more than 17,000 people expressed interest in making purchases from Penn State's allotment of 3,000 tickets.<sup>72</sup> In Dallas, the press speculated that promoters could sell 150,000 tickets for the game if the Cotton Bowl were big enough to accommodate the crowd. Bowl officials must have also been excited to hear that "Gridiron enthusiasts from all parts of the country" were heading to Dallas "picking this (the Cotton Bowl) as the best of the New Year's bowl

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<sup>71</sup> *New York Times*, 30 November 1947, pg. S1.

<sup>72</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 23 December 1947, pg. 26.

extravaganzas.”<sup>73</sup> As the game shaped up to be a sellout, dignitaries on both sides made plans to be a part of the festivities and show support for their team. Pennsylvania governor James H. Duff would lead his state’s delegation on the journey south, while Texas lieutenant governor Allan Shivers planned to represent the host state. Promoters projected gate receipts to reach \$200,000, with 85% of the total divided equally between the two competing universities.<sup>74</sup> More importantly, from the perspective of local civic leaders, the influx of fans into the Dallas area and their purchases of hotel accommodations, meals, entertainment, souvenirs, and other items promised to pump hundreds of thousands of dollars into the local economy. Furthermore, the prestige of hosting one of the premier games of the college football season and the notoriety of associating the city with Walker’s heroics and SMU’s football success offered the potential to pay untold dividends in the future.

Escaping the frozen temperatures of central Pennsylvania, the Penn State team arrived in Dallas by train at noon on December 23, where they received what the black sports writers travelling with them called a “royal welcome.” Met first by the Penn State Alumni Club of Dallas and “a small teen-age band” at the train station in suburban Highland Park, the Lions disembarked and shook hands with a “welcoming group” that “included many Negroes from Dallas.”<sup>75</sup> After this display of school spirit by their own

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<sup>73</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 1 January 1948, pg. A1.

<sup>74</sup> Texas Governor Beauford H. Jester, a University of Texas alum, would spend New Year’s Day in New Orleans watching his alma mater take on the University of Alabama in the Sugar Bowl. *Chicago Tribune*, 1 January 1948, pg. 41. Shivers, another Texas alum who became governor in 1949 following Jester’s unexpected death, later emerged as a major opponent of public school desegregation in the aftermath of the 1954 *Brown* decision. Having once called himself “the kind of Texan who believes colored people do not want to go to school with whites,” Shivers used the Texas Rangers to block the integration of Mansfield High School in the fall of 1956, and also backed a legislative agenda designed to prevent the federally-forced integration of the Texas schools. Robert A. Calvert, Arnoldo De León, and Gregg Cantrell, *The History of Texas* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2007), 388, 393.

<sup>75</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 3 January 1948, pg. 12.

partisans and sympathetic African Americans, the team continued on to the main Dallas terminal for an official, “Western style” Cotton Bowl greeting ceremony.<sup>76</sup> At the station, a large crowd, including many local blacks, watched as the forty Lion players disembarked the train and paraded the short distance to Ferris Plaza on the west side of downtown escorted by a brightly colored high school band. Cotton Bowl Athletic Association president Jordan C. Ownby opened the ceremony and kicked off the year’s bowl festivities by addressing the crowd. Ownby, a long-time supporter and benefactor of the SMU athletic department, was not an impartial observer of the day’s events; in fact, he was, perhaps, the Mustangs’ biggest booster. The football stadium on the southeast side of the SMU campus bore his name and as a booster and benefactor Ownby was a fixture on campus during the Mustangs’ glory years of the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>77</sup> Setting the tone for what his association hoped would be a warm and friendly week of pre-game activities, Ownby welcomed the Pennsylvanians to the city and jokingly reminisced with Coach Higgins about his 1925 West Virginia Wesleyan team’s 9-7 defeat of SMU in Dallas (which Ownby maintained occurred only because of a mental mistake by a Mustang player). Avoiding controversy, Ownby completed his introduction without mentioning the one aspect of the upcoming game that would seem strikingly significant years later—the participation of African Americans and the desegregation of the Texas college football gridiron. The presence of John W. Rice, executive secretary of the Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce along with significant

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<sup>76</sup> *New York Times*, 24 December 1947, pg. 17.

<sup>77</sup> Built in 1926 with Ownby’s money, the stadium provoked controversy because it was completed before the university had a fully functional academic library. Some on campus suggested that the money be used to resolve this glaring academic insufficiency, but Ownby insisted that all of it go to the football program. On September 24, 1926, the Mustangs opened Ownby Stadium with a 42-0 win over North Texas State Teachers College.

numbers of other African Americans at the greeting ceremony, however, indicated that change was in the air and demonstrated the game's significance to the Dallas black community.

In all, Cotton Bowl and Dallas civic leaders put together a warm greeting ceremony emphasizing the region's western—as opposed to southern—roots and, after introducing each player, lined the team up to present each member with a white, ten-gallon cowboy hat. Geographically, Texas sits at the crossroads of the West and the South, and culturally it has deep ties to both regions. During the twentieth century, Texans in general, and in this case Cotton Bowl officials specifically, preferred to associate their state with the heroic image of the cowboy, the cattle drive, and the American West as opposed to the slavery, secession, sharecropping, and poverty characterizing Southern history.<sup>78</sup> Texas historian Walter Buenger sees the Southern influence as critical and contends that “All of Texas is connected—each region to the other and each region to the South.” According to Buenger, Southern folkways and culture shaped the settlement of the entire state as settlers from the region spread across it in the years after Reconstruction.<sup>79</sup>

With Wally Triplett fourth in line to receive a cowboy hat, the contingent of

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<sup>78</sup> Robert A. Calvert, “Agrarian Texas” in *Texas Through Time: Evolving Interpretations*, ed. Walter L. Buenger and Robert A. Calvert (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), 197-228.

<sup>79</sup> In the twentieth century, Buenger argues, Texans increasingly embraced the more heroic, but less significant, early period of their state's history when, as they saw it, pioneers fought Mexicans and Indians as they tamed the frontier and helped secure America's westward expansion. This historically dubious, misremembering of the past distanced Texas from the negative aspects of its Southern roots and tied it more closely to the rest of the nation during a period in which economic developments (the relative availability of land, scarcity of labor, and embrace of mechanization) further differentiated the state from its former Confederate brethren. Walter L. Buenger, “Texas and the South,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 103.3 (2000): 309-324. Historian Ty Cashion reasserted a more traditional view of Texas as two, related, but distinct, regions, one east and one west. Cashion argued that, “Texas, especially West Texas, has more in common with Western states than it does with the South,” and called for greater inclusion of Texas in the field of western history. Ty Cashion, “What's the Matter with Texas? The Great Enigma of the Lone Star State in the American West,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 55.4 (2005): 2-15.

black photographers and sports writers looked for any sign of Southern prejudices slipping into the day's events. However, Dallas kept its best foot forward and both Triplett and Hoggard were fitted with hats just like the rest of the team. Immediately after the festivities, the Nittany Lions boarded buses for the nine-mile trip to the Naval Air Station in suburban Grand Prairie. According to the press, Coach Higgins hurried the team along in hopes of getting in a late afternoon practice to help shake off the rust from both traveling and enduring a long stretch of cold temperatures back home. City officials, no doubt, did not mind the quick exit since it hurried the integrated team away from the heart of the city before dinner and avoided potential incidents in the strictly segregated hotels and restaurants of the downtown area.<sup>80</sup>

With 1947 drawing to a close and the Penn State and SMU squads preparing for their upcoming contest, the Dallas press paid little attention to the larger, racial implications of the event. In fact, the mainstream Dallas newspapers avoided mentioning either Triplett's or Hoggard's race in stories and photographs previewing the big game.<sup>81</sup> In the national black press, however, the significance of events in Dallas received ample coverage. Black sports writers regularly portrayed sporting arenas as central battlegrounds in the fight for equality and often predicted that great progress would come from desegregated contests. R. E. Dixon, whose column "Skipper's Southwest Sport-O-Graph" appeared in the *Atlanta Daily World*, saw great progress coming from events surrounding the Cotton Bowl. He argued that on New

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<sup>80</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 3 January 1948, pg. 12; *New York Times*, 24 December 1947, pg. 17.

<sup>81</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 3 January 1948, pg. 11; Martin, *Integrating New Year's Day*, 364. Despite extensive coverage in the build-up to the game, the *Dallas Morning News* did not reference either player's race directly until the day before the game. On December 31, the newspaper described Triplett as the team's "Negro backfield star" and one of two "speedsters who'll be counted upon to cover pass receivers or to catch racing Ponies who break into the clear." *Dallas Morning News*, 31 December 1947, clipping in Football, 1937-1949, Box 4, Folder: 1-1-48 Cotton Bowl Game SMU vs. Penn State, SMU Archives, Degolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas.

Year's Day in Dallas "rock-ribbed traditions of generations past and present will be shattered and an epochal pattern for real and applied Democracy and sportsmanship will be formulated in its stead." Praising both Penn State, for its commitment to Hoggard and Triplett, and SMU and Bell, for their willingness to challenge Southern tradition, Dixon saw the Cotton Bowl as an important step on the path to racial progress. He reminded his audience that high-profile integrated track meets had already taken place in Texas and that, at both the Pan-American Exposition meet held in Dallas in 1937 and the 1946 NCAA meet in San Antonio, black athletes competed and won distinctions without incident. Now, "Dallas and the South will take Dennis Hoggard and Wally Triplett in stride," Dixon predicted, "and all concerned should be much better off because of it..."<sup>82</sup>

Influential African-American journalist and civil rights activist Roy Wilkins, the editor of the NAACP's *Crisis* magazine, also weighed in with his opinion of the relevance of events in Dallas. Taking exception to those who held that sports could not "have any great effect upon race relations," Wilkins argued that "in the tremendous battle of the Negro toward full citizenship rights and privileges" every African-American accomplishment held significance, including those in athletics. In the struggle for civil rights, the future executive director of the NAACP argued, "we are fighting on a broad front and every man and woman is needed." A staunch supporter of emerging U.S. Cold War policy, Wilkins linked the fight for civil rights to the nation's role as a champion of democracy in the world throughout his career.<sup>83</sup> On this

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<sup>82</sup> *Atlanta Daily World*, 17 December 1947, pg. 5.

<sup>83</sup> As the leader of the NAACP during the Vietnam War, Wilkins remained a staunch Cold Warrior and supporter of official government policy in Southeast Asia. Wilkins personally blocked any efforts to criticize the war from within the organization and doing so helped the NAACP prosper financially during

occasion, he regarded the Cotton Bowl and the media attention it would generate as an excellent opportunity to provide “mass education in the kind of race relations of which Americans can be proud.”<sup>84</sup>

For Wilkins, the most significant aspect of that year’s Cotton Bowl stemmed from the way the game came about. When Virginia played Harvard in Charlottesville earlier in 1947—the first and only other time an African-American had taken the field for a major college football game in the former Confederacy—administrators at both schools worked behind the scenes for almost a year coordinating and planning the historic event. According to Wilkins, that game was of lesser significance because no push from southern players, students, or fans lay behind its scheduling. The fact that it was a regular season contest and a lopsided victory for the home team also minimized its larger implications. In the Cotton Bowl’s case, however, Wilkins pointed out that “the result of voting by the Texas white players and not of consultations between managers and athletic boards” made the game possible. After it became clear that SMU wanted a game against Penn State, “the real surprise” came, according to Wilkins, when “Cotton Bowl officials put their blessing on the precedent-shattering game.” Unlike other instances when Southern elders stepped in to trump the misguided equanimity of youth, authorities in Dallas got on board with the idea and made the game a reality. Civic pride, a sense of public support, and the profitable prospects of a marquee match-up convinced them to embrace integration and provided a model for future progress. Considering how the planning unfolded, Wilkins confidently predicted that January 1 in

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the 1960s. In the long run, however, his moderate approach left the organization isolated from the Black Power Movement emerging in the late-1960s. Glen Inghram, “NAACP Support of the Vietnam War: 1963-1969,” *Western Journal of Black Studies* 30.1 (2006): 54-61.

<sup>84</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 18 December 1947, pg. 7.

Dallas would be “an important event in race relations as well as in sports.”<sup>85</sup>

Whisked away to the Dallas Naval Air Station within minutes of arriving in the city, the Penn State team capitalized on the better southern weather and used their isolated location to begin serious preparations for the game. Practicing twice a day, Coach Higgins worked to get the team back into midseason form and put particular stress on pass defense to counter SMU’s highly publicized passing game. For Hoggard and Triplett, the first few days in Texas passed without incident and those searching for racial tensions did not find any around the Nittany Lion camp. During their stay in Dallas, both signed autographs for hundreds of fans of both races. When an injury forced Hoggard to miss practice and visit the Air Station hospital, the white youths employed there greeted him enthusiastically. On another occasion, when a group of Penn State players that included Triplett left the Naval Station for a night on the town in Dallas, the black halfback received a similarly hospitable Southern welcome. After visiting a penthouse atop the Mercantile Bank Building downtown, the group stopped at what *Pittsburgh Courier* reporter Lem Graves, Jr. called “a high class roadhouse near the city” for dinner. Welcomed enthusiastically and “accorded every courtesy,” Triplett mingled in an atmosphere of equality and, according to Graves, even broke “the top Dixie taboo—that of eating with whites.”<sup>86</sup>

On Saturday night, December 27, the Lions’ two African-American stars encountered an opportunity to push the limits of racial tolerance even further when, according to Graves, they “were invited to a social gathering at a home in the exclusive lily-white Highland Park residential section.” The duo turned down the invitation,

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<sup>85</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 18 December 1947, pg. 7.

<sup>86</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 3 January 1948, pg. 11.



however, and instead spent the evening with George Flanagan, a former athlete at Texas' all-black university, Prairie View A&M, and his parents at their home near downtown Dallas. Both Hoggard and Triplett told Graves they reached this decision of their own free will; that after a tough few days of practicing, "they just wanted a chance to be entertained comfortably and to have some fun and relaxation."<sup>87</sup> Whether this was true and the two preferred a quite relaxing evening with members of their own race to one further challenging racial decorum, or they felt pressure from above to withdraw voluntarily from the event, neither they nor Graves probed the matter further. What is certain is that while the 1947 Cotton Bowl offered a profound challenge to the traditions of Jim Crow, all of those involved, including the African-American players and press, tread carefully, unwilling to upset the delicate balance and provoke a white backlash.

As fans in Dallas and the rest of the college football world excitedly looked forward to the approaching New Year's Day contest, a rumble of discord emerged from within the Nittany Lion training camp in Grand Prairie. Several players, frustrated by the conditions and restrictions imposed on their bowl trip, launched a rebellion against the authority of their coach and the team's confinement at the Naval Air Station. Their protests culminated in a confrontation with Higgins and an unauthorized late night excursion into Dallas by a large part of the team. Rumors circulated that one player even attempted to procure a Navy plane for a trip to Houston on personal business. This mini-rebellion demonstrated that while the Cotton Bowl, the two universities, and officials and coaches on all sides, benefited from the adoption of a racially progressive policy, the Penn State players suffered because the experiment played out well within the boundaries of Southern segregation. Significantly, detailed reports of the players'

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<sup>87</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 3 January 1948, pg. 11.

dissatisfaction did not emerge in the press until several days after the successful staging of the Cotton Bowl contest.

Higgins first became aware of problems when, after a few days of what he thought were good workouts, several players confronted him to complain about the situation. Most of the group, Higgins noted, were veterans who served in the military during the war and they resented the sparse quarters, bad food, and military discipline imposed on them by their stay on base, which they described to Higgins as like “being back in the service.”<sup>88</sup> They also disliked their confinement to the base and reminded Higgins of the social opportunities they might have had staying at a downtown hotel. After the group voiced their complaints and hinted that their dissatisfaction might disrupt the team’s preparations, the usually diplomatic Higgins reacted with anger and reminded his players that he warned them the trip would involve sacrifice.

Stymied by their coach and frustrated that their bowl holiday was producing little in terms of extracurricular excitement, a large contingent of Lions took matters into their own hands and made plans to leave the base for a night of entertainment in Dallas. When the group arrived at the front gate, however, they found their exit blocked by naval guards who refused to let them pass. Unwilling to submit to this imposition on their liberty, the group moved to a different location, jumped the base fence, and proceeded with their evening’s plans. Despite the affront to his authority and the breaking of team rules, Higgins chose not to take any disciplinary actions. Instead, he dismissed the incident as something that “could be expected of college boys” and kept his team focused on the upcoming game. However, with discord in the Lions’ camp, the coach approached the big game concerned about his team’s impending

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<sup>88</sup> *New York Times*, 6 January 1948, pg. 20.

performance.<sup>89</sup>

While Penn State's players chaffed over the disappointment of a bowl trip not living up to expectations, officials in Dallas proved less than sympathetic to their plight. When questioned about the players' unhappiness in the week following the game, Ownby, the Cotton Bowl Athletic Association president, quickly noted that the Penn State team lodged "no official complaint," although he did admit to hearing two or three players grumble about cold food on the Navy base. He assured the public that this information reached base officials, whom he felt deserved everyone's gratitude for allowing the team to use their facilities. After all, he pointed out, the need for Penn State's stay at the federal facility only occurred "because State had Negroes on its squad." In the eyes of Ownby, and the like-minded Dallas whites he spoke to and for, the team willingly chose to endure segregated conditions and any discomforts they experienced as a result were their own fault and they had no right to complain.<sup>90</sup>

Addressing the conditions on base, Ownby, who also served as president of the Dallas Advertising League in 1935 and 1936, said he saw little reason for complaint. In his estimation, the players' quarters looked "better than students have at college these days and," reminiscing about his own undergraduate days, "better than I had." As he saw it, "the trouble was that the Penn State squad was made up of older boys mostly and they felt they didn't have the freedom that would have come had they stayed at a downtown hotel."<sup>91</sup> Ownby's use of the term "boys" to describe players in their early to mid-twenties, many of whom were veterans of World War II, speaks volumes about the gendered and generational outlook of the Dallas upper crust in the late 1940s. When

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<sup>89</sup> *New York Times*, 6 January 1948, pg. 20; *Los Angeles Times*, 5 January 1948, pg. 11.

<sup>90</sup> *New York Times*, 6 January 1948, pg. 20.

<sup>91</sup> *New York Times*, 6 January 1948, pg. 20.

these working-class sons of western Pennsylvania engaged in brutal combat in Europe or the Pacific Islands—or the college football fields of the United States for that matter—they built a claim to manhood few contested. When they decided to protest the inequities imposed on them by Southern segregation, however, they were merely college boys unwilling to understand their proper role and place.

While Higgins worried that these tensions might affect his team’s upcoming performance, the rest of the city and nation eagerly anticipated the approaching big game. The press characterized the contest as a clash between the “brute power” of the Nittany Lions and the speed and trickery of SMU, the “birthplace of the razzle dazzle.”<sup>92</sup> Bookmakers in Dallas made the Mustangs six-and-a-half point favorites in the game, but some national observers, including the partisan Graves at the *Pittsburgh Courier*, found that point spread too tilted toward the home team. Graves felt Penn State’s line play and rugged defense would make the game closer.<sup>93</sup> The more than 3,000 Penn State boosters lucky enough to get tickets began to arrive in Dallas in the days before the game as the holiday atmosphere in the city increasingly focused on football. SMU’s boosters traveled shorter distances but were no less enthusiastic to see what the national press was calling “the biggest prestige game” in the Cotton Bowl’s “short history.”<sup>94</sup>

Thursday morning, January 1, 1948 dawned sunny and cold in Dallas as 47,000 people (1,500 more than the stadium’s official capacity) made their way to the State Fair Grounds for the early afternoon kickoff of the twelfth annual Cotton Bowl. For the Mustangs’ star sophomore, Doak Walker, the day also marked his twenty-first birthday

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<sup>92</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 1 January 1948, pg. 41.

<sup>93</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 3 January 1948, pg. 11.

<sup>94</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 1 January 1948, pg. 41.

and he and his teammates prepared to play in the biggest game of their young football careers. As the Penn State team made the trip into Dallas from Grand Prairie, they prepared for their sternest test of the season. After a frustrating week filled with intra-squad scrimmages, the Lions looked forward to taking the field against an actual opponent and the chance to bring their season to a successful conclusion.<sup>95</sup>

The most historically significant event of the day, the official desegregation of major college football in Texas and the Southwest, came on the game's opening play, when Penn State sent the former soccer player Triplett out to kick the ball off. Reports of the game later that day in the national press paused little to ponder the historical significance of the moment, but as he took the field to kick the Dallas crowd let Triplett know how they felt about his participation as what he later described as a round of "profanity, jeering, and ... threats" reigned down from the stands. "Don't tell me you do the kicking off," a surprised Midwestern official taken aback by the overt display of racial hostility asked Triplett as he handed him the ball. The official encouraged Triplett to "get a good one" and seconds later what Triplett later called "one of the truest traditions" of the South, segregated football came to an end in Texas.<sup>96</sup>

With the game underway, the crowd soon thrilled to the exploits of the home team. Just minutes into the contest, Walker completed a fifty-three yard touchdown pass to fellow halfback Paul Page for the first score of the day. Walker's extra point kick gave the Mustangs an early 7-0 lead. Significantly for Triplett, Walker's pass beat Nittany Lion defender Jeff Durkota, who usually split playing time with Triplett in the

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<sup>95</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 2 January 1948, pg. 21; *Los Angeles Times*, 2 January 1948, pg. 15; *Atlanta Daily World*, 4 January 1948, pg. 7.

<sup>96</sup> Interview of Wallace Triplett III by C. Roy Parker. African American Chronicles: Black History at Penn State, undated.  
[http://blackhistory.psu.edu/timeline/wally\\_triplett\\_first\\_negro\\_to\\_earn\\_a\\_varsity\\_letter](http://blackhistory.psu.edu/timeline/wally_triplett_first_negro_to_earn_a_varsity_letter).

defensive backfield. After this mistake, Higgins relegated Durkota to the bench and left Triplett in the lineup for the remainder of the game. As a result, the African-American star who excelled in pass coverage played in fifty-six of the game's sixty minutes and made critical contributions on both offense and defense. Late in the second quarter, SMU added to their lead when the versatile Walker capped a 37-yard Pony drive with a 3-yard plunge into the end zone. The score stood at 13-0 after Walker missed the extra point and it looked to many in the stadium as if the Mustangs, who dominated the second quarter, might be on their way to an easy victory. As halftime approached, however, the Nittany Lions produced their first offensive thrust of the contest and quickly moved into SMU territory. Their drive stalled at the Mustang 37, but on a desperation fourth-down play with fourteen seconds left on the clock, Elwood Petchel hit Larry Cooney with a dramatic touchdown pass. After a successful extra point attempt, the two teams left the field with the score 13-7.<sup>97</sup>

The Nittany Lions dominated the early stages of the second half, driving to the Mustang goal line in the middle of the third quarter, but then stalling on a critical fourth down that left the Ponies pinned on the edge of their own end zone. Adopting the more conservative tactics of the era, SMU quickly punted, hoping to avoid a mistake that might allow the Lions to even the game, but Petchel fielded the kick and returned it 29 yards to the Mustang nine-yard line. After two running plays that netted five yards, Petchell rolled-out to his right, leaped into the air, and threw back to his left to Triplett as the latter streaked diagonally into the corner of the end zone for the second Lion score of the day. Significantly, the play marked the first time an African American

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<sup>97</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 2 January 1948, pg. 21; *Los Angeles Times*, 2 January 1948, pg. 15; *Dallas Morning News*, 2 January 1948, pg. A1-A2; *Atlanta Daily World*, 4 January 1948, pg. 7.

scored in a major college football game played in the South and yet it went unnoted by both the local and national press. A missed extra point attempt on the following play left the score tied 13-13 with four minutes and twenty seconds left in the third quarter.<sup>98</sup>

It had been a hard fought game, but unlike some other early, integrated contests there were no reports of racial animosity on the field that day. Afterwards, both Triplett and Hoggard commented on the good sportsmanship of their Mustang opponents and none of the participants have reported any incidents in the years since. As the two teams fought it out on the field, however, some in the crowd did register their contempt for the changes Triplett and Hoggard represented. Triplett said, “it was not a friendly situation at all” in the jam-packed Cotton Bowl and reported hearing “jeering,” “profanity,” and “threats” coming from the stands throughout the game. “They were letting the world know that they were objecting to the fact that we were going to break one of the truest traditions,” Triplett later reflected. “Football was a white man’s game and it was supposed to be played by white men for the enjoyment of white people, and we were intruding really.”<sup>99</sup>

The rest of the contest turned into an epic slugfest as two talented teams battled to break the deadlock and come out on top. Each made offensive thrusts, only to see them stopped by opportunistic defenses that capitalized on their mistakes and created turnovers. With just two seconds left on the clock, the score remained knotted as Penn State prepared for a last desperation play hoping to duplicate their miraculous long

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<sup>98</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 2 January 1948, pg. A1-A2; *Chicago Tribune*, 2 January 1948, pg. 21; *Los Angeles Times*, 2 January 1948, pg. 15; *Atlanta Daily World*, 4 January 1948, pg. 7; *Pittsburgh Courier*, 10 January 1948, pg. 13.

<sup>99</sup> Interview of Wallace Triplett III by C. Roy Parker. African American Chronicles: Black History at Penn State, undated.  
[http://blackhistory.psu.edu/timeline/wally\\_triplet\\_first\\_negro\\_to\\_earn\\_a\\_varisty\\_letter](http://blackhistory.psu.edu/timeline/wally_triplet_first_negro_to_earn_a_varisty_letter).

touchdown pass from the end of the first half. The Lions snapped the ball to Petchel from the SMU 37-yard line and, as the final seconds ticked off the stadium clock, the crowd roared in anticipation of the game's climactic moment. The Mustang rush struggled to reach the Nittany Lion backfield, and Petchel drifted from side to side. Under pressure, he rolled toward the right sideline, leaped into the air, and heaved the ball to the end zone where two Mustang defenders and Dennis Hoggard, Penn State's African-American end who had seen only limited playing time during the contest, waited with the game in the balance. Both defenders leaped to deflect the ball, but both missed it. Suddenly, the potential game-winning pass hit Hoggard's outstretched hands as he fell to his knees in the end zone. Unfortunately, for Hoggard, he could not hang on to what would have been a difficult catch and the ball tumbled to the ground ending the game. Hoggard's chance at New Year's Day fame and the Nittany Lions' chance to pullout a dramatic victory disappearing in one dramatic instant.<sup>100</sup>

The much-anticipated Cotton Bowl contest ended in a tie, but few people seemed disappointed with the result as the game lived up to its pre-game hype. Both teams played well, controlling different portions of the game, and statistically they proved as evenly matched as the result on the scoreboard. Both managed twelve first

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<sup>100</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 2 January 1948, pg. 21; *Los Angeles Times*, 2 January 1948, pg. 15; *Atlanta Daily World*, 4 January 1948, pg. 7; *Pittsburgh Courier*, 10 January 1948, pg. 13; *Dallas Morning News*, 2 January 1948, pg. A1-A2. In his book *King Football*, Michael Oriard discusses *Dallas Morning News* sports editor George White's reporting of Hoggard's near game-winning catch. In White's recounting of the play, the pass was imminently more catchable than in other accounts and Hoggard "dropped a bullet touchdown peg into his breadbasket." The most interesting part of White's report, however, described Hoggard's reaction immediately following the play. "He rolled over in disgust for a moment," White told his readers, "then leaped up grinning from ear to ear, grasped Doak Walker's hand and lauded him for his great performance." Oriard questions White's ability to see "the helmeted black man's facial expression from the distance of the press box" and argues that his use of the "grinning Sambo" troupe with his audience "reveal(s) the persistence of the minstrel show stereotype" in a period when segregation is usually seen as in retreat. Michael Oriard, *King Football: Sport and Spectacle in the Golden Age of Radio and Newsreels, Movies and Magazines, the Weekly & the Daily Press* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 315.



downs and while the Nittany Lions outgained the Mustangs 258 yards to 206, the Mustangs held the advantage in turnovers, 3-2.<sup>101</sup> SMU rushed for 102 yards against the vaunted Penn State rush defense, and the Nittany Lions used a wide-open passing attack reminiscent of the Southwest, to produce their two scores. In recognition of the game's parity, both schools received "identical Cotton Bowl team trophies."<sup>102</sup> Conveniently, the deadlock also allowed both clubs to complete an undefeated season and stake their claim as the dominant powers in their region of the country.

The desegregated contest generated noteworthy interest among African-American fans that thrilled to the exploits of Triplett. According to the *Dallas Morning News*, Nittany Lion backfield star "was met by hundreds of Negro fans outside the dressing room" and "went through the crowd signing programs" as the team left the stadium.<sup>103</sup> Building on the good feelings engendered by the game, the year's festivities offered one more challenge to Southern tradition when Triplett and Hoggard joined their teammates in attending the postgame banquet at a segregated downtown Dallas hotel.<sup>104</sup> The celebration took place without incident, and both players praised the treatment they received from the SMU team to the black press.<sup>105</sup>

Dennis Hoggard was not the only member of his family breaking down barriers in the Cotton Bowl on New Year's Day in 1948. That afternoon, his mother was one of a small group of African Americans who integrated the stadium's whites-only seating sections. Mrs. Dennis Hoggard Sr. watched the game from a box seat on the 50-yard

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<sup>101</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 2 January 1948, pg. 15.

<sup>102</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 2 January 1948, pg. A1-A2.

<sup>103</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, undated clipping in Football, 1937-1949, Box 4, Folder: 1-1-48 Cotton Bowl Game SMU vs. Penn State, SMU Archives, Degolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas.

<sup>104</sup> Martin, "Integrating New Year's Day," 364.

<sup>105</sup> *Atlanta Daily World*, 4 January 1948, pg. 7.

line, sitting among Dallas' white elite and far from the "reserved for colored" section at the east end of the stadium. As the parent of a player, Mrs. Hoggard received her ticket in Pennsylvania and after arriving at the stadium she headed for her assigned seat. An usher, noting the disparity between Mrs. Hoggard's seat assignment and her skin complexion, informed her that she needed to exchange her ticket for one in the "seats reserved for colored people." A distinguished member of Philadelphia's black elite, Mrs. Hoggard refused this indignity and told the usher "I shall take the seat my ticket calls for," or she warned him, "I will have to be removed from it."<sup>106</sup> The stadium's representative disappeared never to return, and Hoggard's mother enjoyed her seat, finding the elite white Southerners sitting around her accepting of the Lions' black players and very hospitable to her presence. She overheard several Texans saying they could see why Penn State refused to leave Triplett and Hoggard at home. Perhaps even more surprising, according to the *Chicago Defender*, other blacks with tickets for seats in the restricted white sections also kept their assigned seats and, though their numbers were not large, did so without incident sitting among all classes of Dallas whites. Demonstrating their desire to embrace desegregated football, these black fans ignored the racial slights hurled at Triplett and Hoggard throughout the game for the greater good. In a similar vein, putting its best foot forward, white Dallas overlooked the transgression of racial décor represented by integrated seating in the interest of hosting a successful event. In doing so, they demonstrated that race relations could be slightly more flexible in urban North Texas compared to other parts of the segregated South.<sup>107</sup>

Just as Cotton Bowl officials hoped, the successful 1948 game signaled the

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<sup>106</sup> *Chicago Defender*, 17 January 1948, pg. 10.

<sup>107</sup> *Chicago Defender*, 17 January 1948, pg. 10; *Atlanta Daily World*, 15 January 1948, pg. 5.

beginning of a new era with an expanding stadium and increasing prestige for the game. As they boarded a train to leave Dallas the following afternoon, Penn State officials “lauded the setup here,” to the local press, “and predicted that the local New Year’s spectacle would get bigger and better by the year.”<sup>108</sup> The financial success of the game, no doubt, buoyed the optimism in the Penn State camp and on Monday, January 5, Game Director James H. Stewart announced that the contest had produced the largest gate in Cotton Bowl history.<sup>109</sup> With the stadium set to expand “by 18,000 or 20,000” seats, officials projected a purse of “approximately \$100,000 each” for the following year’s participants.<sup>110</sup>

The enthusiasm for SMU football and the success of the 1948 game allowed the Cotton Bowl Athletic Association to launch a successful bond issue and begin adding upper-decks to the stadium (which became known, with only a little exaggeration, as “The House That Doak Built”). Stadium capacity reached 67,000 by the 1949 game and more than 75,500 when both decks were completed prior to the 1950 contest. For the 1949 game, the Association again challenged local and regional customs by inviting another integrated team, the ninth-ranked Pacific Coast Conference champion Oregon Ducks to face Walker and SMU, who once again won the Southwest Conference. Perhaps, learning from Penn State’s experience, Oregon refused accommodations at the Grand Prairie Naval Air Station and instead opted to stay in a segregated downtown hotel while the team’s three black players stayed with members of the local black community. A standing-room only crowd of more 70,000 on New Year’s Day watched

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<sup>108</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 3 January 1948, pg. A10.

<sup>109</sup> Gross gate receipts totaled \$189,388.53, of that total \$66,453.59 went to Penn State, while SMU received \$61,453.59 and, as the host team, contributed \$5,000 “to the Southwest Conference to help maintain its office of executive secretary.” *Dallas Morning News*, 6 January 1948, pg. A14.

<sup>110</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 6 January 1948, pg. A14.

Walker and the Mustangs hand Norm Van Brocklin's Ducks a 21-13 defeat.<sup>111</sup>

For SMU, the tie with Penn State capped a breakout season that ushered in a decade of financial prosperity for the football team and those surrounding it. The coaching staff gained a share of the benefits in December 1947 when the Faculty Committee on Athletics granted them bonuses equal to roughly 15% of their base salaries “in recognition of the extra work” required to prepare for the bowl game.<sup>112</sup> The Mustang Club of alumni boosters also benefited from the team's success and in the month following the game reported that they expected to raise an additional \$10,000 in revenue because of an increase in memberships.<sup>113</sup> The Athletic Department and the University emerged as the biggest beneficiaries of the football team's surging popularity. For the fiscal year ending in June 1948, the department reported \$57,091 in net profits; the following year that number increased more than five-fold to \$314,432. In 1949-1950, profits increased again to \$426,740 and, on June 30, 1953, the Athletic Department transferred its \$1,134,269 surplus to the University.<sup>114</sup> As SMU's 1947 and 1948 seasons demonstrated—competing at the highest levels of college football

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<sup>111</sup> *Chicago Defender*, 8 January 1949, pg. 14; Martin, “Integrating New Year's Day,” 365. Nationally, the black press paid far less attention to Oregon's Cotton Bowl trip than they had to Penn State's the year before. The *Chicago Defender* reported critically on the housing arrangements, but did not comment on them in any depth. Only the *Pittsburgh Courier* made mention of local African-American interest, reporting that “Approximately two hundred Negroes saw the game from a special end zone section in the bottom rim of the huge Cotton Bowl.” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 8 January 1949, pg. 8.

<sup>112</sup> Meeting of the Faculty Committee on Athletics, December 3, 1947, Athletic Committee, Box 10, Folder: Faculty Committee Minutes (Old), SMU Archives, Degolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas. Bell received a bonus of \$1,200 on top of his base salary of \$7,875. His highest paid assistant, Rusty Russell, whose base was \$5,775, received \$900. On the lower end of the coaching payroll, line coach J. C. Wetsel's base salary of \$3,150 resulted in a \$475 bonus. In total, the Faculty Committee approved \$6,900 in additional money for the coaches.

<sup>113</sup> Meeting of the Faculty Committee on Athletics, February 12, 1948, Athletic Committee, Box 10, Folder: Faculty Committee Minutes (Old), SMU Archives, Degolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas. Mustang Club monies benefited the football team directly by paying tuition for the players. During the 1947-1948 school year, the club paid a “tuition bill” of “approximately \$17,500.00.”

<sup>114</sup> Disposition of Athletic Department Resources For Period 1945-46 thru 1969-1970, Faculty Governing Records, Box 29, Folder: Faculty Senate – Committees – Athletics Committee, 1970-1971, SMU Archives, Degolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas.

nationally required a willingness to relax traditional racial restrictions on occasion. Doing so, however, in terms of glory and treasure, could be quite rewarding.

Watching their football team compete against black athletes prompted some members of the SMU community to consider the larger injustices of segregation. The week after the Cotton Bowl against Penn State, the student newspaper led its editorial column with a discussion of what it called “The Real Victory” of the contest. The editorial praised “Cotton Bowl officials, the SMU coaching staff and the Pony eleven ... for their courage and honesty in refusing to allow prejudices to stand in the way of” scheduling the “best possible” game. It also commended Penn State, “for accepting the invitation when they weren’t certain as to how the mixed team would be received here.” It even lauded the “many thousands of spectators,” who did “hardly any heckling” when, “for the first time, white and Negro athletes played against each other in a major sports event in the south.” The details of the game might eventually be forgotten, the newspaper correctly predicted, but “fair-minded people everywhere still will remember the more important victory which took place that New Year’s Day in the minds and hearts of men.”<sup>115</sup> Ultimately, the atmosphere of racial progress produced by competing against integrated football teams may have helped start the process of gradual desegregation at SMU. In January 1951, three years after the Penn State game, SMU became the first major private university in the South to begin desegregating when its Perkins School of Theology enrolled two African-American graduate students. In 1955, the law school also began accepting African Americans and, in 1962, the first black

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<sup>115</sup> *SMU Campus*, 7 January 1948, pg. 3.

undergraduate enrolled in classes.<sup>116</sup>

Back home in Pennsylvania, Coach Higgins and his squad were left to address the internal tensions and divisions that resulted from their encounter with Southern segregation. Rumors about the conflict between coach and players circulated widely in State College and the local *Centre Daily Times* reported that some Penn State players “were not willing to make sacrifices for their Negro teammates.”<sup>117</sup> On Wednesday, January 7, Higgins and co-captain John Nolan talked to the press and published an “open letter... To All Good Penn Staters” in the campus newspaper in an effort to quell the rumors and bring harmony to the Nittany Lion camp. In the letter Higgins and Nolan addressed talk of “team dissension” and told their fans, “Some of what you’ve heard is true. Most of it is not.” Both sides accepted responsibility for the discord, “Let’s just say that both of us made mistakes—the coaches and the team members,” and both agreed on the need to put the incident behind them and move forward because “there is absolutely nothing to be gained by the further spreading of what happened in Texas.” Speaking for the players, Nolan told the press they were “sorry the situation had gotten so far out of hand,” and assured everyone the rumors they were hearing were “too distorted” to be taken seriously. Higgins said that reports of him “indicting the whole squad for bickering and dissension” and “singling out wingback Jeff Durkota as a ringleader and troublemaker” were inaccurate. He did, however, admit “that mistakes

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<sup>116</sup> Scott Alan Cashion, “‘And So We Moved Quietly’: Southern Methodist University and Desegregation, 1950-1970” (PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 2013), 1-6, 75, 79. SMU began accepting African Americans a full decade earlier than the two other major Methodist universities in the South: Duke and Emory. In Dallas, members of the University’s Board of Trustees proved more accepting of challenges to racial tradition than their brethren in the Deep South. Among the South’s public universities, the University of Arkansas in 1948, the University of Oklahoma in 1949, and the University of Texas in 1950 accepted their first black graduate students ahead of SMU. Notably, all four schools are located in the Southwest.

<sup>117</sup> *Daily Collegian*, 7 January 1948, pg. 1.

were made both by myself and the squad,” and that “some things would be done differently if we had it to do over again.” Now, the two said, it was time to begin building for next season and the coaches, players, and fans all should move forward and leave the controversies of segregated Dallas behind.<sup>118</sup> Eventually, the debates over what happened in Texas did fade and Penn State enjoyed a successful 1948 campaign, going 7-1-1 in what turned out to be Higgins’ final season. Citing health issues, the coach stepped down following nineteen seasons at the school where he won All-American honors as a player both before and after the First World War.<sup>119</sup>

Everyone in the Penn State camp agreed on one thing regarding the trip to Dallas—the experience at the Grand Prairie Naval Air Station had been unpleasant and overly confining. Bad food, sparse accommodations, strict supervision, and physical confinement were not what the forty members of the team had envisioned for their postseason bowl trip. The cancellation of most pregame festivities and the attempt to keep the team on the base brought them face-to-face with the reality of Jim Crow segregation and produced a wave of rebellion. While the team as a whole remained committed to the proposition of racial equality, the confrontation with Southern reality led many individuals—elite athletes playing on one of college football’s best teams—to fight back. Their struggle put Higgins and the coaching staff in a difficult position by challenging their authority in ways not usually permitted in the coach-dominated world of college football. Following his initial outburst when confronted by team leaders,

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<sup>118</sup> *Daily Collegian*, 7 January 1948, pg. 1; *Dallas Morning News*, 8 January 1948, pg. B4. Looking at these two sources, it is obvious that the *Dallas Morning News* based their report on the larger story published in the previous day’s Penn State student newspaper. In keeping with their efforts to avoid issues of race and segregation, the mainstream Dallas newspaper, not surprisingly, failed mention the reports of racial discord in State College.

<sup>119</sup> Higgins, the younger brother of reformer and birth-control advocate Margaret Sanger and a member of the College Football Hall of Fame, lived for two more decades. He died in 1969.

Higgins' measured response to the crisis and his willingness to admit mistakes and meet the players halfway in achieving reconciliation, suggest that he and his fellow coaches may have sympathized with the plight of the players. It also demonstrates the uniquely powerful position of the players in these particular circumstances. The oldest generation to play college football, the war veterans of the late-1940s staked a much more legitimate claim to manhood than either their predecessors or those who followed. Coupled with their moral stand against racial segregation, a position growing increasingly popular nationally in the postwar era, the players possessed the ability to speak and act out to a degree not usually seen. Ultimately, the trip to Dallas put the entire Penn State football program and its commitment to racial justice to the test and much like the result of the game on the field, the off-field confrontation with Jim Crow ended in a win for neither side.

The 1948 Cotton Bowl stands as an early and unique event in the larger history of the desegregation of college football in Texas, the South, and American society as a whole. In many ways, however, the events surrounding that New Year's Day in Dallas foreshadowed the uneven and ambiguous ways in which the Jim Crow system ultimately crumbled. Democratic idealism on the Penn State and SMU campuses, pragmatic calculation in segments of the Dallas business community, and the opportunity to build civic pride and bravado through the vicarious pursuit of gridiron glory allowed two young African Americans entrance to the meritocratic playing field of one of college football's biggest games. At the same time, however, this progress took place in an atmosphere that downplayed and limited change to the greatest degree possible. On the Cotton Bowl field integration took center stage, but in almost all other



areas of the bowl experience segregation remained firmly entrenched. The desegregated game meant much to middle-class black sports fans nationally who followed it in the black press and to Dallas's African-American community who strongly supported it. However, in the minds of most white college football fans little separated it from the other big games of the season and its racial implications went largely unnoticed. For the athletes involved—Triplett, Hoggard, and the entire Penn State squad—the experience required many sacrifices, even as their coaches, administrators, university, and the host city profited handsomely.

## Chapter Two

### Racial Change on the Southern Periphery: Prentice Gautt and the Desegregation of Oklahoma Football

The Cotton Bowl Athletic Association's successful desegregation of its New Year's Day game proved the only major advance toward racial equality on the college gridirons of the Southwest in the years after World War II. For the next decade, college football in the region remained a tightly segregated all-white space that strictly excluded young African-American athletes with the talent to compete on its, theoretically, meritocratic playing fields. On the region's physical and cultural fringes, however, this situation began to change in the mid-1950s. Motivated by a mix of idealism, self-promotion, and a commitment to winning football games, North Texas State College and the University of Oklahoma opened their football programs to their first black players in 1956. In 1957, North Texas State became the first four-year college in the former Confederacy to allow blacks to compete in varsity football.<sup>1</sup> That same year, Oklahoma took a significant step away from its history of segregated education and—as the reigning two-time national champions—became the first major football power in a broadly defined South to field a black athlete on its varsity football team. As the premier university in the state, and with a football program that had become one of its most beloved cultural institutions, this move provided a high-profile challenge to Oklahoma's long legacy of racial restriction just as other barriers were loosening in the aftermath of the *Brown* decision.

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<sup>1</sup> On the integration of North Texas State College and its football program see: Ronald E. Marcello, "Reluctance Versus Reality: The Desegregation of North Texas State College, 1954-1956," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 100 (1996): 153-185; and Ronald E. Marcello, "The Integration of Intercollegiate Athletics in Texas: North Texas State College as a Test Case, 1956," *Journal of Sport History* 14 (1987): 286-316.

In the late-1950s and early-1960s, other schools on the fringes of regional life—Texas Western College, Texas College of Arts and Industries, and the University of Houston—seeking to enhance their status through athletic success—also began utilizing black athletes.<sup>2</sup> While these small steps forward did not lead to the widespread desegregation of college football in the region, they did establish important precedents as both white and black football fans witnessed a select-few African Americans succeed in both the classroom and on the field. In a transitional period in which southern racial norms began to be challenged and a new racial order constructed, the experiences of these pioneering athletes highlighted both the potential and the limitations of change. They also showcased the tremendous talents of some of the region’s elite black athletes and offered limited, but convincing, proof of the dividends that might accrue to desegregated teams. Despite the evidence, however, the mainstream of white college football fans in the region continued to ignore the potential contributions of African

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<sup>2</sup> Located in El Paso, Texas Western originally opened as the Texas State School of Mines and Metallurgy in 1914. A small but growing institution with important links to the mining industry in the 1950s, the school’s enrollment topped 3,000 students for the first time in 1954; a year later the state legislature increased its annual operating budget nearly 50% to just under \$1.5 million. Situated on the Mexican border in far West Texas, El Paso was culturally the least southern city in Texas. In 1955, Texas Western became the first formerly segregated college in Texas to accept black undergraduates. Francis L. Fugate, *Frontier College: Texas Western at El Paso: The First Fifty Years* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1964), 111-116. Opened in 1925 in Kingsville and located near the South Texas coast thirty-five miles south of Corpus Christi and one hundred thirteen miles north of Brownsville, the Texas College of Arts and Industries was also geographically outside the Texas mainstream. A significant Mexican-American population in the local community and on campus helped push desegregation forward. Despite white protest and resistance, the college admitted its first African-American graduate students to a campus of just over 2,500 students in the summer of 1956. Cecilia Aros Hunter and Leslie Gene Hunter, *Texas A&M University Kingsville* (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2000), 100, 107-113. Founded as a community college in 1927, The University of Houston struggled to achieve growth and gain academic respectability during its first three-and-a-half decades. During the same period the school also enforced strict racial segregation. By the early-1960s, however, the two goals could no longer be reconciled. In order to become a state school and gain access to state funding, Houston was forced to desegregate. The first African-American graduate students enrolled in 1962 and the first undergraduates in 1963. Katherine Lopez, *Cougars of Any Color: The Integration of University of Houston Athletics, 1964-1968* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2008), 11-23. Each of these schools advanced their on-field fortunes by accessing the largely untapped pool of black athletic talent available in the state. For more on the desegregation of these athletic programs also see: Charles H. Martin, *Benching Jim Crow: The Rise and Fall of the Color Line in Southern College Sports, 1890-1980* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 90-119, 187-188.

Americans.

In the fall of 1957, Prentice Gautt, a premier athlete, outstanding student, and model young man from Oklahoma City's all-black Douglass High School, became the first African American to play varsity football for the University of Oklahoma. Gautt's career at Oklahoma illustrates how these early pioneer athletes broke down barriers and won a measure of acceptance. His experience also demonstrates how black athletes endured a myriad of hostilities and injustices on an often-lonely path to achieving the first steps toward desegregation. Gautt's breakthrough came through a unique combination of short- and long-range circumstances that coalesced in the Sooner State during the early phases of the Civil Rights Movement in the mid-1950s. Unlike states in the Deep South or neighboring Texas and Arkansas, Oklahoma exhibited less commitment to southern traditions and, on the whole, accepted federal mandates to begin dismantling its system of *de jure* segregation. The University of Oklahoma itself, led by progressive president George Lynn Cross, played an active role in desegregating higher education on the cultural fringes of the South and in introducing racial toleration to the public life of the state. Head football coach, Bud Wilkinson, a native of Minnesota, possessed not only a commitment to social justice but as a highly successful coach, also the stature to challenge one sacred aspect of Jim Crow in the state. The passion of Oklahoma football fans and their pride in and dedication to winning also helped open the door to integration, albeit on a very limited scale, for particularly talented black athletes of exemplary character. A strong and well-organized civil rights community in Oklahoma City played a key role in laying the foundation for the breakthrough. A group of African-American professionals provided Gautt an academic

scholarship that allowed Wilkinson to avoid any negative publicity associated with having to award him an athletic one. As with other pioneering black athletes, Gautt's tremendous physical ability, accommodating personality, and exemplary character proved critical to the success of the experiment in athletic desegregation.

To understand the intense passions inspired by the football program at Oklahoma's flagship university, one needs to understand the unique history of the state. Originally, a marginal land used to relocate the remnants of some of the once great Native tribes of North America, Oklahoma, from the beginning, suffered something of an inferiority complex in relation to the rest of the nation. During the 1830s, the "Five Civilized Tribes" of the Southeastern United States, the Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Creek, and Seminoles, settled in the future state after a torturous removal process and journey, known as the Trail of Tears, robbed them of their ancestral lands. As slaveholders, the wealthy mixed-blood elite of the tribes also brought a significant number of African Americans with them to the future state of Oklahoma.<sup>3</sup> These slaves and later freedmen established important black communities in the eastern half of Indian Territory. During the Civil War, the members of the Tribes officially allied themselves with the Confederacy and fought for southern independence and the right to

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<sup>3</sup> On slaveholding among the Five Civilized Tribes see: Barbara Krauthamer, *Black Slaves, Indian Masters: Slavery, Emancipation, and Citizenship in the Native American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); David Chang, *The Color of the Land: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Land Ownership in Oklahoma, 1832-1929* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Celia E. Taylor, *African Cherokees in Indian Territory: From Chattel to Citizens* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Theda Perdue, *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society, 1540-1866* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1979); R. Halliburton, Jr., *Red over Black: Black Slavery Among the Cherokee Indians* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1977); Michael F. Doran, "Negro Slaves of the Five Civilized Tribes," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 68.3 (1978): 335-350; Martha Condray Searcy, "The Introduction of African Slavery into the Creek Indian Nation," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 66.1 (1982): 21-32.

retain their slave property against the United States, a decision that cost them dearly.<sup>4</sup> Forced to sign new treaties at the end of the war, the tribal nations turned over millions of acres of land, essentially the western half of what was now often referred to as Oklahoma, to the United States. The treaties also compelled them to recognize the freedom of their former slaves, grant them citizenship rights, and set aside further land for their use.

After the Civil War, the U.S. Army battled the Plains Indian tribes to make way for expanding white settlement. With the Medicine Lodge Treaty of 1867, the U.S. government forced the once nomadic Comanche, Kiowa, Cheyenne, Arapahoe, and Apache tribes to settle in the western half of Indian Territory. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, as the amount of good farmland available for settlement in the United States dwindled, white Americans began to encroach onto native lands. The black population of the Territory also grew in this period as migrants seeking to escape the hardening racial caste system of the Deep South relocated to what they hoped would be the less restrictive social climate of Indian Territory.<sup>5</sup> By the late-1880s, the pressure to allow whites into the parts of Oklahoma unassigned to the various tribes proved too great to resist and, in 1889, the first of a series of land runs officially opened the Territory to large-scale white settlement. As the first wave of settlers—referred to as Boomers by their contemporaries—waited along the Kansas border to rush in and claim their homestead, other future Oklahomans were not as patient. Those who clandestinely

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<sup>4</sup> The war deeply divided the tribes. Factions within each tribe supported both the North and the South, while large numbers of Indians preferred to simply avoid a conflict seen as a “white man’s war.” Attacked by both Confederate and Union forces, the war proved devastating to Indian Territory. Mary Jane Warde, “Now the Wolf has Come: The Civilian Civil War in the Indian Territory,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 71.1 (1993): 64-87; William H. Graves, “The Five Civilized Tribes and the Beginning of the Civil War,” *Journal of Cherokee Studies* 10.2 (1985): 205-214.

<sup>5</sup> Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: Norton, 1998), 143-151.

crossed the border to gain an advantage in the run for the best land were called Sooners, and they created an outlaw, win at any cost, reputation for the state from its founding.

After achieving statehood in 1907, Oklahoma experienced the extremes of the boom and bust cycles of the early twentieth-century American economy. The ongoing commercialization and mechanization of agriculture combined with the skyrocketing demand for American agricultural products during the First World War to fuel two decades of growth and prosperity for Oklahoma farmers. Landowners and tenants brought tens of thousands of new acres (predominantly cotton in the eastern half of the state, and wheat in the west) into production each year and the good times seemed like they would never end. During the “Roaring” 1920s, the state’s petroleum industry added to the prosperity by producing over three and a half billion dollars worth of oil and gas, roughly one-fourth of the national total for the decade.<sup>6</sup> Oil produced lavish wealth for the Osage Indians, whose land possessed some of the state’s largest reserves, and for white oilmen such as Earnest Whitworth “E.W.” Marland, a nouveau riche operator who built the state’s biggest oil empire. It also provided good paying—as well as difficult and dangerous—jobs to everyday Oklahomans. As the 1920s waned, however, so did the price of oil. The state’s oil industry soon joined its agricultural sector in a decline that brought the depths of the Great Depression to Oklahoma. As falling crop prices drove tenant farmers and sharecroppers off the land, an environmental disaster known as the Dust Bowl pushed even the heartiest Oklahomans to the brink of despair, particularly in the western half of the state where conditions verged on the unlivable. During the 1930s, the state lost almost 60,000 residents; the

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<sup>6</sup> W. David Baird and Danney Goble, *The Story of Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 366.

impoverished Okie family traveling west on Route 66 in search of a better life in California became one of the enduring symbols of the desperate poverty of the Great Depression.<sup>7</sup> John Steinbeck's 1939 novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, released as a major Hollywood motion picture the following year, captured the Okies' desperation and made them into a classic American archetype of the Depression-era. It also dealt a harsh blow to the state's reputation nationally as well as to the self-image of its citizens.<sup>8</sup> When they joined the nation in fighting World War II, Oklahomans struggled to find an identity and source of pride in their state.

Despite their frustrations, white residents of Oklahoma could take solace in at least one thing: their complete dominance of the social, political, and legal structures of the state. Their ascendancy stemmed from deep historical roots. Slavery existed in what is now Oklahoma before its acquisition by the United States in the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. The treaty finalizing the purchase protected slaves as property and backed a system begun by Spanish and French masters with the force of U.S. federal law. In 1820, the Missouri Compromise explicitly established the future state as slave territory, opening the door for elites in the Five Civilized Tribes to participate in the cotton boom of the antebellum period. The tribes brought a significant African-American population to the region and, by 1860, there were over 8,300 slaves living

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<sup>7</sup> *U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1940: 1940 Census Population, Vol. II Characteristics of the Population: Part 5 New York - Oregon*, 793. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1941. On the Dust Bowl era migration of more than one million migrants from Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri see: James N. Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Charles J. Shindo, *Dust Bowl Migrants in the American Immigration* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> On Oklahoma's "Okie" image and the state's reaction to it see: Richard W. Fossey, "'Talkin' Dust Bowl Blues': A Study of Oklahoma's Cultural Identity During the Great Depression," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 55.1 (1977): 12-33.



and working on tribal lands, roughly 14% of the population.<sup>9</sup> During the late-nineteenth century, driven by natural increase and the arrival of migrants fleeing the harsh racial conditions of the Deep South, the region's black population continued to grow, reaching a total of 18,636 by 1890, and then almost doubling to 36,853 by 1900. The influx of blacks produced sharp racial conflicts with established Native American settlers and provided the impetus for encoding racial distinctions into law and the early development of a system of legal segregation in Indian Territory.<sup>10</sup> During the next seven years, the rapid expansion of the black population continued with the number of African Americans more than doubling, reaching over 80,000 by the time of statehood. The growth of the black population fueled an expansion of the legal apparatus relegating them to second-class citizenship. In 1897, the Oklahoma territorial legislature established segregation laws for schools and, with the state's founding in 1907, whites made segregation and discrimination a part of state law. The very first law passed by the new state's legislature enforced segregation on railroad cars and in train facilities and that same legislature passed a law extending segregation to institutions of higher education. When black Republican votes proved decisive in defeating several Democratic candidates and challenging white Democratic hegemony in the 1908 elections, white Democrats moved to add disenfranchisement to the state's growing Jim Crow system. In 1910, they succeeded in amending the state constitution and installing a literacy test that applied only to black voters and which, though modified in 1915, effectively excluded blacks from meaningful political participation in Oklahoma

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<sup>9</sup> Doran, "Negro Slaves of the Five Civilized Tribes," 347.

<sup>10</sup> Donald A. Grinde Jr. and Quintard Taylor, "Red vs. Black: Conflict and Accommodation in Post Civil War Indian Territory, 1865-1907," *American Indian Quarterly* 8.3 (1984): 211-229; Fay Yarbrough, *Race and the Cherokee Nation: Sovereignty in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

for decades. During the 1920s, the second incarnation of the Ku Klux Klan emerged as a major force in state politics; and then, during the 1930s, the Great Depression hit black families especially hard even as New Deal programs discriminated against the African-American community in their disbursement of assistance. As white Oklahomans struggled to find a source of pride and identity in their state during the war years, black Oklahomans must have found it even more difficult to muster any enthusiasm at all.<sup>11</sup>

The origins of the Sooner football dynasty began at a meeting of the University's Board of Regents held in the aftermath of the war. Oklahoma emerged from the conflict still deeply affected by the scars of the Great Depression and the negative images of Steinbeck's novel. The huge dust storms had stopped but the state continued to watch its population dwindle. As one Regent in attendance on December 12, 1945 pointed out, many Oklahomans felt a sense of embarrassment about their home state.<sup>12</sup> In Norman, the University itself struggled as years of budget cuts left faculty salaries low and the state legislature seemed poised to make good on its threats to weed out liberal faculty members. Amidst this climate of despair, Ardmore oilman and influential regent Lloyd Noble offered the suggestion that the University focus on building a powerful football program as a means of improving the state's national reputation and its own self-image. "A good football team at the University of Oklahoma," President Cross later remembered Noble saying, "will give the whole state

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<sup>11</sup> George Lynn Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges: Oklahoma's Landmark Cases* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975), 11-12, 27-30; Baird and Goble, *Story of Oklahoma*, 156, 284-285, 343-344

<sup>12</sup> George Lynn Cross, *Presidents Can't Punt: The OU Football Tradition* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977), 7.

something to take pride in.”<sup>13</sup> The time seemed right for such a plan. With so many young men leaving the armed forces and enrolling in college to take advantage of the benefits offered by the G.I. Bill, the spring and summer of 1946 promised to be one of the greatest football recruiting seasons ever. The football program, however, lacked a coach and the Regents and Cross, a former college football player himself in his undergraduate days at South Dakota State, decided to fill the coaching vacancy by recruiting one of the many coaches also leaving the military service. In December 1945, Cross reported to the Regents that “25 or 30 applications had been received, and that others were being considered.”<sup>14</sup> In the following weeks, the search ultimately focused on James M. “Jim” Tatum, the head coach at North Carolina in 1942 and an assistant at Iowa’s Navy Pre-Flight school during the war. On January 9, 1946, the Regents authorized Cross “to hire Mr. Tatum on a three-year contract at \$8,000.00 - \$9,000.00 – and \$10,000.00...” and, after some negotiations, the University announced Tatum as its new head football coach.<sup>15</sup>

Tatum’s time coaching military football put him in close contact with the huge flood of football talent ready to enter the college game. It also introduced him to the split-T formation developed by the head coach at Iowa Pre-Flight, Donald B. “Don” Faurot at the University of Missouri in 1941. Tatum brought the offense to Oklahoma

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<sup>13</sup> Barry Switzer and Bud Shrake, *Bootlegger’s Boy* (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1990), 232.

<sup>14</sup> University of Oklahoma Board of Regents, “Minutes,” December 12, 1945.

<sup>15</sup> University of Oklahoma Board of Regents, “Minutes,” January 9, 1946. The salary offered to Tatum reflected the growing emphasis on football within the University’s overall program. In comparison, when the Regents appointed Cross acting president two years earlier they approved an annual salary of \$7,500. A month prior to Tatum’s hiring, the Regents approved a \$6,000 salary for the dean of the medical school and \$5,000 per year for two faculty members appointed to distinguished David Ross Boyd Professorships. Tatum’s predecessor as head football coach, Dewey Luster, received \$6,000 in 1944. University of Oklahoma Board of Regents, “Minutes,” December 28, 1943; University of Oklahoma Board of Regents, “Minutes,” December 12, 1945.

and the Sooners employed it with deadly effectiveness for the next decade and a half. More importantly, Tatum also brought a young assistant coach, Charles Burnham “Bud” Wilkinson, with him to Norman. A twenty-nine year-old graduate of the University of Minnesota, Wilkinson played a key role as a guard and quarterback on the powerful Gopher teams coached by Bernie Bierman between 1934 and 1936. Posting a 23-1 record during Wilkinson’s time on campus, the undefeated Gophers of 1934 and 1935 received widespread recognition as the best team in the nation at the end of the era before polls selected a national champion. In 1936, they finished the season 7-1 and earned the top ranking in the first year of the Associated Press poll. After a brief stint working in the family mortgage business, Wilkinson returned to athletics, serving as an assistant coach at Syracuse, where he earned a Master’s degree in English and coached African-American star Wilmeth Sidat-Singh.<sup>16</sup> In 1942, he returned to Minnesota as an assistant before joining the Navy the following year. Assigned to Iowa Pre-Flight, he coached centers and quarterbacks for the Seahawks and worked alongside Tatum for a year before serving as hanger deck officer on the aircraft carrier the U.S.S. Enterprise.<sup>17</sup> When Oklahoma called Tatum for an interview, he asked if he could bring Wilkinson with him. Cross agreed to the request and, on January 9, the two coaches were interviewed during a luncheon with the Board of Regents. In discussions afterwards, it came out that Cross and several members of the Board thought they liked Wilkinson

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<sup>16</sup> On Sidat-Singh’s spectacular and at times controversial career at Syracuse in 1937 and 1938 see: Patrick B. Miller, “Slouching Toward a New Expediency: College Football and the Color Line during the Depression Decade,” *American Studies* 40.3 (1999): 5-30; Thomas G. Smith “Outside the Pale: The Exclusion of Blacks from the National Football League, 1934-1946,” *Journal of Sport History* 15.3 (1988): 255-281. Following his senior season, Sidat-Singh joined Jerome “Brud” Holland of Cornell as the first two black players to play in the annual College All-Star Game where they took on the NFL’s New York Giants. Despite his obvious talent, Sidat-Singh did not get the chance to play in the NFL as the league’s unofficial policy of segregation barred African Americans from 1934 to 1945. Smith “Outside the Pale,” 264.

<sup>17</sup> *Daily Oklahoman*, 18 January 1947, pg. 9.

more than Tatum. Nonetheless, the Regents stuck with their original plan to hire Tatum; however, when they instructed Cross to offer him the job, they added “with the condition he bring Bud Wilkinson as Assistant Coach”.<sup>18</sup> When Cross contacted Tatum, he initially interpreted the requirement to bring Wilkinson as a slight to his coaching ability and hesitated to take the job; meanwhile, Wilkinson once again considering leaving football to rejoin his father’s successful business in Minneapolis. Cross held firm and told Tatum he could only follow the Regents’ instructions. After ten days of negotiations, both men accepted the positions and set to work assembling the first of the great postwar Sooner teams.<sup>19</sup>

From their efforts in 1946, Tatum and Wilkinson produced one of the most talented recruiting classes in school history. Darrell Royal, Jim Owens, Wade Walker, Jack Mitchell, Buddy Burris, Stan West, and a host of other talented players joined the team in time for fall practice. By mid-season, it was clear that the fortunes of the Oklahoma program were on the rise. Early losses in close contests against national powerhouses Army and Texas quickly disappeared from fan’s minds when the Sooners won six of their final seven games. The team’s emerging offensive juggernaut concluded the regular season with a 73-12 rout of in-state rival Oklahoma A&M on the Aggies home field in Stillwater. A year earlier, A&M shutout Oklahoma 47-0 in Norman, but this time the Sooners jumped out to a 66-0 lead on route to a ten-touchdown performance in front of 18,500 at Lewis Field.<sup>20</sup> Tatum’s Sooners ended the season by winning the first bowl game in the program’s history when they traveled to

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<sup>18</sup> University of Oklahoma Board of Regents, “Minutes,” January 9, 1946.

<sup>19</sup> Cross, *Presidents Can’t Punt*, 9-13; Switzer and Shrake, *Bootlegger’s Boy*, 232-233.

<sup>20</sup> *Daily Oklahoman*, 1 December 1946, pg. 1.

the Gator Bowl in Jacksonville, Florida to take on North Carolina State.<sup>21</sup> In the bowl's second year, 17,000 fans watched the Sooners' "flashy offense," led by Eddy Davis, Charley Sarratt, and Jack Mitchell, put on "an eye-filling exhibition...in administering a savage 34-13 battering to" the Wolfpack.<sup>22</sup>

Amid disputes with Cross and with other opportunities opening up for him, Tatum left Oklahoma for the University of Maryland after only one season. The university quickly appointed Wilkinson as his replacement and one of the great college football dynasties emerged on the plains of central Oklahoma. In 1947, the Sooners tied their first Big Six conference game 13-13 with the Kansas Jayhawks (a team they shared the top spot in the conference standings with at the end of the year at 4-0-1) and then went 70-0-1 in conference games over the course of the next twelve-and-a-half seasons. In his second year as head coach, Wilkinson's team dropped its first game at Santa Clara by a field goal, then started a thirty-one game winning streak—the sixth longest in modern college football history—that culminated in two Orange Bowl victories and the school's first national championship in 1950. The 1953 Sooners also struggled early, losing to Notre Dame and tying Pittsburgh, before winning their final nine games. In 1954, 1955, and 1956, Wilkinson's Sooners went undefeated (and untied) on their way to back-to-back consensus national championships in 1955 and 1956. After winning their first seven games in 1957, the Sooners pushed their winning streak to forty-seven games, the longest in the history of major college football. Twice during the streak, on January 1, 1954 and January 2, 1956, Oklahoma met undefeated

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<sup>21</sup> The 1938 Oklahoma team coached by Tom Stidham allowed only twelve points during a 10-0 regular season. On January 2, 1939, they lost 17-0 to Tennessee in the Orange Bowl in Oklahoma's first-ever bowl appearance.

<sup>22</sup> *Daily Oklahoman*, 2 January 1947, pg. 1.

Maryland squads, led by their old coach Jack Tatum in the Orange Bowl. On both occasions, the pupil, Wilkinson, defeated his former teacher and the Sooners shattered their eastern rival's dream of a perfect season.

By the 1950s, competing at the highest levels of college football nationally required scheduling games against opponents from the North, Midwest, and West—regions where African-American football players were becoming increasingly common. For schools like Oklahoma in states with long histories of racial segregation this posed potential problems and forced a choice: forego competition against integrated opponents and forfeit the chance for national recognition or break with tradition and schedule the best teams. Ultimately, in Oklahoma, the desire to win football glory proved stronger than Southern racial traditions.

In the early years of Oklahoma football, the Sooners rarely played against teams outside of their region, ensuring that the issue of taking the field against African Americans did not arise. As aspirations for the team grew, however, the necessity of competing nationally became evident and, though few may have realized it at the time, so did the possibility of encountering desegregated opponents. Oklahoma first competed against a major school from outside their region in 1927 when they defeated Amos Alonzo Stagg's all-white University of Chicago Maroons 13-7 in Chicago. In 1939, the Sooners traveled to Evanston, Illinois and this time their opponent, highly regarded and favored Northwestern University, included African-American end Jim Smith on their team. Smith did not start the game, but when he was inserted late in the first half his appearance was greeted with "a chorus of catcalls and boos ... and ... several unprintable invectives" from Oklahoma fans in the stands and players on the

Sooner bench. Oklahoma coach Tom Stidham, a former assistant at Northwestern, rose to his feet and quieted the unruly members of the Sooner contingent, but the outburst received national publicity when CBS radio announcer Ted Husing proclaimed to his audience that it was “the most unsportsman-like gesture I have ever encountered during my career as a sports announcer.” African Americans attending the game were also outraged, the black press reported and, despite a 23-0 upset victory over a team many predicted would win the Big Ten, the brush with desegregation left Oklahoma accused of “southern bias” in the national media.<sup>23</sup>

The following evening, five thousand fans greeted the returning team at the train station in Norman and listened to university President William Bennett Bizzell proclaim “we really stepped into big time football yesterday.”<sup>24</sup> Many in the crowd probably did not care about the racial incident, but some Oklahomans were outraged by the negative publicity. The editor of the university’s student newspaper wrote a column condemning those doing the heckling and reporting on the “feeling of intense shame” felt by students on campus as they listened to the broadcast. Not content with reaching a local audience and hoping to rehabilitate his school’s reputation in Evanston, the editor sent a copy of the column to Northwestern where it was published in the *Daily Northwestern*. The outburst by Sooner fans, the editorialist said, “seared upon this group the brand of racial unfairness” and “did a thousand time(s) more harm to this university” than “making a several-hundred mile trip to support one of her athletic teams” did good. Now Oklahoma and its fans faced a decision—quit scheduling integrated opponents or accept black competitors without complaint. “In the name of right and fair play,” the

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<sup>23</sup> *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 21 October 1939, pg. 17; *New York Amsterdam News*, 14 October 1939, pg. 18; Martin, *Benching Jim Crow*, 40.

<sup>24</sup> *Daily Oklahoman*, 9 October 1939, pg. 1.



student editor said, they must choose “one way or the other.” While a sense of moral obligation motivated this writer, so did more practical considerations. “If Oklahoma is to cement a place in the big time,” he warned his audience, “... there must be no more of such conduct as marred the Evanston game Saturday.”<sup>25</sup>

During the 1940s and 1950s, Oklahoma typically scheduled one national opponent each season and during that period they played against other integrated teams without major incident. By the 1955 championship season, Oklahoma fans were accustomed to watching their team compete against blacks. In the second game that year, the University of Pittsburgh and African-American backfield man Bobby Grier visited Norman and the change in attitudes was apparent. Grier lodged with his teammates, saw blacks practicing with the Sooner freshman team, and left with the impression that Oklahoma was a state moving beyond its segregationist past.<sup>26</sup>

With so much success, Wilkinson had little practical motivation to take on the role of racial reformer; still, in the midst of the historic winning streak, a tremendous young black athlete from Oklahoma City came to his attention. In 1954 and 1955, Prentice Gautt, from Oklahoma City’s all-black Douglass High School, emerged as a major high school star. Douglass had a winning streak of their own, forty-six straight, during which the Trojans dominated opponents from other black high schools in five different states. Playing fullback, Gautt led the team during his junior and senior seasons as their winning streak captured the attention of the local mainstream press.<sup>27</sup>

Gautt and Douglass’s fame grew at the same time as the state of Oklahoma moved to

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<sup>25</sup> *Chicago Defender*, 28 October 1939, pg. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Lane Demas, *Integrating the Gridiron: Black Civil Rights and American College Football* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 77-78.

<sup>27</sup> See for example: *Daily Oklahoman*, 19, September 1954, pg. 93; *Daily Oklahoman*, 9, October 1954, pg. 10; *Daily Oklahoman*, 6, November 1954, pg. 10; *Daily Oklahoman*, 24, September 1955, pg. 9.

comply with the school desegregation mandated by the *Brown* decision; consequently, Oklahoma City school officials took a major step and scheduled “the first major game ever played in the state between white and Negro teams.”<sup>28</sup> The game slated Douglass, from the city’s black northeast side, against traditional power, all-white Capitol Hill located in the working-class suburbs of the south side. On November 3, 1955, the contest drew an “overflow crowd” of “more than 8,000 fans” to the campus of the white school. A local television audience of thousands more tuned in for what turned out to be a classic with Gault, according to the *Daily Oklahoman* “easily the most outstanding performer on the field.” The big fullback not only scored the Trojans’ only touchdown, but also thrilled the crowd with a long, 68-yard run early in the second half. Capitol Hill, however, hung tough on their home field and scored with twenty-seven seconds left to break a tie and post a dramatic 13-6 win.<sup>29</sup> The move by school officials toward desegregation did not stop on the playing field. Following the game, each team picked a player to attend classes at the other school for a day. Gault represented Douglass at Capitol Hill while a member of the white squad attended Douglass.<sup>30</sup> Though many Oklahomans no doubt opposed the game and this small measure of classroom integration, neither event provoked major racial tensions as the city’s schools took the first step toward ending racial exclusion in athletics.

The desegregated game broke down barriers in the city and contributed to another advance, this one statewide, at the end of the season. On December 3rd, the all-

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<sup>28</sup> *Daily Oklahoman*, 3 November 1955, pg. 42. Following the lead of newly elected Governor Raymond Gary, in March and April 1955 the Oklahoma legislature passed and the state’s voters approved an amendment effectively ending segregation in Oklahoma’s public schools. D. Keith Lough, “The Adoption of the 1955 Better Schools Amendment,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 85.2 (2007): 158-175.

<sup>29</sup> *Daily Oklahoman*, 5 November 1955, pg. 28.

<sup>30</sup> Harold Keith, *Forty-Seven Straight: The Wilkinson Era at Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984), 218.

black Oklahoma Interscholastic Athletic Association, representing 94 segregated high schools around the state, announced that its members had voted unanimously to join the larger, and previously all-white, Oklahoma State High School Athletic Association (OSHSAA) with its more than 650 member schools. The invitation from the larger organization came with the stipulation that the black schools would “have to change certain eligibility rules;” and the black organization, in turn, offered a utilitarian justification for accepting—it would allow, “for easier scheduling of games”—but still the step forward was significant. The mainstream press noted Douglass’s contribution to the initiative by listing them as a concrete example of what the new alignment might mean. The Trojans, formerly members of the black organization’s “Big Three,” the *Daily Oklahoman* reported, would be joining the prestigious, and previously whites-only “Mid-State circuit” following desegregation.<sup>31</sup> Because of the state’s unique history, segregation and racial discrimination in Oklahoma took on a different—in some ways more complex—but, ultimately, more moderate tone. In the mid-1950s, as the first stirrings of what would become a mass civil rights movement rumbled in the Deep South capital of Montgomery, Alabama, Oklahoma began opening its schools and playing fields to African Americans.<sup>32</sup>

Gautt’s days as a high school racial pioneer did not end with the game at Capitol Hill. Following his senior year, he became the first black athlete selected to play in the

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<sup>31</sup> *Daily Oklahoman*, 5 December 1955, pg. 44.

<sup>32</sup> In August 1958, black Oklahomans helped popularize a significant new tactic in the emerging national civil rights movement when Clara Luper, an NAACP official and teacher at Gautt’s Douglas High, organized 13 students and led a sit-in campaign against the segregated lunch counter at Katz Drugstore. The group quickly forced Katz to integrate all of their stores nationally and then successfully expanded their protests to other city restaurants with Jim Crow policies. Carl R. Graves, “The Right to Be Served: Oklahoma City’s Lunch Counter Sit-Ins, 1958-1964,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 59.2 (1981): 152-166; Ronald Walters, “The Great Plains Sit-In Movement, 1958-1960,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 16.2 (1996): 85-94.

OSHSAA's prestigious annual high school all-star game in August 1956. The road to his selection, however, was not a smooth one. At the end of the 1955 season, when Gautt's name surfaced as the squads were being selected, the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Coaches Association declared the Trojan star ineligible because his school was not a member of the OSHSAA at the time. Only after injuries beset the North team as they prepared for the contest did the idea of allowing Gautt—whose school had joined the OSHSAA in the intervening months—to participate resurface. A special meeting of the Board convened and this time they decided to allow Gautt to join the North squad coached by Bear Jenson of Claremore and Tractor Trent of Dewey.<sup>33</sup>

After two days of practice, Gautt took the field on August 16<sup>th</sup> 1956 for a game that annually offered Oklahoman's a special treat—high school football's re-creation of the Civil War with the “Rebels” from the South taking on the “Yankees” from the North. For the first time the Northern invaders featured a single black recruit, but that evidently did not impress local writers who installed the South as a pregame favorite.<sup>34</sup> Playing among the top high school talent in the state, Gautt dominated the game and led his team to a decisive victory that further enhanced his reputation as a stellar athlete. In front of 12,000 fans at Taft Stadium, located in upscale northwest Oklahoma City, Gautt broke open a scoreless contest with 23-yard touchdown run in the second quarter. Then, with the score 7-0, black Oklahoma City's favorite son took the second-half kickoff and went “roaring up the middle and booming into the clear at his own 40” on his way to a 90-yard touchdown run, providing the margin of victory and earning him

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<sup>33</sup> *Daily Oklahoman*, 14 August 1956, pg. 43.

<sup>34</sup> *Daily Oklahoman*, 16 August 1956, pg. 41.

recognition as “the game’s outstanding back.”<sup>35</sup> As Gautt’s high school days ended, he emerged as the most famous black athlete in the state’s history. Moreover, his career helped open doors by demonstrating that whites and blacks could compete against and alongside one another. Still, it was only a small first step. Despite providing vivid evidence of the untapped athletic potential of Oklahoma’s best black athletes, another decade and a half would pass before significant numbers would have a realistic opportunity of winning scholarships to the state’s leading universities.

Having conquered the state’s high school football fields, Gautt packed his bags in the fall of 1956 and moved to Norman where he hoped to make his mark as a student, athlete, and racial pioneer at the University of Oklahoma. Sixteen miles south of Oklahoma City, Norman was a world away from the black neighborhoods in northeast Oklahoma City where Gautt grew up. Once a “sundown town” where African Americans were tolerated—mostly for their labor or consumer dollars—during the day, but were not allowed to live or even be present after dark, Norman had a long history of racial prejudice and segregation, a history that went back further than statehood.<sup>36</sup> It was during the 1890s that Norman joined many other cities and towns across the country in expelling its black residents and imposing a system of rigid residential segregation. In 1892, Norman whites, “determined that no ‘niggers’ shall live in this town,” used threats and intimidation to rid their city of its small black population. During the purge, one black resident received a note giving him “ten days” to leave

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<sup>35</sup> *Daily Oklahoman*, 18 August 1956, pg. 26.

<sup>36</sup> On sundown towns see: James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York: New Press, 2005).

town and warning him to “‘git’ or...stand the consequences.”<sup>37</sup>

Economic motivations often undergirded white efforts to enforce segregation in Norman and other communities around the country. In 1898, a white Oklahoma City roofer, J.J. Wallace, made the mistake of hiring black carpenter George Rogan to work for him on a project in Norman. As they worked, a mob of approximately twenty-five angry local whites, spurred on by the town marshal J. S. “Long Jim” Davidson, attacked and badly beat Wallace while forcing Rogan to flee. Wallace went to civil court seeking \$25,000 in damages from the town of Norman for the injuries he suffered as a result of the beating, including a fractured skull and the loss of sight in his left eye. According to court records, he contended that the town of Norman and its residents “entered into a conspiracy... for the purpose of preventing, by means of threats and physical violence, the laboring, living, or lodging... of law-abiding colored citizens of the United States” in their town. In addition to Rogan, Wallace listed the names of four other black men and indicated that there were others whose names he did not know, who had similarly been assaulted and forced out of Norman during the previous three years. Unfortunately for the plaintiff, the Supreme Court of the Territory of Oklahoma rejected his claims and refused to hold a municipality financially liable for its citizenry’s enforcement of unwritten codes of segregation. The court held that a local municipal government such as Norman could not “be a party to a conspiracy” and therefore could not be held responsible for “certain prejudices against the colored people.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Loewen, *Sundown Towns*, 92, 169. According to Loewen, “In town after town in the United States, especially between 1890 and the 1930s, whites forced out their African American neighbors violently....”

<sup>38</sup> *Wallace v. Town of Norman*, 9 Okla. 339, 60 p. 138 (1900); Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges*, 6-8; Loewen, *Sundown Towns*, 238.

More than two decades later, in 1922, anti-black sentiment in Norman remained strong and reached a fever pitch when students at the University invited Singie Smith's Orchestra, an all-black musical group out of Fort Worth, to play in a local dance hall.<sup>39</sup> In a town where the black press reported signs reading "Nigger, don't let the sun go down on you in this berg" stood proudly on display, a mob of 500 local whites "armed with clubs, guns, and...ropes," and including "several prominent businessmen," gathered outside the dance hall as the evening's festivities got under way. As the night progressed, the increasingly hostile crowd threw bricks at the building and began to discuss lynching the black musicians. According to reports, several carloads of whites even headed for the city park to prepare "telling the rest to bring the 'niggers'" when they were ready. At that point, the local sheriff got involved calling in his available men and deputizing almost one hundred OU students in an effort to protect the band.

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<sup>39</sup> Twentieth-century American race relations reached a nadir in the late-1910s and early-1920s, as violent race riots erupted in several cities. As the Great Migration drew blacks out of the rural south and into urban areas, and as economic and political gains and the World War I experience emboldened many blacks to push for greater equality, whites reacted with resentment that often escalated into violence. Major riots in East St. Louis in 1917 and Chicago in 1919 gave violent expression to underlying white anxiety over competition for jobs and housing. For the classic articulation of this thesis see: Elliott M. Rudwick, *Race Riot at East St. Louis, July 2, 1917* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964) and William M. Tuttle, *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Atheneum, 1970). More recent examinations of these riots emphasize black agency and characterize the violence as a reaction to increasing black political power. See: Charles L. Lumpkins, *American Pogrom: The East St. Louis Race Riots and Black Politics* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008); Malcolm McLaughlin, *Power, Community, and Racial Killing in East St. Louis* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Jonathan S. Coit, "'Our Changed Attitude': Armed Defense and the New Negro in the 1919 Chicago Race Riot," *Journal of the Gilded Age & Progressive Era* 11.2 (2012): 225-256. Lumpkins argues that the East St. Louis riot was "an American pogrom, or racial cleansing, in which officials directed the organized, physical destruction of a racially defined community." Far from an unorganized, spontaneous eruption of working-class resentments, the riot, according to Lumpkins, "is more accurately understood as a profoundly political event that occurred because black East St. Louisians had cracked a rigid racial hierarchy." Lumpkins, *American Pogrom*, 7-8, 110. One of the worst riots in this period and indeed in all of the nation's history occurred in Tulsa, Oklahoma on May 31 and June 1, 1921. When armed black citizens, many of them war veterans, emerged to defend a black youth threatened by a lynch mob, white Tulsans rioted attacking the black section of the city, one of the wealthiest African-American communities in the nation, and burning much of it to the ground. Officially, 39 people died in the rioting, but some estimates place black deaths as high as 300. Scott Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992); James S. Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance: America's Worst Race Riot and Its Legacy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002).

With fights breaking out between locals and students, officers broke up the event and escorted the musicians to the local train station where they quickly boarded a train and escaped to Oklahoma City.<sup>40</sup>

In 1934, when future university president Cross moved to Norman as a newly hired professor of botany, a local businessman explained how the town handled race relations in the 1930s. Pointing with pride to the fact that Norman did not have what he described as a “nigger problem,” the local resident told Cross that not only did blacks not live in town, but also that none even lived close to it. Whites simply would not allow it, the man explained, if blacks were permitted to settle in town they would soon congregate in ghettos and destroy everyone’s property values. African Americans could work in Norman, the businessman said, but only those who understood that, at the end of the day, they had to leave. When Cross asked how such an unwritten ordinance could be enforced, his newly found confidant explained that there was not any need for enforcement. Blacks, the merchant told Cross, “understood the situation perfectly and knew better than to remain in the city after sundown.”<sup>41</sup>

By the time Gautt attended OU in the 1950s, Norman might not have been as racially violent as in decades past, but it was still a town entirely dominated by whites. Indeed, its sundown-town days were hardly far behind it. According to local lore, residents of Norman grudgingly began accepting their first black neighbors when the U.S. Navy located a naval air station in town in 1942 and it was a town still taking its

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<sup>40</sup> *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, 9 February 1922, pg. 1; *Chicago Defender*, 11 February 1922, pg. 2; Loewen, *Sundown Towns*, 245-246. According to the *Defender*, the musicians boarded a train bound for Ft. Worth.

<sup>41</sup> Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges*, 5-6.



first halting steps toward racial inclusion.<sup>42</sup> According to census figures, in 1950, only nine of the city's 27,006 residents were black; a very small group, but significant given the fact that only one African American, a female, lived there a decade earlier.<sup>43</sup> By 1960, the African-American population had grown to ninety-nine, but still blacks represented less than three-tenths of one percent of the city's 33,412 inhabitants.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, economic realities relegated these few black residents to the city's social margins as none of them owned homes. Norman's first African-American homeowner, OU sociology professor George Henderson, did not purchase a home until 1967, a decade after Gautt made his debut on the university's football field, and even then he and his family endured a significant white backlash.<sup>45</sup>

While Norman remained closely connected to Oklahoma traditions of Jim Crow and residential segregation, in the late-1940s and 1950s, the town's university began moving haltingly toward a degree of racial inclusion. To do so, it had to overcome the

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<sup>42</sup> Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges*, 10.

<sup>43</sup> *U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1950: 1950 Census Population, Vol. II Characteristics of the Population: Oklahoma*, 36-54. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1951; *U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1940: 1940 Census Population, Vol. II Characteristics of the Population: Part 5 New York - Oregon*, 881, 919. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1941.

<sup>44</sup> *U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1960: 1960 Census Population, Vol. I Characteristics of the Population: Oklahoma*, 38-51. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1961.

<sup>45</sup> Henderson accepted an appointment in the Sociology and Education Departments and moved his family to Norman weeks after rioters destroyed stores on the block behind his home in Detroit. Unable to purchase the two homes in Norman they liked best because neighborhood prejudices stopped their owners from selling to an African-American family, Henderson and his family settled on their third housing choice. Wild rumors circulated in their new neighborhood. By Henderson's estimation, most homeowners feared a decline in property values, but some "believed we would throw our barbeque bones on the front lawn" and "sneak our relatives into the house to live with us." One scared neighbor even worried that Henderson would lead Oklahoma City blacks to Norman for a race riot. Another felt the arrival of new black neighbors was God's punishment to him. Once the black family moved in, they faced the wrath of resentful white neighbors who dumped garbage on their lawn, shattered car windows, and made threatening phone calls. At times, Henderson and his wife contemplated leaving Norman, but the support and friendship of white fellow faculty members helped them endure and eventually prosper in Norman. George Henderson, *Our Souls to Keep: Black/White Relations in America* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1999), 208-210; Loewen, *Sundown Towns*, 437-438. Henderson's observation that "The only thing I really new about O.U. was that it had good football teams," is an example of intercollegiate football's tremendous marketing power and ability to build national name recognition for what are essentially regional institutions. In this regard see: J. Douglas Toma, *Football U.: Spectator Sports in the Life of the American University* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 1-16.

entrenched opposition of the state legislature and a significant portion of the state population. In 1941, Oklahoma lawmakers—perhaps sensing the changing racial attitudes of the day and seeking to further entrench the state’s already strong tradition of segregated education—explicitly banned interracial educational settings and threatened stiff fines for educators and students bold enough to defy the law. The threat of legal action kept the student body at the University of Oklahoma all white until the late-1940s despite growing support for integration among the faculty, administration, and parts of the student body.<sup>46</sup>

In September 1945, the Oklahoma branch of the NAACP opened a direct assault on segregated education in the state by announcing a campaign to enroll the first African-American students in Oklahoma’s previously all-white institutions of higher learning. In reaction to the civil rights group’s announcement and the publicity it garnered, and in light of the legislature’s stringent attitude regarding segregation, that November OU’s Board of Regents directed President Cross “to refuse to admit anyone of Negro blood as a student in the University for the reason that the laws of the State of Oklahoma prohibit the enrolment of such a student...”<sup>47</sup> Despite these efforts, Oklahoma’s ability to maintain segregation on its most prestigious campus was waning. At the end of the decade, change came fast and dramatically when the Supreme Court ordered desegregation in two landmark cases. These cases brought a lot of unwanted publicity to the university and ended with the opening of the law school, graduate

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<sup>46</sup> A 1948 survey of 500 university students found that 43.6% of the student body favored admitting the first black student to the law college. Among those participating in the survey, male students demonstrated more liberal views on race than their female counterparts. When asked if blacks should be admitted to graduate programs, 46.1% of men and 33.3% of women answered in the affirmative. When access expanded to the undergraduate level, however, a good deal of this idealism faded for both genders. In 1948, only 21.4% of male and 17.2% of female students favored allowing black undergraduates on campus. *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 24 January 1948, pg. 1.

<sup>47</sup> University of Oklahoma Board of Regents, “Minutes,” November 7, 1945.

studies, and, by the mid-1950s, the rest of the university to African-American students. The negative publicity damaged the national reputations of Oklahoma and its leading university and made some Oklahomans more open to methods of improving their state's image on race issues.

The NAACP selected Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher of Chickasha, a twenty-one-year-old graduate of Langston University, the state's all-black school, for the role of racial trailblazer. A married honor student, Fisher represented the aspirations of many in Oklahoma's growing black middle class and reflected their striking emphasis on academic achievement. As a junior at Langston, she joined a group escorting a state official around campus in hopes of gaining his support for upgrading the facilities. When the official seemed disinterested and suggested they should be happy with just having a school, Fisher became politicized and decided to take action. "I didn't see why Negroes should be kept from learning," she later told the press. "Justice is for everyone."<sup>48</sup>

On January 14, 1946, Fisher, NAACP official W. A. J. Bullock, and Roscoe Dunjee, a newspaper editor and the state president of the NAACP, called on President Cross and informed him that Fisher planned on applying for admission to the university's law school.<sup>49</sup> Cross, who opposed segregation, found Fisher "chic, charming, and well poised... an excellent choice of a student for the test case" and

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<sup>48</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 15 January 1948, pg. 20.

<sup>49</sup> As editor of Oklahoma City's *Black Dispatch*, Dunjee served as a driving force in Oklahoma civil rights for decades. In Oklahoma City, Dunjee unified two dominant ideologies of black leadership by serving as both president of the Oklahoma City chapter of Booker T. Washington's National Negro Business League and as a national official and long-time state president of the W.E.B. DuBois-led NAACP. On Dunjee's life and career see: Bob Burke and Angela Monson, *Roscoe Dunjee, Champion of Civil Rights* (Edmond, OK: University of Central Oklahoma Press, 1998); William S. Sullins and Paul Parsons. "Roscoe Dunjee: Crusading Editor of Oklahoma's Black Dispatch, 1915-1955," *Journalism Quarterly* 69.1 (1992): 204-213.

listened as Dunjee explained Fisher's desire to attend law school in Oklahoma.<sup>50</sup> Cross sent Fisher's credentials to the Dean of Admissions for review and then discussed with his visitors the segregation laws and how they prevented him from admitting her to the university. Dunjee told Cross that they were all well acquainted with the law and then asked for what the group really hoped to obtain from the visit: a letter indicating that Fisher fully met the criteria for admission to law school, but that her application would be rejected for one, and only one, reason—her race. Dunjee's question brought Cross to an impasse. He could do what he felt was morally just and admit the obvious—that Fisher would be rejected only because she was black, giving the NAACP an advantage in its fight against the state. Or he could, as one top state official had advised him to do in this very situation, reject Fisher on academic grounds—stemming from Langston's status as an unaccredited institution—and, thus, stand with the segregationists. Cross knew that students from unaccredited schools had been admitted to OU in the past and decided that to perform his duties objectively and fairly he had to give Fisher and her representatives the statement they wanted. A surprised Dunjee watched as Cross dictated a letter stating that he was rejecting Fisher's application on strictly racial grounds.<sup>51</sup>

Armed with Cross's statement the group went to court, but both the Cleveland County District Court and the Oklahoma Supreme Court refused to break Oklahoma's segregated traditions. The state's high court ruled that Fisher did not have a right to attend law school at the University of Oklahoma, but could only expect that the state

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<sup>50</sup> Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges*, 35.

<sup>51</sup> David W. Levy, "Before Brown: The Racial Integration of American Higher Education," *Journal of Supreme Court History* 24.3 (1999): 303-304; Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges*, 36-38.

would provide her with “equal facilities of instruction.”<sup>52</sup> This meant that she could either use state funds to attend an out-of-state law school as other talented black Oklahomans had in the past or she could request that the state create a black law school at Langston. Unsatisfied because neither option challenged segregation in higher education, Fisher and the NAACP instead petitioned the United States Supreme Court. In a landmark case, two years after Fisher’s initial visit to Cross’s office, the high court in 1948 began dismantling decades of segregation in higher education when it ordered the State of Oklahoma to provide Fisher an equal legal education “and provide it as soon as it does for applicants of any other group.”<sup>53</sup> The Court, however, stopped cautiously short of explicitly ordering Fisher’s admission to the OU law school. Rather, the decision required that Oklahoma offer Fisher an option that the court’s would consider an equal legal education or that they cease admitting students of any race. Oklahoma could begin desegregating or it would have to eventually close down the OU law school and cease offering legal instruction to white students.

The Fisher case generated much discussion among white Oklahomans regarding the efficacy of segregated education. Many were not happy with Fisher and the changes she was attempting to bring. Eunice Nolen of Oklahoma City felt compelled to write to the *Daily Oklahoman* to explain that she “doubted her (Fisher’s) desire for a higher education” and thought “that the only thing she cares about is to force her way into a school where Negroes have never gone.” Nolen’s skepticism stemmed from the fact that black leaders accompanied Fisher on her initial visit to the school. “Why couldn’t she have gone by herself as any other student would have?” Ultimately, Nolen

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<sup>52</sup> *Sipuel v. Board of Regents of University of Oklahoma*, 199 Okla. 586 (1948).

<sup>53</sup> *Sipuel v. Board of Regents of University of Oklahoma*, 332 U.S. 631 (1948).

contended, the NAACP was behind it all. “They want to show us that they will enter our schools.”<sup>54</sup> Other white Oklahomans supported Fisher and called on their state to move forward in race relations. Kent Ruth of Geary, Oklahoma, who held Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees from OU, wrote the *Daily Oklahoman* on the same day as Nolen, but his letter called on the state to “establish graduate-level equality right now.” Doing so, Ruth said, “would make Oklahoma the first southern state to prove that Negroes’ participation in World War II—fought, in part at least, to defeat Hitler’s phony race theories—was not in vain.” Ruth condemned segregation as “morally wrong” and asked the state to accept the inevitable and begin moving forward. The Fisher case actually afforded Oklahoma a “big opportunity,” Ruth told the newspaper’s readers, a chance “to prove that it’s a progressive, adult state.”<sup>55</sup>

In Norman, student opinion was divided fairly evenly regarding Fisher’s admission to the law school. In a campus survey, forty-four percent of all students said they favored allowing black graduate students to attend white schools, while half approved of equal educational opportunities, but felt they should be delivered in separate settings. The remaining six percent of the student body wanted to both maintain segregation and continue denying equal opportunities to blacks. Law students demonstrated the most liberal attitudes with eighty-two percent supporting Fisher’s acceptance. Twenty percent of the law students felt blacks should be accepted to the University at all levels of study and half favored the desegregation of public school systems. Support for Fisher was weakest in the College of Business Administration where only twenty-eight percent believed she should be allowed to attend the

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<sup>54</sup> *Daily Oklahoman*, 25 January 1948, pg. 62.

<sup>55</sup> *Daily Oklahoman*, 25 January 1948, pg. 62.

University.<sup>56</sup>

Those who hoped that the high court's order might resolve the matter underestimated the creativity of segregationists and the state still refused to allow Fisher to attend OU Law. Instead, prompted by state Attorney General Mac Q. Williamson, and under orders from the Oklahoma Supreme Court, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education quickly created the Langston University School of Law. This three-room "university" with a hastily assembled three-person faculty would hold classes at the state capitol and offer, the State Regents claimed, a legal education "substantially equal in every way" to the one provided white students in Norman.<sup>57</sup> Fisher and the NAACP rejected this solution and returned to court once again. While they waited, however, the courts began working on a closely related case, a case that grew out of Fisher's and that also directly challenged segregated higher education in Oklahoma—a case that eventually cleared the way for Fisher to enroll in the Oklahoma School of Law.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, while Fisher's case, and the efforts of Oklahoma segregationists to avoid the implications of the Supreme Court's decision, garnered a lot of unwanted national attention to the school and state, this new case forced Oklahoma to expand on its peculiar attempts at preserving segregated higher education and exposed them to even greater national scrutiny.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Daily Oklahoman*, 13 January 1948, pg. 20.

<sup>57</sup> Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges*, 54.

<sup>58</sup> Levy, "Before Brown," 304-305. On June 18, 1949, following passage by the state legislature of an amended segregation law allowing blacks to attend white institutions, Fisher finally enrolled in the law school at the University of Oklahoma. Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges*, 113-114.

<sup>59</sup> The Fisher case drew national attention and led many to speak out against the state and its segregationist practices. Mildred Atkinson of Covington, Kentucky wrote to the editor of the *Washington Post* to voice her opinion that, "The fraud perpetrated on our democracy by our efforts at segregation bares a great sore spot on our body politic." According to Atkinson, Fisher's case provided "the spectacle of a sovereign state completely confounded by a... slight woman... reminiscent of David and Goliath" and symptomatic of the "regional schizophrenia from which our country suffers." Identifying events in

Fisher's struggle at OU, and the Supreme Court's support of her position, inspired other black Oklahomans to seek educational opportunities at the state's white colleges. On January 28, 1948, six more African-American students applied for admission to OU.<sup>60</sup> One of them, George Washington McLaurin, a distinguished older gentleman and a member of the Langston faculty, applied to the Graduate College where he hoped to pursue a PhD in Education.<sup>61</sup> When the school (as expected) rejected all six applications, McLaurin went to court and the U.S. District Court ordered the state to provide him with an equal education. The court, however, like the Supreme Court in the Fisher case, stopped short of striking down Oklahoma's segregated education laws and left the door open to creative methods of compliance by the state. After extensive consultation with Attorney General Williamson and Governor Roy J. Turner, the Board of Regents responded by giving Cross rather vague orders—admit McLaurin but craft guidelines which maintained segregation while also allowing him to receive a “substantially equal” education.<sup>62</sup> By doing so, the Regents hoped to find some sort of workable compromise that would appease federal authority while, at the same time, maintaining a measure of state-mandated segregation in the classroom.

The resulting plan turned into a public relations disaster for both the school and

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Oklahoma as a hindrance to the nation's Cold War goals, she called on the “wise men” of the state and the South to come forward with “a solution” that aligned domestic race relations with the nation's stated “international goals.” *Washington Post*, 4 February 1948, pg. 14.

<sup>60</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 5 February 1948, pg. 1.

<sup>61</sup> Contemporary press coverage of the case generally described the “tall and lean” McLaurin “with more gray than black in his hair” as a man in his mid-50s, although some later accounts have him as old as his late-60s. Born in Mississippi, McLaurin and his wife immigrated to Oklahoma in 1910 where they both enjoyed long careers as educators. The couple's three grown children all obtained advanced degrees, but were forced to leave the state to pursue their post-secondary educations. The McLaurin's first challenged segregation at the University of Oklahoma in 1923 when Mrs. McLaurin wrote the school asking for permission to enroll. She received a letter in reply stating that her credentials were in order but that state law prevented her admission. *Washington Post*, 25 June 1950, pg. B3.

<sup>62</sup> The Regents directed Cross to admit McLaurin “under such rules and regulations as to segregation as the President of the University shall consider to afford to Mr. G. W. McLaurin substantially equal educational opportunities....” University of Oklahoma Board of Regents, “Minutes,” October 10, 1948.



state by putting segregation, and the rather absurd lengths some Oklahomans were willing to go to preserve it, on prominent display. Under the plan, McLaurin would attend classes at OU, but he would do so in an environment that strictly upheld the physical separation of the races. His classes would all meet in the same classroom, a classroom with a small, connecting side room that allowed McLaurin to sit separately but still receive the same instruction as his fellow students. In addition, the university would establish special, segregated spaces in the library and the student union where McLaurin could study and eat his meals. Finally, a single restroom facility would be designated for his exclusive use. When the NAACP legal team protested this arrangement, the U.S. District Court backed the university and, though his lawyers appealed, McLaurin began attending classes under these unique circumstances in the spring of 1949.<sup>63</sup>

On campus in Norman, many constituencies stood ready to embrace even this limited degree of integration. Led by Cross, the administration and a large portion of the faculty always opposed segregation, as did a vocal and active part of the student body.<sup>64</sup> When McLaurin's application to the university was initially rejected, a campus demonstration drew an estimated 1,000 white students who braved temperatures in the teens and fresh snow on the ground to protest the decision. According to the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the protestors staged a "sombre (sic) ceremony, tense with poignant drama" where they burned a copy of the Fourteenth Amendment in effigy, "encased the ashes in a black box and mailed it to President Harry S. Truman."<sup>65</sup> Speaking to the crowd, the

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<sup>63</sup> Levy, "Before Brown," 305-306.

<sup>64</sup> Levy, "Before Brown," 306.

<sup>65</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 February 1948, pg. 1. Those who opposed integration on campus also made their voices heard by staging protests of their own. The following day, Friday, January 30, 1948, a group of

organizer of the protest Howard Friedman, a senior from Oklahoma City, argued that “second-class citizenship cannot exist” and asserted that those who protected it sought an “extension of the Hitler myth.”<sup>66</sup> “We protest any type of discrimination,” Friedman told the crowd. “Those who say we have equality under separate schools are blind.... The university is to develop minds, not preserve color lines.”<sup>67</sup> This more liberal attitude toward race on the Oklahoma campus emerged as part of a larger shift in attitudes, particularly among the urban middle class of the border South.<sup>68</sup> During the McLaurin controversy, the *Chicago Tribune* noted this “different attitude toward the Negro” and maintained that it was “most marked precisely among the classes which send their children to the universities.”<sup>69</sup> When McLaurin arrived on campus, clubs and organizations formed and staged protests to show their support for him. Supportive

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approximately 350 gathered on the campus’s North Oval to voice their opposition to the admission of black students. After listening to forty-five minutes of impassioned speeches, “with intermittent interruptions by hecklers,” the protestors presented President Cross with a petition containing 282 signatures and asking him to uphold segregation by refusing to admit African Americans. A day later, a different group of students staged another protest on the oval. In this case, however, they did not directly challenge the goals of those seeking integration instead they simply mocked them. Led by three law students, the crowd of about one hundred gathered to protest for “equality of the Irish” and sarcastically demanded state recognition of the Railroad Act of 1842, a measure granting special privileges to Irish laborers. To complete their lampooning of civil rights protestors, the group burned a copy of the railroad act and sent the ashes to the janitor in charge of the student union. Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges*, 70-71.

<sup>66</sup> Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges*, 68.

<sup>67</sup> *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 31 January 1948, pg. C1.

<sup>68</sup> Fisher told black minister and political activist Matthew G. Carter that she encountered “much favorable sentiment” for her integration bid at the law school among residents of Oklahoma City and students on the university campus. She attributed the acceptance in the state’s capital city to the efforts of a biracial coalition of ministers who worked “zealously for the last seven or eight years to bring about improved race relations.” Carter, for his part, saw larger economic and historical forces in motion. Describing Oklahoma and the Southwest as a “psychic borderline region” lacking the “deep seated traditional prejudices” of the Deep South, Carter told readers of the African-American press the region offered much better “chances... for making progress in race relations.” Hard economic facts also complemented this more permissible racial climate, Carter contended. A group of university deans reported to the state Board of Regents that creating just the physical infrastructure for a segregated graduate school at Langston would cost the state between ten and twelve million dollars. *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 3 April 1949, pg. 9.

<sup>69</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 7 June 1950, 20. The newspaper gave two reasons for this momentous shift. One, “the remarkable record that has been made by Negro athletes in and out of the colleges,” and, more importantly in the paper’s view, “the growing recognition that all races have contributions to make to the mind and spirit of man.”

white students removed the barriers and invaded the segregated spaces created to keep McLaurin (and the other African-American graduate students who soon joined him) isolated.<sup>70</sup>

While progressives on campus pushed for racial change, the negative publicity generated by the McLaurin case on the national stage also encouraged many Oklahomans to begin rethinking their exclusionary policies. Applying a mid-western perspective to the situation in Oklahoma and its implications for higher education throughout the South, the *Chicago Tribune* asserted that segregation negatively impacted educational quality. As the newspaper pointed out, “there is no first class university in the world, outside our south, which excludes men on account of race,” a potentially damning indictment for those Oklahomans who hoped to one day see their state university achieve national recognition for its academic merit.<sup>71</sup> From the nation’s capital, the *Washington Post* criticized McLaurin’s physical separation from his fellow students and suggested that white Oklahomans let petty jealousies overcome their sense of justice and fair play; after all, the newspaper editorialized, the policies were developed “in a manner patently intended to humiliate him (McLaurin).”<sup>72</sup> Oklahoma’s Assistant Attorney General, Fred H. Hanson, made the state look foolish while arguing its case before the Supreme Court during McLaurin’s appeal. Hanson confessed that the segregation plan was a “legal fiction” designed to maintain segregation because the

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<sup>70</sup> By summer 1949, eleven black graduate students attended OU and their numbers were increasing. Levy, “Before Brown,” 306. By spring 1950, twenty-three African Americans were attending classes at OU. As the black student population grew, the university’s methods of maintaining physical segregation evolved. Black students soon moved into white classrooms, but initially sat in specifically designated seats separated by railing and with a sign indicating “Reserved for Colored.” The legislature removed the requirement for the sign and railing in its 1949 session, but maintained segregated seating. Black students also remained confined to segregated spaces in the library and cafeteria. *Atlanta Daily World* 5 April 1950, pg. 1, 5.

<sup>71</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 7 June 1950, 20.

<sup>72</sup> *Washington Post*, 2 March 1950, pg. 12.

state could not afford a separate black graduate school.<sup>73</sup>

On campus, letters arrived from around the country demonstrating that the outrage over the university's racial policies extended to many everyday Americans. The letter writers approached the issue from a variety of perspectives, but tended to emphasize the injustice being perpetrated against African Americans and the damage inflicted on the reputations of the state and university. Several writers also linked segregation at the university to the bogeymen of U.S. foreign policy: fascism and communism. One woman from New Jersey wrote and asked "How narrow and hard can an educated person or school be not to wish to share its advantages with another human being, regardless of color?" A woman from California informed OU officials that segregation at the University stood as a "mockery of all our colleges are supposed to teach." From New York, a Vassar student wrote criticizing the University and the religious pretensions of Oklahomans, asking sarcastically if there would be "a little Jim Crow place in heaven" similar to the one blacks endured at OU. Another correspondent from California told the administration, it is "ever so clear to me now why your breed of American is called the 'Oakie-type,' and called that with a mixture of genuine pity and contempt."<sup>74</sup>

For some letter writers the situation in Oklahoma bore negative implications for American foreign policy. From Washington, one asked, "How can we tell the world Hitler was wrong in his race superiority when the highest institutions of Education at home force this program upon its people?" An OU alumna predicted that the controversy would "furnish fuel for disparaging comments by the Russian press." After

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<sup>73</sup> *Washington Post*, 5 April 1950, pg. 12.

<sup>74</sup> All of these letters are from John Thomas Hubbell's Master's thesis, "Racial Segregation at the University of Oklahoma, 1946-1950," (Master's thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1961), 74-75.

all, she wrote, “The Russians seize upon anything which is undemocratic or discriminatory for publication and vilify our way of life.”<sup>75</sup> In all, one thing clearly emerged from the communications the university received—in the post-World War II era, segregation and attempts to enforce it increasingly provoked the ire of many Americans. Just as the economic dislocations of the Dust Bowl had tarnished Oklahoma’s national reputation during the Great Depression, and just as the state began to hope to move beyond them, the racial restrictions highlighted in the Fisher and McLaurin cases added to the negative image of the state in the larger nation.

With the university and its racial policies trapped in an uneasy stasis, the Supreme Court acted by bringing Oklahoma’s peculiar experiment with interracial, segregated education to an end. On June 5, 1950, in a unanimous decision, the high court ruled that “the conditions under which... (McLaurin) is required to receive his education deprive him of his personal and present right to the equal protection of the laws” and that “having been admitted to a state-supported graduate school, (he) must receive the same treatment at the hands of the state as students of other races.”<sup>76</sup> The court’s decision cleared the way to end a situation that all sides found increasingly unsatisfactory and the Graduate College and School of Law removed their restrictions

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<sup>75</sup> Hubbell, “Racial Segregation,” 75. Hubbell also documents the many correspondence received by Cross and the administration praising the university’s maintenance of segregated education. One Oklahoma City resident thanked Cross for “helping us to hold our self-respect in segregation of the colored” because “it hasn’t been too long since the negro was wearing rings in his nose and practicing canibalism (sic) ...” The same writer revealed the fear of many like him when he added “I don’t want some big black buck even close to my children.” A small-town Oklahoma resident agreed and was more specific “Anti segregation laws mean the Negro bucks are free to marry our Daughters.” Writers in support of segregation, like those opposing it, saw themselves fighting communism. A woman from Texas exhorted the university to “fight all the Communist or Socialist inspired negro demands for entrance to white universities.” According to her a black student applied to a white university not because he was “interested in the subjects...but because he is the tool of the Communist-Socialist supported organization the” NAACP. Hubbell, “Racial Segregation,” 76-77.

<sup>76</sup> *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education*, 339 U.S. 637 (1950).

on African-American education.<sup>77</sup> From there, the university proceeded slowly, but deliberately, toward integration and, in the summer of 1955, removed its last racial restrictions on undergraduate admissions.<sup>78</sup> When Gautt arrived on campus a year later, OU was still adjusting to the first phases of campus-wide integration. After the highly publicized court cases, no doubt many within the university community possessed a strong desire to avoid further racial conflict; some may have even hoped that a black football player would generate positive racial publicity and improve the school's image.

The debate over segregation and integration at the University reached the football program even before the question of participation by African-American players came to the fore. In the summer of 1949, with the Sooner's football fortunes and the demand for game tickets on the rise and with black students beginning to join the university community, the administration faced the need to comply with state segregation law and establish a Jim Crow section in the football stadium. African-American students, like all students, were "entitled to purchase" a ticket for themselves and "a wife's ticket" for each home contest and the University expected a small but growing number of African Americans to attend games. The Board of Regents addressed the issue at their July 13th meeting and directed school officials to erect "a temporary solid 'wall'" made of plywood sectioning off a group of seats in the student section and designating them for the use of their anticipated growing black constituency. According to minutes from the meeting, they decided on a wall as opposed to a rail as was used in classrooms "because of the fact that people are in much

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<sup>77</sup> On the same day the court also ruled on the case of Heman Sweatt, an African-American postal worker denied admission to the University of Texas School of Law. See: *Sweatt v. Painter* 339 U.S. 629. Taken together these two decisions effectively destroyed the legal basis of segregated graduate education. Levy, "Before Brown," 310.

<sup>78</sup> University of Oklahoma Board of Regents, "Minutes," July 14, 1955.

closer proximity to each other in the stadium than in classrooms.” Following strict southern custom, they also directed stadium officials to “designate separate restroom facilities in the stadium” for black patrons.<sup>79</sup>

In their discussions of the matter, Cross and the Regents carefully considered the public relations implications for the school and attempted to handle the matter with “the least possible adverse publicity to the University.” To further this goal they developed a set of policy guidelines designed to minimize the potential for controversy.

According to the plan, administrators would attempt to “privately instruct the colored students” to get to games early in order “to avoid the surging crowds.” A tactic that would also conveniently encourage black patrons to arrive before the time the administration most feared a confrontation with disgruntled whites. For practical purposes and perhaps to limit the documentary evidence of enforcing segregation, game tickets for the Jim Crow section would be printed in the same manner as all other tickets with only a “simple rubber stamp overprint” added later to identify them as for restricted seating. Finally, according to the Regents’ plan all signage labeling the area as restricted was to have “adhesive backs” so that it could be put up and taken down on game day and “avoid as much as possible (the) publicity and photographs which will result.”<sup>80</sup> In the midst of desegregation battles in the federal courts, the last thing the administration and Regents wanted was further negative exposure on racial issues.

These arrangements governed game-day seating until the mid-1950s when, in the face of the Supreme Court’s *Brown* decision, Cross and other members of the administration made the decision to disassemble them. In 1954, Athletic Department

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<sup>79</sup> University of Oklahoma Board of Regents, “Minutes,” July 13, 1949; Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges*, 125-126.

<sup>80</sup> University of Oklahoma Board of Regents, “Minutes,” July 13, 1949.

Business Manager Kenneth E. Farris, the official in charge of ticket sales, began questioning the policy, especially regarding its application to the increasing number of black fans arriving with tickets to non-Jim Crow seats. According to Farris, stadium employees currently “refer”(ed) these customers “to a special booth” where they “exchange(d) their tickets for others in the specially designated section.” In late-August 1955, in the aftermath of *Brown* and with football season fast approaching, Farris asked Cross for clarification of “the University’s policy” regarding these customers.<sup>81</sup> Advising Cross, Roscoe S. Cate, OU’s Vice President for Business and Finance, offered a compromise solution that walked a tight rope between Oklahoma’s segregation laws and customs on one side and the desires of African Americans and sympathetic members of the OU community to achieve greater equality on the other. In a memorandum to Cross, Cate suggested that a black fan with tickets outside the Jim Crow section should be directed to the special booth as before, but then given “a choice of exchanging his tickets for others in the section set aside for Negroes, or using the tickets he already has wherever they might be.” Seeking to keep the university as neutral as possible in this situation, Cate offered that, “The choice should be offered courteously and without any intent...to persuade.” Knowing that his proposal “might cause trouble,” Cate characterized it as “a calculated risk,” and one preferable to “trying to enforce segregation.”<sup>82</sup>

After receiving Cate’s memo, Cross decided to go further and take the bold step of eliminating segregation in the stadium. “In my opinion, we should no longer try to

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<sup>81</sup> Kenneth E. Farris to George Lynn Cross, August 25, 1955, George Lynn Cross Presidential Papers, (hereafter referred to as the GLC Papers), General Correspondence, 1955-1956, Box 131, Folder Athletics-General, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman.

<sup>82</sup> Roscoe Cate to George Lynn Cross, August 29, 1955, GLC Papers, General Correspondence, 1955-1956, Box 131, Folder Athletics-General.



segregate with respect to any University function,” Cross wrote back to Farris. On the matter of segregation at football games, Cross was straightforward with his directions: “A Negro, therefore, should be permitted to buy a ticket to any available seat in the stadium.” Like Cate, Cross said he saw the potential for “some trouble” in the policy change, but maintained that his hands were tied, that he saw “no other way of interpreting the Supreme Court’s action.”<sup>83</sup> Ardent segregationists would spend many more years finding creative ways to circumvent *Brown*, but for Cross, the OU administration, and the Athletic Department, the case provided a definitive conclusion to the era of segregated seating in their football stadium and freed them from the necessity of continuing to enforce it.

The willingness to embrace desegregation on campus found eager allies within Oklahoma City’s African-American community. Desegregating the football program at OU was just one small part of a larger effort on the part of black Oklahomans to achieve racial equality, but it was a small step that carried great symbolic importance. Knowing that Wilkinson would face pressure and resistance at many points during the process, a group of black Oklahoma City doctors and pharmacists formed the Medi-Phar Association and pooled their resources to remove one potential stumbling block—the awarding of a scholarship to Gautt. The group funded a four-year scholarship at OU to be awarded to promising young black scholar-athletes, and then named Gautt its first recipient. This prevented Wilkinson from having to use a scholarship usually reserved for a white player and freed him from the storm of publicity that would likely ensue if

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<sup>83</sup> George Lynn Cross to Kenneth Farris, August 31, 1955, GLC Papers, General Correspondence, 1955-1956, Box 131, Folder Athletics-General.

Gault received an athletic scholarship at Oklahoma.<sup>84</sup> As in the Fisher case, the desegregation of the Sooner football team required not only a brave and talented protagonist to challenge and break the color line, but also the support of key members of central Oklahoma's African-American community.

Gault was not the first African American to attempt to join the Sooner football program. In the summer of 1954, Douglass's star quarterback Andy Dement and his father visited with Wilkinson in his office to discuss the possibility of Dement playing at Oklahoma. "We had a very good conversation, and Coach Wilkinson was very cordial," Dement later said, "but the bottom line was they wanted me to walk on with no guarantees."<sup>85</sup> Needing financial assistance and with other scholarship offers already in hand, Dement turned his back on the school he had always dreamed of playing for and went to Maryland State College where he became the starting quarterback. The following year, in September 1955, four African-Americans, George Farmer, Sylvester Norwood, and Charles Parker from Oklahoma City's all-black Dunjee High School, and Frank Wilson Jr. from Douglass, enrolled in school and tried out for the freshman team. None of the black freshmen had consulted with Wilkinson or the coaching staff before practices began, but they were issued equipment alongside their white counterparts and joined them in the first grueling preseason workouts. Racial animosities surfaced from the beginning as the four received the cold shoulder from many of their teammates and endured racial slurs on the practice field on an almost daily basis. "Needless to say, we

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<sup>84</sup> Gary T. King, *An Autumn Remembered: Bud Wilkinson's Legendary '56 Sooners* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 222; Jay Wilkinson and Gretchen Hirsch, *Bud Wilkinson: An Intimate Portrait of an American Legend* (Champaign, IL: Sagamore Publishing, 1994), 68; Carol J. Burr, "Prentice Gault: A Sooner's Story," *Sooner Magazine*, Spring 1987, 11; Keith, *Forty-Seven Straight*, 219. Behind the scenes, Wilkinson quietly promised to return the group's money and award Gault an athletic scholarship if he made the team, a promise he made good on early in the black freshman's first semester.

<sup>85</sup> Jay C. Upchurch, "Uncommon Courage," *Sooner Magazine*, Spring 2007, 13.

were not welcomed with open arms,” Norwood later remembered, “. . .no Negro players had ever played football at Oklahoma, and a lot of people really didn’t want that to change.”<sup>86</sup>

The three freshmen from Dunjee lacked the financial means to live on campus and commuted daily from northeast Oklahoma City; while Wilson, the son of a successful Oklahoma City businessman, came from a more comfortable middle-class background and could afford to live in the campus dorms. None of the four, however, remained in the program long enough to play a game on the freshman team. In early October, Norwood was the first to abandon the quest to play at OU when he injured his back in practice and missed three weeks of practice and classes. Laid up at home while he recovered, he never returned to the university. After leading the state in touchdowns during his senior year, Farmer appeared the most likely of the four black freshmen to make an impact in the Sooner program. He passed up a scholarship opportunity at Langston to attend Oklahoma and make his bid to become a racial pioneer. Maybe because of his impressive athletic talent, Farmer faced the most opposition from segregationists on campus and in Norman. He quickly grew discouraged as he encountered slights and antagonism on a daily basis. He also grew disheartened because he felt the coaching staff was not giving him an equal opportunity to display his talents on the football field. The young black man reached a breaking point after a scrimmage in late October when he found his car had been vandalized, its windows shattered and the word “nigger” painted on the side. Farmer left OU shortly afterwards—his once promising athletic career over before his nineteenth birthday.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Upchurch, “Uncommon Courage,” 14.

<sup>87</sup> Upchurch, “Uncommon Courage,” 12-17.

Like Farmer, Parker, an offensive lineman, also displayed athletic potential. John Ederer, a white fellow walk-on who later earned two letters on the Sooner varsity, attested to his talent. "...I can honestly say he could have started for any Big Seven school," Ederer judged. "That's how good he was, it's unfortunate he didn't get that chance."<sup>88</sup> A few days after Farmer left school, Parker sustained a severe concussion when his head slammed into a blocking sled during practice. The injury ended both his season and his attempt to make the OU team. Parker successfully completed his semester of classes and earned 13 hours of credit at OU, but in the spring transferred to Central State College in Edmond, Oklahoma where he played one year of football. With the three Dunjee graduates gone, Wilson found himself the last of the four black freshmen competing for a place on the squad. Lacking the support of the others made things more difficult and in early November, before the freshman team's first game, he gave up and quit the program. While none of these young black players ever donned a Sooner game uniform and though they are largely forgotten in the storied annals of Oklahoma football, their contribution to desegregation at Oklahoma was not insignificant. By seizing the initiative and going out for the team, they forced the university community for the first time to confront the impending new reality of integrated college football. Their experience demonstrated that the coaching staff would not stand in the way of moves toward inclusion. Furthermore, when their picture appeared in the student newspaper, they alerted the student body and the university community that change was on the way.<sup>89</sup>

The recruiting of Prentice Gautt actually began long before anyone at the

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<sup>88</sup> Upchurch, "Uncommon Courage," 16.

<sup>89</sup> Upchurch, "Uncommon Courage," 12-17; Keith, *Forty-Seven Straight*, 217-218.

University even knew his name. Growing up in Oklahoma City, Gautt, like many Oklahomans, became a Sooner fan and dreamed of one day taking the field in Norman wearing Oklahoma red and white. As a youth, he and his friends would sometimes ride the train to Norman, climb the fence at Owen Stadium, and take the field pretending to play for the Sooners.<sup>90</sup> On several autumn Friday evenings in his youth, Gautt walked from his home to downtown Oklahoma City and the Skirvin Hotel, where the Sooners customarily spent the night before home games, seeking the autographs of his favorite Sooner players. Even at a young age, however, Gautt realized that segregation blocked his dreams from becoming reality, “I didn’t think there was any way I could play at Oklahoma,” he said reflecting back on that time years later.<sup>91</sup> As the most talented black high school football player in the state, Gautt drew the attention of many college recruiters and received scholarship offers from around the country. Oklahoma’s other large state university, Oklahoma A&M (a school with an even stronger tradition of segregation than OU) offered him a scholarship, as did Ohio State. During his senior year, Gautt envisioned himself accepting the later offer to play football in the desegregated Big Ten.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Before it got too late in the afternoon, Gautt and his black friends made sure to catch the train back to Oklahoma City. On one trip, they even encountered a local resident who warned them not to test Norman’s unofficial sundown laws. “Once we met a guy on the street at Norman,” Gautt later recounted. “‘Better be out of town by six o’clock,’ he warned. We definitely beat the deadline.” Keith, *Forty-Seven Straight*, 217.

<sup>91</sup> King, *An Autumn Remembered*, 223.

<sup>92</sup> Burr, “Prentice Gautt,” 11; King, *An Autumn Remembered*, 223. College football witnessed one of its most infamous incidents of racially motivated violence, in 1951, when fellow Missouri Valley Conference member Drake and black halfback Johnny Bright one of the top players in the nation played Oklahoma A&M in Stillwater. Before the game several Drake players reported hearing A&M students wagering on whether or not Bright would survive the game without injury and early in the contest the black star seemed targeted by the Aggies. Then, following a handoff to an offensive teammate—as Bright drifted away from the play and out of the view of game officials—a single Aggie lineman pursued him and viciously punched him in the face, breaking his jaw. The injury ended Bright’s college football career and attracted widespread condemnation when the *Associated Press* distributed photographs of the incident nationally. When both Missouri Valley officials and Oklahoma A&M refused to take action

Gautt's first official contact with the Sooner program did not come until the August following his senior year, after his dominating performance in the high school all-star game. Kurt Burris was a former All-American center, and the runner-up for the 1954 Heisman Trophy, now serving as an OU assistant. Following the game, he approached Gautt and said that Wilkinson and the Sooners were interested in him playing for OU. For Gautt it was a dream come true: "I very much was walking on Cloud 9," he later remembered. However, there were doubts that made his final decision a difficult one.<sup>93</sup> Some in Oklahoma City's black community questioned Gautt's ability to make it at a major university, both athletically and academically, and warned him that he might fail at OU. Gautt himself knew the three black athletes from Dunjee who walked on at OU in 1955, but watched with some dismay as none of them made the team, including George Farmer who he felt had a real chance. Fueling these doubts, another former Sooner standout, Merrill Green, now coaching at Wichita State University, visited the Gautt home and flatly told the family he did not think Prentice would make it at Oklahoma. Instead, Green self-servingly suggested that he should come to Wichita where he could make an impact and play immediately.<sup>94</sup>

The more Gautt thought about his inner doubts and listened to the warnings of others, the more determined he became to prove them wrong by succeeding at the University of Oklahoma. Gautt accepted the scholarship offer of the Oklahoma City black doctors and, after gaining admission to the university, accompanied a group of his

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against the offending player, Drake quit the conference in protest. Martin, *Benching Jim Crow*, 74-75; Michael Oriard, *King Football: Sport and Spectacle in the Golden Age of Radio and Newsreels, Movies and Magazines, the Weekly & the Daily Press* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 299-300.

<sup>93</sup> Wilkinson and Hirsch, *Bud Wilkinson*, 69.

<sup>94</sup> King, *An Autumn Remembered*, 223.

benefactors to meet with Bud Wilkinson about enrolling as a student and playing on the football team. Arriving at the University, Gault felt a mixture of fear and excitement. “I was in a place where I had dreamed of playing football,” he recalled, “yet I was afraid of all the obstacles.”<sup>95</sup> From the beginning of their relationship, Wilkinson impressed Gault with his steady personality and calm command of his surroundings. While rarely addressing the topic of race directly, Wilkinson conveyed to Gault a sense of confidence that assured him that he would be secure under the coach’s tutelage. Gault felt that Wilkinson understood the challenges desegregation would face and the hostilities it might generate, but that, because of his stature as a championship coach, he could handle any problems that might arise. With Wilkinson, Gault always understood that if he could do his part, as both a student and an athlete, then he would have a chance to succeed at OU. “Because he was secure,” Gault later remembered, “whenever I was around him, I felt secure, I felt comfortable.”<sup>96</sup>

In a profession with as high a turnover rate as coaching major college football, Wilkinson possessed about as much job security as a coach could get by the mid-1950s. Undoubtedly, his stature in Oklahoma contributed to his willingness to integrate the OU football program and it also played an important role in leading others to accept or at least go along with the idea. In late-November 1955, two days after the Sooners posted their twenty-ninth straight victory and the same day the final Associated Press poll of the year crowned them unofficial national champions, businessman W. D. Grisso of Oklahoma City wrote to Wilkinson to express his appreciation for what the football program had accomplished not only for the school, but the state as well. “Even greater

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<sup>95</sup> Keith, *Forty-Seven Straight*, 219.

<sup>96</sup> Burr, “Prentice Gault,” 11.

than winning football games is the service you have performed...in changing the national reputation of Oklahoma,” Grisso told Wilkinson. “Not too many years ago...Oklahoma was regarded as an oil field and filled only with tenant farmers and blanket Indians,” Grisso opined, but now, thanks in large part to Wilkinson’s success, “the impression of people throughout the land” had been changed.<sup>97</sup>

Albert Drake, an executive with the Mutual Benefit Life Insurance Company of Kansas City, felt similarly. The following spring, he witnessed an example of how a successful OU football program bolstered the image of the state on the national level. Drake wrote to Cross and Wilkinson to report on a speech given by Major General P. D. Ginder at the annual Missouri Reserve Officers Association meeting at the Hotel Muehlebach in his home city. According to Drake, attendees “included seventy foreign officers attending the Command and General Staff School, a 4-star General, and so many Major Generals that I lost count” at a Cold War-era gala celebrating the worldwide power and prestige of the U.S. military. In his speech, General Grinder discussed the multi-tiered organization of U.S. defenses, with “a highly trained standing army... supported by broad reserve components.” Then “to illustrate his point,” he compared it favorably to Wilkinson’s tactic of using of two full platoons in the Orange Bowl the previous January where the General watched “a magnificent Oklahoma Team beat a fine Maryland Team.” To Drake, the speech provided “wonderful publicity for the State of Oklahoma from an unbiased source” and proved “that when your boys play, they play not only for themselves but the honor and integrity of the commonwealth.”<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> W. D. Grisso to Charles B. Wilkinson, November 28, 1955, GLC Papers, General Correspondence, 1955-1956, Box 131, Folder Athletics-General.

<sup>98</sup> Albert Drake to Charles B. Wilkinson, May 1, 1956, GLC Papers, General Correspondence, 1955-1956, Box 131, Folder Athletics-General.



A decade after the Regents' meeting where Lloyd Noble suggested building a powerful college football program to improve Oklahoma's image, Drake saw direct evidence of how Wilkinson's team was doing just that, and producing, in his opinion, "the great collateral benefits that inure to so many as a result."<sup>99</sup>

One year later, with Gault on the freshman squad and archrival Texas in search of a new coach, rumors surfaced that the Longhorns hoped to lure Wilkinson away from Oklahoma. Such rumors prompted the Sooner fan base to reach out to the University and plead for school officials to do what was necessary to keep their coach. George Voes of northwest Oklahoma City telegraphed Cross to implore "Don't let Texas steal the best football coach in the nation" and advised the University to "match all salaries" in the effort to do so.<sup>100</sup> In a handwritten letter to Cross from Ponca City, Charles E. McColgar agreed. Noting "that it is impossible to pay Bud what he is worth to O.U. and to the state," McColgar asked Cross to use his "influence to insure" Wilkinson would not be lured away by a higher salary.<sup>101</sup> Cross wrote back to McColgar assuring him that the administration shared his high opinion of Wilkinson. In doing so, he noted, "We believe that we are paying him the top salary paid to any collegiate coach in America" and that the "other conditions of his employment" made "his job the most attractive of its kind in the nation."<sup>102</sup> Ultimately, Texas hired Wilkinson protégé Darrell Royal and Sooner fans rested easier knowing that college football's most successful coach remained on their sideline. As long as the Sooners kept winning

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<sup>99</sup> Albert Drake to George Lynn Cross, May 1, 1956, GLC Papers, General Correspondence, 1955-1956, Box 131, Folder Athletics-General.

<sup>100</sup> Telegram, George Voes to George Lynn Cross, December 9, 1956, GLC Papers, General Correspondence, 1956-1957, Box 147, Folder Football-General.

<sup>101</sup> Charles E. McColgar to George Lynn Cross, December 10, 1956, GLC Papers, General Correspondence, 1956-1957, Box 147, Folder Football-General.

<sup>102</sup> George Lynn Cross to Charles E. McColgar, December 14, 1956, GLC Papers, General Correspondence, 1956-1957, Box 147, Folder Football-General.

football games, complaints about desegregation or anything else Wilkinson did, largely fell on deaf ears in Oklahoma.

At the end of his campus visit with the black doctors, it was agreed that Gautt would enroll in classes and try out for the team. However, because his scholarship was not technically an athletic one, he would have to start at the lowest rung of the Sooner football ladder by practicing with the freshman walk-ons. When Gautt arrived on campus in the fall of 1956, the Sooner program stood at the apex of college football competition—winners of thirty straight games after beating Tatum’s Maryland team in the 1956 Orange Bowl and reigning as consensus national champions. Making an impression at such an elite program seemed a daunting task, but it was one that the black freshman embraced. After surviving the coaching staff’s rigorous early season workouts designed to eliminate all but the most committed, Gautt quickly moved up from the walk-on squad, and soon found himself practicing with the top freshmen recruits and members of the Sooner varsity. “I thought I was working hard,” Gautt later remembered. “... being out there with all those guys as a freshman, I’m thinking, ‘My goodness I shouldn’t be out here. These guys are all tremendous players.’ ... It was a real adjustment.”<sup>103</sup> Gautt earned a starting spot on the freshman squad—the “Boomers,” as they were known—and quickly made his presence felt by scoring the team’s only touchdown in a 7-7 tie with Oklahoma A&M’s freshmen squad, the “Colts.”<sup>104</sup> Although the Boomers played only two games in 1956, the “Negro flash,” as one reporter called Gautt, “lost no time revealing his vast offensive potentialities” and figured to compete for a spot on the varsity in 1957. During his first semester,

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<sup>103</sup> Wilkinson and Hirsch, *Bud Wilkinson*, 70.

<sup>104</sup> *Daily Oklahoman*, 9 November 1956, pg. 32.

Gautt watched the Sooners extended their winning streak to forty games and repeat as undefeated consensus national champions.<sup>105</sup>

In the classroom, Gautt quickly overcame the doubts many had about his preparation in the African-American school system by embarking on a long and successful academic career. Outside of class, however, life was anything but easy for the young black man. The most difficult adjustments for Gautt came as he adapted to life at a major university in what was still a largely segregated setting. As one of only a handful of black undergraduates on campus, and the only athlete, Gautt found himself functioning in an exclusively white world and, like other early African Americans on white campuses, battling loneliness and social isolation. Because of Norman's long history of segregation he did not enjoy complete freedom of movement as other freshman at the University did. Venturing off campus opened up the possibility of experiencing rejection and slight. On one excursion into Campus Corner, the student shopping and entertainment district just north of the campus, Gautt suddenly realized that the drugstore soda fountain he and some of his teammates were visiting had served him in a paper cup while the rest of his group enjoyed their drinks in glasses. As the others spent their time socializing, Gautt silently pondered the fact that had he not been a football player in the company of other football players he would not have been allowed to enter the establishment at all. As a black man on an almost all white campus, Gautt felt the need to be especially circumspect in his relations with white female students. During one art class, he developed a friendship with a young white co-ed and one day after class walked with her to her dorm on his way to practice. During the walk, Gautt noticed many of their fellow students—including other football

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<sup>105</sup> *Daily Oklahoman*, 7 December 1956, pg. 32.

players—paying undue attention to their every move and felt so awkward that he avoided leaving class with the girl again.<sup>106</sup>

Not all of Gautt's teammates shared in Wilkinson's desire to achieve desegregation and several expressed their hostility at having to play with an African American. One player quit the Sooner program in protest, but it was the rejection and the behind-the-back comments of those who stayed that made things most difficult.<sup>107</sup> Gautt's teammate Brewster Hobby from Midwest City, Oklahoma remembered that some on the team registered their discontent through physical aggression on the practice field, "They went out of their way to administer punishment that he didn't need to be taking." Hobby also recalled "two or three times" in the dorms when Gautt overheard groups of teammates engaging in lively discussions and referring to him as "the nigger" when they did not realize he was within earshot.<sup>108</sup> Gautt began many lifelong friendships at OU, and eventually won over many of the teammates who had never interacted with African Americans before their college experience. Still, throughout his years at OU, he encountered resistance from a small, but sometimes vocal, minority of teammates who opposed the changes he represented.

An incident that occurred during the freshman team's only road trip of 1956 highlighted the prejudices Gautt faced as a pioneer athlete in 1950s Oklahoma while also rallying some of his teammates to his cause. The Boomers traveled to Tulsa in early November where they suffered a 33-12 defeat to the high-powered passing offense of the University of Tulsa's freshmen "Golden Gales."<sup>109</sup> Before their trip back to

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<sup>106</sup> King, *An Autumn Remembered*, 230; Burr, "Prentice Gautt," 12-13.

<sup>107</sup> Burr, "Prentice Gautt," 11.

<sup>108</sup> King, *An Autumn Remembered*, 233.

<sup>109</sup> *Daily Oklahoman*, 8 November 1956, pg. 55.

Norman, the team stopped for dinner at a prominent downtown Tulsa restaurant. Understanding Tulsa's strong traditions of segregation, freshmen coach and long-time top Wilkinson assistant, Port Robertson called ahead days before the trip to confer with the owner and make sure the restaurant would serve Gautt alongside his teammates. Assured that Gautt would receive equal treatment, Robertson took his young team, fresh off a bitter defeat, for their postgame meal. As the players disembarked the team bus and entered the restaurant, fifty freshly cooked fried chicken dinners spread out on tables greeted their arrival. Gautt joined Hobby, Jim Davis, and Bennit Watts at a table and prepared to sit down and eat when the restaurant manager appeared at their table and informed them that they were in a segregated establishment and that Gautt would not be served. Incensed by the affront to Gautt, several Sooners stood-up for their teammate and told the manager that if they could not all be served then the entire team would leave. "Several guys—Brewster Hobby, Jim Davis, Jere Durham—led the support for me there," Gautt latter remembered. "I'll never forget how good (they)... made me feel. It was the most joyful moment I had known." When the restaurant would not budge, the team stormed out and as they exited they ran into Robertson just coming in from the bus. "Those sons-of-bitches won't let Prentice eat here," an impassioned Hobby told Robertson. The team got back on the bus and traveled to the outskirts of Tulsa where they found a small hamburger stand whose surprised staff quickly put together fifty double cheeseburgers and fries for the team to eat on the way back to Norman.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Wilkinson and Hirsch, *Bud Wilkinson*, 69-70; Keith, *Forty-Seven Straight*, 219; King, *An Autumn Remembered*, 230-231; John Martin Meek, Interview of Lew Ferguson, "The Night the Sooners Said, 'No!'" [n.d.], video clip, accessed December 29, 2012, YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LuPbTQCKiLE>.

Upset because they were out the cost of the fifty chicken dinners, the restaurant threatened to sue the OU Athletic Department. A phone call from Wilkinson to the company president, however, in which the coach threatened to denounce the restaurant to the Oklahoma public, quickly resolved the matter; once again, confirming the powerful influence of Wilkinson and the OU football program in the state.<sup>111</sup> More importantly, for some members of that freshmen class, the brush with segregation in Tulsa proved a defining moment that thrust the prejudices blacks like Gautt regularly endured directly into their faces and made them allies in the fight for integration. “I’ll always remember that incident...” fellow freshman Jerry Thompson later said. “Prentice was a great human being. He was a good student, very humble and very easygoing.”<sup>112</sup> For Hobby the event proved transformative. “It embarrassed all of us,” he later remembered, “but it humiliated Prentice and made me committed to being a good friend and to giving him a fair shake....”<sup>113</sup>

Gautt reported to spring practice in 1957 ready to compete for a position on a Sooner varsity team heavily depleted by graduation. Midway through practices, however, he found himself in Wilkinson’s office discussing what his coach felt were subpar performances. In a meeting probably as much about motivation as criticism, Wilkinson told Gautt that he wasn’t playing up to his full potential and that he was in danger of not making the varsity traveling team. “It was like he wanted me to do well,” Gautt remembered later. “He wanted me to improve.”<sup>114</sup> While Wilkinson never directly challenged segregation in a public forum, at several critical points, he inserted

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<sup>111</sup> Meek, Interview of Lew Ferguson, “The Night the Sooners Said, ‘No!’”

<sup>112</sup> Jeff Snook, “*Then Bud Said to Barry Who Told Bob ...*”: *The Best Oklahoma Sooners Stories Ever Told* (Chicago: Triumph Books, 2008), 70.

<sup>113</sup> King, *An Autumn Remembered*, 230-231.

<sup>114</sup> Snook, *Then Bud Said to Barry*, 70.

himself into Gautt's affairs with an eye toward helping his young black protégé succeed. He also made himself available when Gautt needed to seek him out. "I felt like I could go in and talk with Bud if there was anything wrong," Gautt said reflecting. "I found a real source of strength in some people ... and ... Bud was one of them."<sup>115</sup>

The meeting with Wilkinson produced its desired effect and Gautt made the varsity team in the fall. If he saw the playing field, one of the last remaining vestiges of segregation of campus—the color line in Oklahoma football—would fall. That day came quickly on September 21, 1957, when the Sooners ventured north and posted a decisive 26-0 victory over the University of Pittsburgh to open the season. As a third-stringer on the 42-man traveling roster, Gautt was not guaranteed an opportunity to play that day against a Pitt squad that had dealt the Sooners' record its last blemish, a 7-7 tie in Pittsburg in 1953. With the game in hand, however, Wilkinson cleared the bench in the final quarter. When the third team ran onto the field for the final four and-a-half minutes, Prentice Gautt became the first African American to play varsity football for the University of Oklahoma. Gautt carried the ball once, gaining three yards on an off-tackle play, as the Sooner bench finished off the season-opening shutout of the Panthers.<sup>116</sup>

Recognized today as an important moment in the history of Sooner football, Gautt's breakthrough received only brief mention at the time. The *Daily Oklahoman* gave it one sentence toward the end of its game coverage and national papers like the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Los Angeles Times* did not bring it up at all in their accounts. Coverage of the contest in the *New York Times* mentioned it only in the very last

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<sup>115</sup> King, *An Autumn Remembered*, 227.

<sup>116</sup> *Daily Oklahoman*, 22 September 1957, pg. 153.

sentence. Not surprisingly, the black press made more of the event and the *Associated Negro Press* distributed an article nationally recognizing it. The press service praised Wilkinson for being “a man of his word” and keeping his promise to allow a worthy black athlete to play at Oklahoma while providing readers with details about Gault’s background. On the day of the game, the *Norfolk Journal and Guide* also reported on Gault’s pending achievement and speculated about his progress on the squad. With the optimism of a loyal booster, the newspaper told its readers Gault was “steadily progressing into one of the finest gridsters ever to wear a Sooner uniform.”<sup>117</sup>

When Gault joined the varsity squad as a sophomore, the potential problems of housing a desegregated team—both at home and on the road—came to the fore. The night before home games, Wilkinson liked to take his team to the traditionally segregated Skirvin Hotel in Oklahoma City to keep them away from potential distractions in Norman. When Gault joined the team, Wilkinson contacted his friend Dan James, the Skirvin’s manager, to make sure the hotel would have no objections to hosting an African-American player. James assured Wilkinson the hotel would accommodate the team. Photographers from the black press were there to record the historic event when Gault arrived to obtain his room key before the 1957 home opener against Iowa State. Gault and the Sooners also stayed at the Skirvin two weeks later when they hosted Kansas, but following that game the hotel backed out of their agreement with Wilkinson. The publicity generated by Gault’s presence at the hotel exposed management to pressure from both segregationists, who threatened to withdraw their patronage from a hotel allowing even this small measure of integration, and black

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<sup>117</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 26 September 1957, pg. B3; *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 21 September 1957, pg. 16; *New York Times*, 22 September 1957, pg. 203; *Daily Oklahoman*, 22 September 1957, pg. 153.



groups, who sought to schedule events at what they hoped was a newly desegregated venue. Management felt caught in the middle and sided with the segregationists when they decided they could no longer afford to host the Sooners. In this case, Wilkinson responded, not by threatening to take the hotel to task in the court of public opinion, but by seeking other options. The city's less prestigious Biltmore Hotel agreed to house the entire team for the remainder of 1957 and the Sooners also stayed there for home games during the 1958 and 1959 seasons. It is worth noting that with Gault's graduation in 1960, the once again all-white, varsity team returned to the Skirvin.<sup>118</sup>

The week after the Iowa State game, the Sooners traveled to Dallas for their annual contest with Texas and once again ran into Jim Crow customs that disrupted their typical routine and forced their black teammate to endure not so subtle humiliations. For the annual Texas weekend, the team usually stayed at the Worth Hotel in Ft. Worth where local law prevented blacks and whites from sleeping in the same hotel overnight. Wilkinson and the OU football program possessed significant prestige in their home state and a growing regional and national reputation, but they were not in a position to challenge Texas segregation laws; therefore, the team made plans for Gault to stay at a nearby black hotel. For three seasons, Gault attended meetings and a movie with his teammates on the night before the Texas game. When they returned to the hotel, however, he got in a cab and rode to the black hotel where he stayed separately. "Ken Farris went with me the first time," Gault later remembered, "Bud told him to give me money and to make sure I was able to get back." Wilkinson and the coaching staff kept Gault's situation from his teammates, perhaps not wanting

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<sup>118</sup> Cross, *Presidents Can't Punt*, 284-285; King, *An Autumn Remembered*, 234-235; Wilkinson and Hirsch, *Bud Wilkinson*, 72-73.

to distract from their focus on the game, and the players complied by not becoming too inquisitive. “They kept it a secret,” Brewster Hobby later remembered. “I never knew this until long after we graduated...I guess none of us were smart enough to realize what was going on.” Another cab brought Gautt back to the Worth for breakfast in the morning, but he ate in a separate room with the coaches and trainers, not in the main dining room with his teammates.<sup>119</sup> While Wilkinson and Oklahoma willingly challenged fundamental aspects of segregation by having Gautt on the team, they stopped short of launching a broader assault on the region’s Jim Crow system. Gautt became the first African American to participate in one of college football’s most storied rivalries, but it was there that the push for racial change ceased. Challenging the broader Jim Crow system in late-1950s Texas simply was not feasible.

Wilkinson always kept a careful eye out for Gautt on the trip to Texas, even at times riding to and from his segregated hotel with him. Gautt, as he did throughout his years at OU, ignored the minor slights and remained focused on larger objectives. No problems emerged during the trips to Texas and Gautt’s time at Oklahoma, as a whole, was free of public racial controversy. In this regard, a good measure of the credit for the harmony of athletic integration at OU can be attributed to Gautt’s personal courage and his accommodating demeanor. The young black man made a conscious effort to fit in and avoid controversy at OU, and while he was successful in doing so, his success came at a difficult cost. “I knew there would be some people who would have some problems with my being there at OU,” Gautt later recalled, “...whether or not I could handle something when it did happen was the issue before me.” Gautt did such a good

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<sup>119</sup> Gautt in Wilkinson and Hirsch, *Bud Wilkinson*, 72; Hobby in King, *An Autumn Remembered*, 234; Cross, *Presidents Can’t Punt*, 285.

job handling difficult situations when they did arise that the image of harmonious change was easy to maintain even as it inflicted painful psychological blows on the black athlete at the center of the drama. “I think outwardly people perceived me as handling it extremely well,” Gautt surmised, “but inwardly I had a difficult time, a very difficult time.”<sup>120</sup> Above all else, he wanted to be liked by his peers and successful at OU; consequently he held in check any thoughts, feelings, or actions he thought people might find disagreeable. As a result, however, he often felt like a shell of his true self.<sup>121</sup>

Part of what made the experience more difficult was the fact that Gautt, like many other black athletes who broke down barriers at formerly white universities, had to endure it largely alone. With his parents divorced and his father living out-of-state, he lacked an older black male role model, a confidant who might understand his situation and provide guidance.<sup>122</sup> His black friends and peers in Oklahoma City could not relate to his experience as a solitary African American on an almost entirely white campus. Further, his teammates at OU had little idea of the world he grew-up in and only glimpses of the pressures he faced as a racial pioneer. “To talk to somebody who has never experienced what prejudice is would not be very meaningful,” Gautt later said when remembering his teammates. “He wouldn’t understand it.” In part, it was pride that led Gautt to suppress his feelings and keep them bottled up inside—to confide in someone would have been to show “weakness” in the young athlete’s eyes—and partially it was immaturity. “It’s kind of difficult to talk of these experiences when

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<sup>120</sup> King, *An Autumn Remembered*, 232-233.

<sup>121</sup> Burr, “Prentice Gautt,” 13.

<sup>122</sup> In 1957, the Oklahoma press guide listed Gautt’s father, Jack Gautt, as a mechanic living in Joilet, Illinois. Game Program, Oklahoma vs. Notre Dame, November 16, 1957, p. 70, GLC Papers, General Correspondence, 1957-1958, Box 158, Folder Football-General.

you're an eighteen- or nineteen-year-old kid," he later reflected.<sup>123</sup>

Until his marriage during his senior year at OU, Gault roomed by himself in the athletic dorm, suggesting limitations to the football program's willingness to challenge segregation on all fronts and adding to his social isolation. On issues of race, Gault did find an ally in Morris Tennenbaum, OU's Jewish stadium gatekeeper.<sup>124</sup> "You and I have experienced a lot of similar kinds of things," Tennenbaum once counseled the young black man. "You're going to be much better for it." However, Gault and the gatekeeper never developed a close relationship and, ultimately, it was only Wilkinson who provided significant guidance and mentoring when it came to the challenges Gault faced. Other than the black athlete himself, Wilkinson was the individual most exposed to the outrage and anger produced by the desegregation of football at OU. "I had so much hate mail," Wilkinson later remembered.<sup>125</sup> The coach also faced the hostility of several prominent alumni and boosters as well as the more subtle resentment of many other Oklahoma fans displeased with the change. For Wilkinson, who played with African Americans and witnessed the discrimination they faced first-hand during his days on the championship teams at the University of Minnesota, these attitudes seemed

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<sup>123</sup> King, *An Autumn Remembered*, 233.

<sup>124</sup> Beginning in the Progressive era, American Jews played a significant role in the African-American civil rights struggle. Though their influence has been overlooked often in the years since, Jewish Americans contributed "far more emotional commitment and organizational and financial support to the black civil rights movement and the advancement of black education than any other white group." This support "was motivated largely by Jews' ability to identify with another oppressed people, and by idealism and moral conviction shaped by Jewish values." This larger effort led to significant Jewish participation in and support for the racial desegregation of sport. Jewish sports writers such as Walter Winchell, Shirley Povich, Roger Kahn, and Lester Rodney served as consistent critics of baseball's segregation policies and championed Jackie Robinson's effort to change them. Jewish politicians and business leaders often worked both publicly and privately to challenge barriers and help support early black athletes. Jewish slugger Hank Greenberg provided critical support and encouragement to Robinson during his difficult first season and then worked to advance desegregation in the major and minor leagues as the general manager of the Cleveland Indians from 1949-1957. Stephen H. Norwood and Harold Brackman, "Going to Bat for Jackie Robinson: The Jewish Role in Breaking Baseball's Color Line," *Journal of Sport History* 26.1 (1999): 115-141.

<sup>125</sup> Wilkinson and Hirsch, *Bud Wilkinson*, 70 and 73.

counterproductive and hypocritical.<sup>126</sup> Looking back on his first years at OU and in the Big Six (later Big Seven) conference, he reflected, “(They)...never admitted they were a segregated conference. They somehow just hid behind the status quo, and nobody was playing blacks.”<sup>127</sup>

Wilkinson later said that bringing Gault to OU “was the most significant thing I did while I was coaching,” and he quickly became the young player’s confidante.<sup>128</sup> “I felt like I could go in and talk with Bud if there was anything wrong,” Gault remembered. “He was almost like a therapist for me. I found a real source of strength in some people...Bud was one of them.” Gault recognized that Wilkinson faced a great deal of antagonism over the issue of desegregation. “I know he took a lot of guff having me down there.... There were some guys who really hated this, some players and some alums,” he recalled. “He stuck his neck out for me.”<sup>129</sup>

It was during his junior season of 1958, that Gault began making a significant impact on the football field.<sup>130</sup> His emergence started in the annual spring scrimmage

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<sup>126</sup> At Minnesota, Wilkinson witnessed coach Bernie Bierman and the University bow to the mandates of the gentleman’s agreement in 1935 when they hosted Tulane and benched black end Dwight Reed. The following year, Bierman held Reed and guard Horace Bell out of the lineup when the University of Texas ventured north for a late season intersectional contest. Even with this self-imposed handicap, the Golden Gophers easily won both contests. Martin, *Benching Jim Crow*, 28.

<sup>127</sup> Wilkinson and Hirsch, *Bud Wilkinson*, 68. The Big Six Conference (the Big Seven after 1948) enforced the gentleman’s agreement from its founding in 1928 and remained segregated until 1949 when Kansas State and center Harold Robinson broke the color line. Robinson made the All-Big Seven team in 1950 before being drafted into the Army and fighting in the Korean War. In 1951, Veryl Switzer from Nicodemus, Kansas, emerged as a star halfback for the Wildcats and he earned All-Conference honors during his senior season in 1953. By the time Gault took the field for the Sooners in 1957, Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, and Iowa State had also all fielded African-American players. Martin, *Benching Jim Crow*, 75-76.

<sup>128</sup> Wilkinson and Hirsch, *Bud Wilkinson*, 73.

<sup>129</sup> King, *An Autumn Remembered*, 227. Gault’s bond with and allegiance to Wilkinson continued after he graduated from Oklahoma. When Wilkinson ran for the U.S. Senate in 1964, Gault served as a Co-Chairman of the Oklahoma County for Wilkinson Club. *Daily Oklahoman*, 13 September 1964, pg. 28.

<sup>130</sup> That same year, a second African American joined Gault on the Sooner varsity. Wallace Johnson, another former Douglass star, accepted a scholarship similar to Gault’s from the black Medi-Phar Association and enrolled at OU in 1957. Johnson played on the freshman team in 1957 and joined Gault on the varsity in 1958 and 1959. Upchurch, “Uncommon Courage,” 17.

where he rushed for 194 yards against what became one of the top defenses in the nation. As Harold Keith Oklahoma's long-time Director of Sports Information saw it "Gautt had straightened out his thinking, achieved his racial breakthrough, and began hitting the white boys who were his teammates as hard as they were hitting him."<sup>131</sup> While Keith underestimated the challenges Gautt continued to face because of his race, he was right about the young African American making significant advances on the field. In the first game of the fall season against West Virginia, Gautt offered a glimpse of his talents after switching from halfback to fullback and emerging from preseason practices as a starter. In front of 56,000 fans, the fifth largest crowd in Oklahoma football history to that point, Gautt scored the team's first touchdown of the season on a powerful 27-yard off-tackle run that saw him barrel through "at least half a dozen defenders" on his way to the end zone.<sup>132</sup>

In the second game of the season, Oklahoma hosted Oregon and once again Gautt turned in a critical play, this time on defense. With the Sooners fighting to maintain a 6-0 lead in the third quarter, Oregon's speedy black halfback, Willie West, broke into the open along the sideline deep in his own territory and sprinted for what looked like a long tying or go-ahead touchdown. As West raced across midfield into Sooner territory, however, Gautt caught him from behind and dragged him down at the OU 36-yard line, preventing what looked like a game changing touchdown and helping preserve the Sooner victory. "I had to put everything I had to catch him," Gautt told reporters after the game. "He's fast."<sup>133</sup>

According to Keith, as Gautt returned to the sideline after the play, he and his

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<sup>131</sup> Keith, *Forty-Seven Straight*, 240.

<sup>132</sup> *Daily Oklahoman*, 28 September 1958, pg. 23.

<sup>133</sup> *Daily Oklahoman*, 5 October 1958, pg. 81.

teammates heard an Oklahoma fan shout, “Look at our colored boy catch that Oregon nigger from behind.” If the remark hurt Gautt, he did not show it, or at least Keith did not notice. In fact, Keith noted that Gautt eventually looked back on the incident positively, “My toleration of (the) white-black relationship in our state had grown so greatly that I enjoyed the remark too.”<sup>134</sup> Instead of enjoyment from the incident, Gautt probably understood well that it was one of the many disparaging moments he would have to bear in order to keep his larger goals on track. Remembering his experiences at OU years later, Gautt expressed regret that he had not spoken out when confronted with slights such as this one. “I think that I really should have said something when this thing happened or that thing happened,” he said in the 1980s. Even then, however, he realized that doing so would have put his athletic and academic careers in jeopardy. “The only thing it would have served would be for me to vent my frustration,” he calculated, “and more than likely I would have lost the opportunity to play at the University.”<sup>135</sup> For the lone black man desegregating one of the most venerated public spaces in the state of Oklahoma, the ability to control his emotions and maintain his behavior within strictly confined boundaries was central. Gautt’s naturally likeable demeanor and accommodating personality proved essential to his success. Had he spoken or acted out in reaction to incidents like the one on the sideline against Oregon it is difficult to imagine that such behavior would have done anything more than hurt him.

In an era before scholarship limits, the Oklahoma teams of the late-1950s were loaded with talent, their rosters swelled with elite high school stars honed and hardened by four years of intense training in Wilkinson’s program. Playing time was at a

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<sup>134</sup> Keith, *Forty-Seven Straight*, 246.

<sup>135</sup> Burr, “Prentice Gautt,” 11.

premium as the coaches routinely played two full platoons, regularly brought in a third, and even, with the game in hand, sometimes sent in a fourth set of eleven players. In 1958, ten different OU ball carriers gained more than 100 rushing yards as the Sooner offense employed a wide-open attack that spread the ball around to all its skill position players. If Gautt had spoken out, there were many other great athletes ready to step in and take his place. Statistically, in 1958, Gautt was the team's best rusher; he led the squad with 627 yards rushing and was second, behind quarterback David Baker, with 105 carries. His average of six yards per rushing attempt was also the highest among runners with more than sixteen carries. The week following the Oregon game, the Sooners lost to rival Texas by a single point, but then finished the regular season with seven consecutive wins to secure their eleventh straight outright Big 7 championship and a trip to the Orange Bowl. From his fullback position, Gautt established himself as a powerful blocker and, as a linebacker, he played a critical role on a defense that shutout five opponents and only allowed a single touchdown to four others. In a 43-0 rout of Kansas, Gautt made a dramatic one-handed interception; against Colorado, he scored his second touchdown of the season on a long 48-yard run.

While Gautt certainly received ample playing time during his junior season, there were those who felt that the coaching staff succumbed to prevalent prejudices and discriminated against him in one significant way: by limiting his opportunities to touch the ball near the goal line and by allowing his white teammates to grab the glory by scoring touchdowns. During the desegregation of college football, it was one of the many forms of prejudice black trailblazers faced, but sentiments like this were not often



expressed in mainstream press coverage.<sup>136</sup> Still, among some fans, and especially the African-American community, they resonated. Several years after Gautt's Oklahoma career ended, A. L. Dow of Norman wrote a letter to the editor lamenting the continuing prejudice black athletes at OU faced and also commenting on the treatment of Gautt during his playing days. "Gautt was used for blocking tackling and plowing up the middle—mostly well out of touchdown territory," Dow remembered. "Backs who couldn't carry his helmet were allowed to get the headlines."<sup>137</sup> Statistically, Dow's argument contained some merit. Despite being the team's top rusher, Gautt only scored two touchdowns in 1958, tying him with two teammates for sixth best on the team.<sup>138</sup> Significantly, both of his touchdowns came on long runs from scrimmage, not on plays where his number was called close to the goal line. If the slight was the result of racial prejudices, it was not something that Gautt or anyone associated with the program ever validated, but for some black Oklahomans their lived experiences made it at least seem feasible.

One of Gautt's best performances of his junior season and the moment when his exploits on the playing field first grabbed national attention came during Oklahoma's

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<sup>136</sup> Michael Oriard, *Bowled Over: Big-Time College Football from the Sixties to the BCS Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 65-66.

<sup>137</sup> Undated newspaper clipping, GLC Papers, General Correspondence, 1965-1966, Box 334, Folder 18: Football, General, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman. Dow's letter to the editor came to Cross along with a handwritten letter from Cecil Block of Oklahoma City who wrote to complain about the treatment of other early black players at OU in the mid-1960s. Block contended that "when Ben Hart plays the line men (sic) slip blocks by that I mean the wholes (sic) are never there when he gets the ball." Block, who resided in the black northeast section of the city, offered his unsolicited advice to the university president as "not one of your regents but... a citizen of Oklahoma" and complained that the coaching staff engaged in the practice of stacking, or limiting black players to certain positions. "Sure you have to (sic) negro on your team," Block commented, "but like the article (Dow's letter) says their (sic) linemen and defense backs." Block concluded his letter to Cross by showing the deference traditionally expected of blacks in Oklahoma while also illustrating the assertiveness of a new era: "So forgive me for speaking out," he wrote, "but I felt I must." Cecil Block to George Lynn Cross, November 5, 1965, GLC Papers, General Correspondence, 1965-1966, Box 334, Folder 18.

<sup>138</sup> Gautt's 105 rushing attempts represented 17% of the team's running plays during the season, while his two scores were only 9.5% of their 21 rushing touchdowns.

postseason trip to the Orange Bowl to face Syracuse. Four years earlier, on January 1, 1955, the Orange Bowl became the second of the three major southern bowls to integrate when Duke handily defeated a Nebraska squad with two African-American players, 34-7. In the late-1950s, however, Miami and the South were just taking the first steps toward desegregation and preparations for the bowl's second integrated contest sparked controversy in 1957. Organizers initially arranged a game between South Carolina's Clemson University and the University of Colorado, but then Clemson threatened to withdraw if Colorado brought their two black players, Frank Clarke and John Wooten, on the trip. Hotels in Miami Beach also made it clear to Colorado that they did not want blacks staying in their facilities. The university and coach Dal Ward refused to compromise with Jim Crow and both Clemson and the hotels backed down. The full Colorado team made the trip, jumped out to a 20-0 halftime lead, and then fell behind 21-20 in the second half. The Buffalos then rallied to defeat the Tigers 27-21, in a game the participants reported was made more physically intense on the field by the racial tensions preceding it.<sup>139</sup>

Following his sophomore season in 1957, Gautt travelled with the Sooners to the 1958 Orange Bowl to face Duke, but did not get a chance to contribute to his team's 48-21 victory. That did not figure to be the case on January 1, 1959 when the crimson-clad Sooners took the field against the Orangemen with Gautt in the starting lineup. In front

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<sup>139</sup> Larry Zimmer, "The Right Thing: When 'Shoulder to Shoulder' Were More Than Words in the CU Fight Song," Classic CU—Official Site of University of Colorado Athletics, accessed February 1, 2013, [http://www.cubuffs.com/fls/600/classic/content/events/fb\\_1956\\_1961\\_bowls.html](http://www.cubuffs.com/fls/600/classic/content/events/fb_1956_1961_bowls.html). The successful fight against the traditional Gentlemen's Agreement in southern bowl games helped galvanize the Colorado campus and rally the university in support of the struggle for civil rights. Star fullback John Bayuk, nicknamed "The Beast," later described how the incident affected him and his teammates: "When Clemson said they wouldn't play us, it was the wording that got to us. They said, 'We're not going to play with those monkeys.'" Bayuk, who grew up in integrated Salida, Colorado, and the rest of the Buffalo football program stiffened their resolve when faced with this extremist rhetoric. "We laid it out. They are our teammates and they are with us," Bayuk remembered.

of the more than 75,000 spectators and a national television audience, Oklahoma used three big plays to decisively defeat a Syracuse team that outgained them on offense. On the Sooners' second play from scrimmage, Gautt became the first black player to score a touchdown in Miami's postseason bowl when he took a pitchout wide and raced around the left side untouched 42 yards into the end zone. He also threw a "crushing block" on OU's second long scoring play, a 79-yarder. From his linebacker position, he helped shutdown the vaunted Syracuse passing game as the Sooners posted a convincing 21-6 victory. The *New York Times* called Gautt "far and away the game's outstanding individual performer," and "also was a devastating blocker and tackler" as he led all rushers with 94 yards.<sup>140</sup> The *Miami Herald's* Jack Bell agreed, praising Gautt's performance and calling him "the best player on the field."<sup>141</sup> The acceptance of Gautt by Bell and at least a portion of his readership demonstrated that southern prejudice against African Americans, or at least those with elite athletic skills, was on the decline.

The 1958 team that went 10-1 and won the Orange Bowl (losing only to Texas by a single point) proved to be the last of the great Wilkinson-era teams at Oklahoma. During Gautt's senior season in 1959, the program slipped from the elite level it had operated at for more than a decade and lost three games for the first time in the coach's tenure. As frustration grew both inside and outside of the program, racial animosities directed at Gautt emerged on the squad and threatened to further derail the season. A small but vocal minority expressed their belief that the black fullback did not deserve his starting position and that he was receiving special treatment because of his race.

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<sup>140</sup> *New York Times*, 2 January 1959, pg. 30; *Chicago Tribune*, 2 January 1959, pg. B3.

<sup>141</sup> Cross, *Presidents Can't Punt*, 308.

“Prentice was getting a lot of publicity,” Wilkinson later frankly remarked. “This made some of the players mad because he was black and they were rednecks. They had grown up that way.”<sup>142</sup> Opposition to Gault emerged on two fronts: among those competing with him for playing time and from a contingent of Texas players who everyone assumed were more inclined to racial prejudice. “Things had surfaced to the point where it was hurting the team overall,” Hobby commented. “I think we were beginning to choose up in groups.”<sup>143</sup>

The situation got so bad that Wilkinson felt it had to be addressed and asked the team’s captains to do so, but still the malaise lingered. Then, in the middle of a practice he once called the worst of his career, Wilkinson ended the workout and ordered his team to the locker room. Inside, he challenged the disgruntled to confront Gault directly and then left them alone to face each other and resolve the issue. Several players, including Hobby, rose to address the internal dissensions affecting the team, but those who Gault felt most opposed him remained silent. Finally, Gault stood and spoke to the team. First he apologized for anything he might have done to offend anyone. Then he said he put the team first and, if his presence was detrimental, he was willing to quit. He then walked out of the room and left his teammates to ponder the way forward. According to lineman Leon Cross, in the discussion that followed it became clear that only “two or three guys ... really ... wanted Prentice to leave” and that the rest supported him. As Hobby remembered, “people got up and admitted they were wrong—even some of the Texas guys—and said they were glad to be teammates ...

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<sup>142</sup> King, *An Autumn Remembered*, 235.

<sup>143</sup> Wilkinson and Hirsch, *Bud Wilkinson*, 71.

with Prentice.”<sup>144</sup> The meeting quelled the dissent on the team and helped them finish the season with four straight victories and yet another Big Seven championship, their third of Gault’s three-year varsity career and their twelfth straight outright conference championship under Wilkinson.<sup>145</sup> Gault closed out his athletic career at OU with another excellent season, rushing for 674 yards and four touchdowns, and earning recognition as an All-Big 7 performer for the second year in a row. He also continued to excel in the classroom and was named an Academic All-American.

Any doubts about the caliber of Gault’s athletic talent or his ability to succeed in the larger game of life were put to rest by his eight years in professional football as well as his successful career in academics and administration that followed. Drafted by the Cleveland Browns, Gault spent 1960 as a backup to Jim Brown and Bobby Mitchell before being traded to the St. Louis where he spent the next seven seasons in the Cardinal backfield. In 1968, with his NFL career over, Gault joined Dan Devine’s coaching staff at the University of Missouri where he once again worked at the forefront of racial change as one of two black assistants in what had by then become the Big Eight Conference.<sup>146</sup> Gault spent four years as a coach and two years as a counselor in the Missouri football program. At the same time, he furthered his own education by earning a Master’s degree and PhD in psychology. In 1975, Gault joined the education

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<sup>144</sup> Wilkinson and Hirsch, *Bud Wilkinson*, 72.

<sup>145</sup> During Tatum’s only season at OU in 1946 and Wilkinson’s first season of 1947, the Sooners tied Kansas for the league crown, so 1959 marked the fourteenth straight season OU claimed at least a share of the conference championship.

<sup>146</sup> During an era of increasing militancy among black athletes, Gault found himself serving as an intermediary between the white coaching staff and their black players. The controversy began when a group of black athletes from several schools, including Missouri, submitted a formal list of complaints about the treatment they endured on campus and in their athletic programs. In all, Gault felt Devine did a good job of communicating with his players and handled the situation well. Gault agreed with some of the grievances expressed by the players—such as their complaints about the stacking of black athletes at certain positions—but found some of their criticisms off base. King, *An Autumn Remembered*, 238.

faculty at Missouri and in 1979 became an assistant commissioner for the Big Eight Conference. As a conference administrator, Gault focused on enhancing the educational opportunities offered to athletes and ensuring that member institutions complied with academic standards. When the Big Eight merged with the remnants of the once-proud Southwest Conference in the mid-1990s, he joined the administration of the new Big 12 Conference as a special assistant to the commissioner. In 1999, as a tribute to a man by then seen as one of its most important graduates, the University of Oklahoma named its new facility for student-athlete academics the Dr. Prentice Gault Academic Center. After a brief illness, Prentice Gault died on March 17, 2005 at the age of sixty-seven.

The breakthrough Gault achieved by integrating the Sooner football program represented an early challenge to the long tradition of segregation on the college gridirons of the South. On the fringes of the region, Oklahoma became the first major college program to field an African-American athlete and in doing so initiated a two decade long process of desegregation throughout southern college football. Events in Oklahoma foreshadowed many of the contours of this larger process even as they proved unique to their time and place.

Inside the state, a variety of factors came together to make this early change possible. The University of Oklahoma stood at the center of the drama. Already, the school had played an important—though at times hesitant—role in the desegregation of higher education in the South, a process that prepared them to lead the way on the football field. Representing a progressive, national outlook in a more conservative and provincial state, the faculty and administration largely worked to end a Jim Crow

system they viewed as objectionable and antithetical to American ideals. They did so, however, in a political and legal climate that resisted change and threatened repercussions for those who violated segregation laws. Forced to hold the line against integration in the face of two highly publicized legal challenges in the late-1940s, the University found itself the subject of national scorn, particularly after its ill-conceived experiment with integrated, yet segregated, classrooms in the McLaurin case. By trying to appease federal authority and the will of a growing majority of the country while also complying with state law and social custom, they forged a halfway measure satisfactory to neither side. When the Supreme Court dismantled the legal basis of segregated education during the first half of the 1950s, they found ready allies at the University who cautiously but persistently desegregated their entire campus by the middle of the decade. As would be the pattern throughout the region, racial change in the football program at OU, undertaken with Gautt's arrival in the fall of 1956, took place following the major period of desegregation, both at the University and within the state. Unlike Jackie Robinson's breakthrough in professional baseball, which came ahead of and helped lay the groundwork for the major changes of the civil rights era, the desegregation of southern college football took place after the region's racial order had been revised.

The unique racial heritage and history of Oklahoma opened the way for the school to become the first major power in the Border States to embrace gridiron desegregation.<sup>147</sup> At the same time, however, this legacy also ensured that the change

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<sup>147</sup> State universities in the Border States of Kentucky and Maryland desegregated their classrooms just ahead of the University of Oklahoma. Their football teams, however, remained all white until significantly later. The University of Maryland admitted its first black law student under court order in 1935 and other African-American graduate students beginning in 1950. In 1951, the University began

would take place within neatly defined integrationist parameters. Settled originally by the slave-owning tribes of the Southeast, Indian Territory and then Oklahoma constructed an elaborate system of legal and *de facto* segregation and defended it staunchly, and when necessary, violently, into the 1930s. When race relations improved during the World War II-era, the old order began to loosen. In the aftermath of the 1954 *Brown* decision, Oklahoma joined other states on the fringes of the Old South in dismantling portions of the Jim Crow system. Still, by the mid-1950s, even more progressive centers like Norman continued to enforce a rigid and customary segregation that routinely excluded African Americans and relegated them to the region's social and cultural fringe. In this environment, Oklahomans cautiously allowed the doors of opportunity to open in the late-1950s for one particularly talented black athlete of unimpeachable character. Far from embracing integration, however, the experiment merely represented the first tentative steps in that direction. To receive the opportunity, Gautt had to meet stiff athletic, academic, and personal conduct standards, standards that very few of his white teammates would have met. And unlike them, he faced constant scrutiny and the knowledge that one mistake, one brief indiscretion where he challenged accepted racial décor, might mitigate the end of his football opportunities. Gautt's breakthrough in the OU football program represented a significant step in the

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desegregating undergraduate education and eliminated its last barriers to admission in 1954. On the football field, Maryland became the first Atlantic Coast Conference team with a black player in 1963, six years after Gautt began playing on the Sooner varsity. The University of Kentucky accepted its initial black graduate student in 1949 and its first black undergraduates in 1954, one year before OU. More than a decade later, in 1967, they became the first Southeastern Conference member to desegregate their football squad. In both states, the delayed change in athletics had much to do with each school's conference membership and their resulting ties to schools in the Deep South. In Missouri, membership in the Big Seven helped allow racial change at an earlier date. Under court order, the University of Missouri began desegregating in 1950 when it accepted its first black undergraduates. The Missouri football team added its first black athletes in 1958, one year after Oklahoma. Martin, *Benching Jim Crow*, 124-125, 232, 260; Larry Grothaus, "'The Inevitable Mr. Gaines': The Long Struggle to Desegregate the University of Missouri, 1936-1950," *Arizona and the West* 26.1 (1984): 21-42.



desegregation of the state, but it did not signal a move toward wide-scale racial integration.

While the desegregation of Sooner football ultimately affected (indirectly at least) tens of thousands of lives, it was most relevant to those at the center of the drama. Several key individuals shaped the course of events and led them to a successful conclusion. Setting the stage were individuals such as George Lynn Cross, a former college football player turned botanist and then university president, whose liberal desegregationist leadership guided the University through the critical years of racial change. Cross played with African-American teammates at South Dakota State and saw segregation both on campus and in sports as an injustice that needed to end. In the late-1940s and the first-half of the 1950s, he and other key members of the faculty and administration accomplished that task. Equally important were Roscoe Dunjee and countless other activists in the Oklahoma black community who waged a calculated and insistent campaign for equal rights over several decades. The efforts of many in Oklahoma City's black community, who against great odds and stiff opposition built a community and a public school system that produced students of Gautt's caliber and temperament, also played a key role in setting the stage for the advance.

Within the Oklahoma football program, head coach Bud Wilkinson proved instrumental in breaking down barriers and initiating change. A native of the Midwest who played with and coached African Americans as a young man, Wilkinson did not hesitate to recruit a young black athlete who emerged as one of the premier football players in the state. Understanding the task before him, Wilkinson moved directly against the Jim Crow traditions of Oklahoma and used his stature to force others to

accept this first small step toward racial inclusion. A political conservative who later ran for the U.S. Senate as a Republican, he moved increasingly to the right in the late-1960s emerging as an ally of Richard Nixon and, as a prominent broadcaster, an unofficial spokesperson for the Silent Majority. In fact, at several points during Gautt's time at OU, Wilkinson stopped short of pushing further. When the segregated, upscale Skirvin Hotel chose to bar his mixed-race team, or when confronting the more formidable mandates of segregation in Texas, Wilkinson acquiesced to firmly established prejudices, perhaps sensing the limits of his influence. Still, his contribution proved significant and decisive. A coach of lesser stature, or one less willing to embrace racial change, could have easily delayed desegregation at Oklahoma another few years (as was the case at numerous other programs).

Though the deep southern traditions of racial prejudice never completely left the Sooner locker room, a large majority of Gautt's teammates ultimately, if at times grudgingly, embraced the changes he represented. Several members of the team played key roles in helping him adjust to campus life and were there for support when racial animosities surfaced. From their freshman trip to Tulsa, when Gautt was denied access to a prominent restaurant, to his senior season when racial tensions threatened to derail the team, a core group of players rallied to his cause and provided backing essential to his success. Living, attending classes, and playing high-level college football with an African American convinced many of his humanity and they committed themselves to supporting their friend, and by extension the imperatives of integration. For many pioneering black athletes, including Gautt, breaking down barriers often proved a lonely experience. At Oklahoma, however, the personal support and friendship of these

teammates mitigated these feelings of isolation.

At the center of athletic integration at Oklahoma stood Prentice Gautt, an immensely talented young man from Oklahoma City who fit the mold of the ideal black athletic trailblazer better, arguably, than even Jackie Robinson himself. The top athlete and student in his class at Douglass High, Gautt entered OU with impressive credentials—the beneficiary of the best education and preparation the segregated black community of Oklahoma City had to offer. A quick learner with a strong desire to please others, Gautt performed exceptionally well in the classroom while, concurrently, earning star status in one of the most elite athletic programs in the nation. More impressively, he also successfully negotiated the trials and tribulations of desegregating one of the state’s most revered public places. Thrust into an environment that was potentially hostile at every turn, Gautt endured numerous direct insults and affronts, countless slights—and in some cases even physical punishment on the practice field—without retaliation. If he had reacted or not been circumspect in his personal behavior (by avoiding developing relationships with white female students and refraining from speaking out about the injustices he faced) then the experiment in integration at OU may very well have failed.

In the late-1950s and early-1960s, while Oklahoma and a few small schools took their first steps toward athletic integration, the football powers of the Southwest Conference remained strictly segregated. Unlike Oklahoma, the states of Texas and Arkansas maintained their commitment to racial exclusion for almost another decade and this effectively blocked any thoughts of tapping into the large pools of black athletic talent in each state. Deeper in the heart of Dixie, athletic desegregation proved

much more difficult to achieve.

## Chapter Three

### Desegregating the Southwest Conference: Recruiting Jerry LeVias and the Strange Career of John Westbrook

In the middle of the 1960s, the tide of racial change finally reached the heart of Texas football and the Southwest Conference as racial desegregation began unlocking doors to the mainstream of social and cultural life for African Americans.<sup>1</sup> Forced to accept the impending reality of change, the Conference moved slowly toward its first steps.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, it was two of the Conference's private religious schools, Southern

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<sup>1</sup> In the fall of 1966, the progressive *Texas Observer*, based in Austin, linked the desegregation of Texas college football to broad racial transformations occurring in the state over the previous "two and one-half years." "Bolstered" primarily by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and "growing compliance with federal guidelines for school desegregation," the Lone Star state had progressed to a point where legal segregation, according to the magazine, was "no longer accepted policy." *Texas Observer*, October 28, 1966, pg. 1-3.

<sup>2</sup> In the Texas, college football lagged well behind other sports in its acceptance of interracial competition. When the state legislature lifted a thirty-eight year ban and legalized boxing in 1933, legislators included a provision banning mixed-race fights in the new law. Six months after the Supreme Court's *Brown* decision in 1954, however, the Texas Court of Civil Appeals in *Harvey v. Morgan* ruled the segregation of the ring unconstitutional and ended Jim Crow in Texas boxing. Unlike the reaction to school desegregation, this ruling produced little controversy, and few Texans expressed animosity toward black and white prizefighting. Francine Sanders Romero, "'There Are Only White Champions': The Rise and Demise of Segregated Boxing in Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 108.1 (2004): 26-41. In baseball, desegregation started in 1952 when the Cleveland Indians, the American League's most integrated franchise, and Jewish general manager Hank Greenberg sent pitching prospect David Hoskins to desegregate the Texas League by playing for the Dallas Eagles. Maverick Dallas owner Richard Wesley Burnett embraced the move and watched as his team won the league pennant. Hoskins proved the circuit's most dominant player winning 22 games and posting a 2.12 earned run average (he also hit .328). Burnett and his fellow owners, struggling in an era of declining revenues and searching for a new, profitable minor league business model, received a nice boost in revenue. The press reported that in his first eight games, Hoskins brought an estimated 25,000 additional fans to league ballparks, with the spike in attendance particularly noticeable among African Americans. White opposition to baseball desegregation proved stronger than in boxing two years later and Hoskins received death threats in Dallas. Ultimately, however, propelled by Hoskins' commanding performances, the experiment succeeded. Stephen H. Norwood and Harold Brackman, "Going to Bat for Jackie Robinson: The Jewish Role in Breaking Baseball's Color Line," *Journal of Sport History* 26.1 (1999): 115-141; Bruce Adelson, *Brushing Back Jim Crow: The Integration of Minor League Baseball in the American South* (Charlottesville VA: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 53-62; Larry G. Bowman, "Richard Wesley Burnett and the Dallas Eagles, 1948-1955," *East Texas Historical Journal* 32.2 (1994), 49-58; *Pittsburgh Courier*, 31 May 1952, pg. 24; *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 24 May 1952, pg. A21. In 1952, desegregated professional football arrived in Texas when investors purchased the New York Yankees of the National Football League and relocated the team to Dallas. Changing their name to the Texans, the team featured two African-Americans, Buddy Young and George Taliaferro on their roster. The Texans only played four home games before the league took over ownership and made them a travelling team.

Methodist University and Baylor University, who led the way. In 1965, SMU broke the initial barrier by making Beaumont, Texas native Jerry LeVias the first African-American athlete to be offered a scholarship in conference history. The following year, in September 1966, walk-on John Hill Westbrook of Elgin, Texas officially broke the color barrier in the Southwest Conference when he played in Baylor's opening game against Syracuse. The subsequent careers of both LeVias and Westbrook not only broke down barriers, but also symbolized both the potential and the limits of racial change in mid-1960s Texas.

As the first high-profile black athlete in the Conference, LeVias endured the sharpest scrutiny and an experience not unlike that of Jackie Robinson desegregating major league baseball almost two decades earlier.<sup>3</sup> Initially, meeting a chilly reception on the North Dallas campus, LeVias won the acceptance of SMU football fans when his athletic abilities helped vault the Ponies into conference title contention in his sophomore year. A storied championship season followed (the Mustangs' first in almost two decades) and LeVias went on to a spectacular three-year career that culminated in his team's dramatic Bluebonnet Bowl victory over Oklahoma on the last day of 1968. Along the way, he endured not only violence and abuse on the field, but

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Racial animosity played a role in their failure to win support in Dallas, as whites resented their integrated lineup and blacks rejected their segregated seating policies. The following year, the league sold the franchise to Baltimore investors who renamed them the Colts. Charles K. Ross, *Outside the Lines: African Americans and the Integration of the National Football League* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 128-130; Michael MacCambridge, *America's Game: The Epic Story of How Pro Football Captured a Nation* (New York: Random House, 2004), 76-79.

<sup>3</sup> On Robinson's experience integrating major league baseball see: Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Arnold Rampersad, *Jackie Robinson: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1997); Chris Lamb, *Blackout: The Untold Story of Jackie Robinson's First Spring Training* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004). According to John D. Kelly, Robinson served as a "paradigmatic martyr" to the goal of harmonious race relations during a turbulent and rapidly changing period. John D. Kelly, "Integrating America: Jackie Robinson, Critical Events, and Baseball Black and White," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 22.6 (2005), 1011-1035. LeVias's career in the Southwest Conference symbolized a similar "critical event" on a regional level.

also antagonism and threats off of it as he desegregated a game at the center of regional identity. Perhaps, his sternest test came outside of football. He struggled to overcome the personal isolation and social ostracism that he endured on a campus not accustomed to African-American students. Facing difficult circumstances, he emerged triumphant, a civil rights hero with a story as compelling as any Hollywood movie.

For Westbrook, events in Waco did not play out in a similar fashion. Receiving the same initially cold reception LeVias experienced in Dallas, Westbrook overcame long odds to win a scholarship and remain in school following his first season on the freshmen team. As a sophomore, in 1966, he officially broke the color barrier the Southwest Conference and demonstrated early promise until a serious knee injury ended his season ushering in what would be the disappointing final years of his college football career. Battling injuries and the racism of members of the coaching staff, as well as the indifference and hostility of the larger Baylor community, Westbrook closed out his final two years on campus in personal isolation and athletic anonymity. Far from a storybook Hollywood ending, Westbrook's Baylor years demonstrated just how limited opportunities could be for pioneering black athletes in this period.

By the early 1960s, the inevitability of desegregation in Texas football became apparent to many—including those responsible for directing the game on the field and those who covered it in the region's sporting press. In 1962, just before the start of a new football season, a *Dallas Times Herald* poll of six Southwest Conference coaches conducted by sportswriter Dan Jenkins demonstrated that the men running the conference's football programs "believe(d) that integration in the conference...(was)

not far away.”<sup>4</sup> The coaches (five head coaches and one assistant) covered a broad spectrum of ages and backgrounds, but all agreed in the imminence of change. All also maintained that the change would not present difficulties or be a concern for their current players. “It wouldn’t matter a bit to the kids,” TCU’s Abe Martin told Jenkins. His counterpart at Rice, Jess Nealy agreed, “The boys themselves are ready.” As in so many other instances where racial barriers faced challenges, at least in these coaches’ opinion, youth would find it easier to adapt to change.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, in light of later events, there was also consensus among the coaches “that a state-supported school will lead the way” to desegregation. That is what Martin and Baylor’s John Bridgers told Jenkins and SMU’s Hayden Fry agreed, adding, “We (SMU) need to go slow. The state schools operate a lot differently than privately endowed schools. There would be a lot of things to consider.”<sup>6</sup> Fry offered his opinion based on first-hand experience. After accepting the job at SMU with the intention of recruiting black athletes, he approached his first season actually having to confront the task. He quickly understood the many obstacles standing in the way of making that goal a reality.<sup>7</sup> What he did not realize, however, was that his counterparts at the state schools would face equally challenging obstacles to overcome if they chose to pursue the path to desegregation.

The coaches Jenkins interviewed also demonstrated an awareness of the latent talents of Texas’s African-American athletes. These blacks served as a resource that schools outside of the region began to exploit in the late-1950s and tapped into with

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<sup>4</sup> *St. Petersburg Times*, 13 August 1962, pg. 25.

<sup>5</sup> LeVias’ experiences at SMU from 1965 to 1968 proved these coaches’ assessment wrong as he experienced verbal and physical abuse from conference opponents, and initially from even his own teammates, throughout his career.

<sup>6</sup> *St. Petersburg Times*, 13 August 1962, pg. 25.

<sup>7</sup> Hayden Fry and George Wine, *Hayden Fry: A High Porch Picnic* (Champaign, IL: Sports Publishing, 2001), 68-69.



increasing frequency over the course of the 1960s.<sup>8</sup> This awareness must have made the possibility of desegregation enticing to some inside the Conference. TCU's Martin, coaching in his final season in 1966, pointed to earlier, limited, advances and the general level of black football in the state when he noted that "Negros play in all of our stadiums now." While Nealy, who also coached his final season in 1966, commented that, "We've had some fine Negro athletes in the state." Bridgers, who later coached Westbrook at Baylor and who spent part of his early coaching career outside of the South, agreed, telling Jenkins, "There are some fine Negro athletes in Texas." As something of an outsider, he also offered his opinion that "everybody will go slow."<sup>9</sup> Charley Shira, an assistant coach on Darrell Royal's University of Texas staff, made perhaps the most revealing comment when he told Jenkins "all conference coaches have talked up some good Negro athletes to their friends in coaching out of state."<sup>10</sup> For men whose professional success and very livelihood, depended on winning football games, the type of conversations Shira alluded to must have created some frustration, especially as they watched the number of outside coaches coming to Texas increase in the 1960s. For the more aggressive (or progressive), thoughts of how things might be different in a desegregated football world must have surfaced.

The most dramatic early sign of a crack in the edifice of Jim Crow college football in the Southwest Conference came in November 1963 when the Board of Regents at the University of Texas voted to open "all campus activities, including

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<sup>8</sup> Stephen H. Norwood, *Real Football: Conversations on America's Game* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 150-151.

<sup>9</sup> *St. Petersburg Times*, 13 August 1962, pg. 25; Bridgers served as head coach at Johns Hopkins University from 1953 to 1956 and then as an assistant coach with the NFL's Baltimore Colts in 1957 and 1958.

<sup>10</sup> *St. Petersburg Times*, 13 August 1962, pg. 25.

athletics, to members of all races.” Coming from the leaders of the conference’s premier school and from a body that had led the fight to maintain segregation at the University, it was a move many observers “expected to lead to [the] eventual integration of athletics in the Southwest Conference.”<sup>11</sup> The Regents’ seemingly sudden and dramatic action came after years of liberal student pressure, including an October petition by student groups on the Austin campus calling on the University to change its policies on race. Once again, it was students leading the push for racial change. In this case, however, they found willing allies (although admittedly more cautious and conflicted) among the University’s governing board.<sup>12</sup> While the optimism for rapid change proved unfounded, the Regents’ decision came as part of the larger process of racial change at the University and removed an important barrier to achieving athletic desegregation.

An editorial in the student newspaper praised the Regents for making “A Sensible Move” and reflected student support for the policy change. The editors said they were “deeply heartened” to see their University make the shift and felt that it would lead to change on other Texas campuses as well. Only the University of Arkansas and Governor Orval Faubus, the newspaper predicted, would “probably prove recalcitrant.” Beyond football and the universities, they saw the decision helping to expand the meaning of “Solid South” to something more than just “political solidarity based on hatred for the Negro and the North.” Athletic desegregation, they optimistically hoped, might help the South become “an integral part of the United States and the world, an area which contributes rather than degrades, and a place where the

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<sup>11</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 23 November 1963, pg.24.

<sup>12</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 23 November 1963, pg.24; *Chicago Defender*, 12 November 1963, pg. 22.

people think with something besides their skin and their blood.” Like numerous black sportswriters since the 1930s, the editors placed great hope in college football’s power to initiate broader cultural change. “An 80-yard touchdown run by a fleet Negro halfback will do wonders in dissolving racial antipathy,” they concluded. “It may even precipitate dormitory integration.”<sup>13</sup>

William W. Heath, a regent from 1959 to 1966 and Chairman of the Board of Regents from 1963 to 1965, oversaw the change and his views reflected the more cautious and hesitant feelings of an older generation of Texans. A former staunch segregationist from East Texas, Heath found it difficult to accept the rapid transformations of the civil rights era. In the end, however, Heath decided that desegregation was, as he put it, a “human rights” issue and the morally correct thing to do. Remembering the Boards’ deliberations two years later, Heath recalled the difficult situation he and his fellow Regents found themselves in. On the one hand, “the vast majority of the faculty and the students” wanted to “integrate completely and immediately,” while “at the same time a vast majority of the people of Texas and of the legislature” thought things “were going too fast,” the Chairman explained.<sup>14</sup> For Heath personally, the most difficult aspect of desegregation was the challenge to his dearly-held beliefs about race and gender, specifically his responsibilities as a protector of white womanhood. “Hardest thing I had to reconcile myself to,” Heath remembered, “was the integration of the girls’ dorms, where girls receive their dates and have their social activities.”<sup>15</sup> On this occasion, however, Heath and his fellow regents postponed

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<sup>13</sup> Daily Texan, 21 November 1963, pg. 2, clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A242, “E” File (Sports), 1963-1977, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>14</sup> *Texas Observer*, 28 October 1966, pg. 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Texas Observer*, 28 October 1966, pg. 3.

the most unpleasant aspect of desegregating the university when they announced that student housing and dining would continue to be segregated pending the resolution of ongoing federal litigation.<sup>16</sup> In regard to desegregating athletics and eventually the entire University, Heath ultimately decided that “in my heart (I knew) it was right.” “As a man who tries to subscribe to Christian principles, even though I have my prejudices,” he later said, “I think we did right. Certainly the human rights have to be protected.” Heath also pointed with pride to the fact that desegregation occurred in a “reasonably orderly” fashion and that Texas accomplished “the hardest thing we’ve gone through” without the violence and federal intervention necessary in other states.<sup>17</sup> Recognizing the tenor of the times and the potential mandates of the federal government, the Board of Regents led the University on an important and early first step toward integration.

Observers interpreted the Regents’ decision as having larger significance because, as the *Pittsburgh Courier* reported, of the “general feeling...that other schools in the conference were waiting for Texas to make the move toward integration in athletics.”<sup>18</sup> With the Longhorns undefeated and ranked number one in the country, Coach Royal seemed poised to make a breakthrough announcement when *United Press International* reported an impending statement from him regarding the issue. However, the wire service proved overly optimistic, since Royal never came forward with an announcement and no apparent breakthrough was forthcoming. The Texas football

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<sup>16</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 23 November 1963, pg.24; *Chicago Defender*, 12 November 1963, pg. 22. The following spring, in May 1964, the Regents ended segregation at the University completely when they lifted the ban on integration in housing and dining facilities. That same month the University also became the first formerly segregated Southern university to desegregate its faculty when Ervin S. Perry joined the graduate engineering faculty. *Texas Observer*, October 28, 1966, pg. 2-3.

<sup>17</sup> *Texas Observer*, 28 October 1966, pg. 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 23 November 1963, pg. 24.

program was not yet ready to take the bold step toward racial desegregation and close observers may have noted that, in effect, Royal had only promised to make a statement after he could meet with the school's Athletic Council. Asked his opinion of the proposed change, Howard Grubbs, secretary of the Southwest Conference, denied that there was even a problem. "Anyone who is a bona fide student and meets eligibility requirements can take part in athletics," the conference leader insisted.<sup>19</sup> While the Regents' policy change signaled to some that the days of whites-only conference football were about to end, the decision merely opened the door for very slow and gradual change.

The responses of Grubbs and Royal neatly encompassed the range of justifications that maintained Jim Crow college football in the conference for several more seasons. As the coach of the conference's most prestigious program, Royal faced the most pressure from partisans on both sides of the issue; consequently he chose to sidestep taking a definitive position by referring the matter to those in positions of higher authority. Given the controversial nature of the topic, this made sense. That said, as the headman of Texas football, Royal undoubtedly acted unilaterally in many situations and it is difficult to imagine him seeking the Athletic Council's permission to recruit a blue-chip white athlete. Grubbs, on the other hand, gave voice to the longstanding justification for the conference's lack of black athletes—a view that placed the blame for discrimination squarely on the victim—that there were simply no qualified black student-athletes to fill the role. Taken to its logical extreme, this critique extended beyond the individual athlete and encompassed a condemnation of the state's entire black community. Adherents to Grubbs' view maintained, at least implicitly, that

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<sup>19</sup> *Chicago Defender*, 12 November 1963, pg. 22.

at the root of the problem stood the African-American public school system, an organization structurally incapable of producing graduates able to succeed on the conference's playing fields and in its classrooms. While those who opposed the desegregation of Southwest Conference football undoubtedly encompassed a broad range of opinions and motivations—from Royal's foot-dragging obstructionism to Grubbs's blind bigotry—one fact proved true. With a wealth of black athletic talent in their home states, the majority of college coaches in Texas and Arkansas chose to maintain strictly segregated rosters for several years after the Texas Board of Regents mandated a policy of desegregation.

It was the conference football leaders, not the Regents, who were out of step with the tenor of the times. It was during the middle years of the 1960s, between the Regents' decision in November 1963 and LeVias and Westbrook's gridiron debuts in September 1966, that desegregation (at least of the *de jure* variety) became a reality in the state of Texas. Increasingly, white Texans accepted the reality of racial change. The Belden Poll, a pioneering, statewide public opinion survey conducted by Joe Belden, documented this transformation. In 1963, Belden found that, while some change in racial attitudes had taken place, a majority of Texans still opposed the primary goals of desegregation. In the classroom, at church, and while dining and traveling, white Texans rejected the idea of sharing public space with African Americans. As one sign that things might be changing, Belden found that more than 50% of Texans supported the idea of an integrated workplace. That was as far as their acceptance reached, however. In all other areas surveyed, the majority of Texans expressed a preference for segregation. Three years later, in 1966, however, Belden

found that a majority of the state now supported desegregation in restaurants and hotels, on railroad cars, and in their schools and churches as well. Attitudes still favored the segregation of swimming pools and social functions, but nonetheless the change was profound.<sup>20</sup> Between 1963 and 1966, the foundation of the Jim Crow system in Texas, the segregation of public accommodations, crumbled and collapsed beneath the weight of shifting public opinion and the mandates of the federal government.

The progress made toward desegregating the public school systems of the state symbolized the change. In 1963, almost a decade after the *Brown* decision, only roughly 7,000 of Texas's approximately 400,000 black students attended schools previously closed to them because of segregation. In 1964, the number increased to 25,000, and, by 1966, it stood at 100,000. By the fall of 1967, a date targeted by the U.S. Office of Education, officials projected that all but a handful of Texas schools would be free of regulations restricting student access based on race. While the enduring realities of *de facto* segregation and economic inequality were just beginning to become apparent to astute observers, and while many parts of the white population of the state maintained their commitment to racist views, Texas was entering a new era.<sup>21</sup> In the mid-1960s in Texas, old Jim Crow, the elaborate, legally codified system of racial segregation extending into almost all areas of daily life, finally went down to defeat.<sup>22</sup>

Much of the credit for taking the first steps toward recruiting African Americans

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<sup>20</sup> *Texas Observer*, 28 October 1966, pg. 2.

<sup>21</sup> The struggle to achieve true educational integration in the state continued for many years. As H.G. Bissinger points out in his classic study of Texas high school football, *Friday Night Lights*, Odessa did not fully desegregate its public schools until 1982, and, even then, did so only under order of the federal courts. H.G. Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team, and a Dream* (Cambridge, MA: De Capo Press, 2004), 75.

<sup>22</sup> *Texas Observer*, 28 October 1966, pg. 3.

and breaking down the color bar in the Southwest Conference belongs to John Hayden Fry, a native Texan who Southern Methodist University sought for its vacant head coaching position in late 1961. Born February 28, 1929, Fry's early childhood coincided with the worst years of the Great Depression. When his struggling family relocated to Odessa in 1937, they lived for a time in the African-American section of town and young Hayden developed important bonds of friendship with many of his black peers. As Fry grew older and confronted the realities of a segregated social world that excluded his black friends and deemed them inferior, he developed a keen sense of the injustices these realities produced and a strong desire to help in the fight for change. "By the time I was in high school," Fry later remembered, "when my black friends were playing football at Dunbar instead of with me at Odessa, I made a commitment that if I was ever in a position to change that, I would."<sup>23</sup>

After leading Odessa High football team to a Texas state championship during his senior season, Fry enrolled at Baylor University in the spring of 1947. At Baylor, he played in the offensive and defensive backfields and completed a degree in psychology. After a stint in the Marine Corps, where he joined the powerful Quantico Marines football team, Fry served as head coach for his former high school and then returned to Baylor as an assistant coach in 1959. After two seasons at Baylor, Fry joined Frank Broyles' highly regarded staff at the University of Arkansas where he coached quarterbacks during the 1961 campaign. As the Razorbacks prepared for a postseason trip to the Sugar Bowl, SMU contacted him about leading their program.

The Mustangs had hit rock bottom competitively in 1960 and 1961 under head coach William M. "Bill" Meek. Winning only two games in total and only one

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<sup>23</sup> Fry, *Hayden Fry*, 67.



Southwest Conference contest, the team finished last in the conference both seasons. Even more concerning, futility on the field created financial problems for the Athletic Department and the University. During the victory-less 1960 season, the team's "supporters dwindled in number until receipts were far behind those of average years," the Committee on Athletics reported to the University Senate. With two professional teams in Dallas, the Committee worried about the future and reduced the number of new scholarships they planned to offer each year. They also "proposed that a substantial budget deficit be budgeted for" the following year and warned that "extensive revision of the athletic program" might soon be necessary if the situation did not improve.<sup>24</sup> Following another bad season in 1961 and facing an "acute financial situation ... and possible withdrawal from bigtime (sic) football," the Committee recommended Meek's removal as head coach late in November.<sup>25</sup> Their backs against the wall, athletic officials had plenty of motivation to consider new alternatives as they looked for a promising young coach who could turn the program around.

The Athletic Committee developed a list of thirty-eight potential candidates to fill the vacant position. Eventually, they interviewed five candidates including Rice assistant Harold "Bo" Hagan, Highland Park High School head coach Thurman

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<sup>24</sup> "Annual Report of the Committee on Athletics to the University Senate, April, 1961," Faculty Governing Records, Box 29, Folder: Faculty Senate – Committees – Athletics Committee, 1960s, SMU Archives, Degolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas. Annual season ticket sales "dropped from about 7900 to 3400" at SMU between 1958 and 1962. The Athletic Committee attributed the decline to "teams which ... won less regularly" and the "accent on showmanship" offered by their professional competition. "Annual Report of the Committee on Athletics to the Faculty Senate of Southern Methodist University, 1962-1963," Faculty Governing Records, Box 29, Folder: Faculty Senate – Committees – Athletics Committee, 1960s, SMU Archives, Degolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas.

<sup>25</sup> "Annual Report of the Committee on Athletics to the Faculty Senate of Southern Methodist University, 1961-1962," Faculty Governing Records, Box 29, Folder: Faculty Senate – Committees – Athletics Committee, 1960s.

“Tugboat” Jones, and Fry.<sup>26</sup> During a phone interview, Fry indicated his interest in the job, but, perhaps considering what it would take to win at SMU, said he would only accept it if he would be allowed to recruit African-American athletes. According to Fry, this abruptly ended the interview as SMU officials explained that their school would not be the first to break the conference color line. Forced to put his aspirations of becoming a head coach on hold, Fry returned to his bowl preparations. Much to his surprise, however, he received another call from SMU a few days later.<sup>27</sup> After interviewing candidates, the committee voted and found that “Fry was the choice of the members by a wide margin.”<sup>28</sup> Now, they told Fry they were considering his proposal to desegregate their team and asked if he was still interested in the job. Fry said yes, but once again reiterated his condition that SMU commit to recruiting blacks. Knowing that any school would be hesitant to go first and given the racial climate of the day, he needed a guarantee before accepting the job. He was also concerned that important alumni and large numbers of fans would resist change.<sup>29</sup>

The key decision-makers at Southern Methodist included University President William Tate (a star lineman on SMU’s 1935 Rose Bowl team) Madison “Matty” Bell (the school’s athletic director and acclaimed former head coach) and faculty members Harold A. Jesky and Ed Mouzon. Together they made the decision to commit to Fry’s plan to desegregate the Southwest Conference, but only with certain stipulations.

Similar to the situation with Branch Rickey a decade-and-a half earlier, the SMU

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<sup>26</sup> “Annual Report of the Committee on Athletics to the Faculty Senate of Southern Methodist University, 1961-1962,” Faculty Governing Records, Box 29, Folder: Faculty Senate – Committees – Athletics Committee, 1960s, SMU Archives, Degolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas.

<sup>27</sup> Fry, *Hayden Fry*, 5-6, 11-46, 67-68.

<sup>28</sup> “Annual Report of the Committee on Athletics to the Faculty Senate of Southern Methodist University, 1961-1962,” Faculty Governing Records, Box 29, Folder: Faculty Senate – Committees – Athletics Committee, 1960s.

<sup>29</sup> Fry, *Hayden Fry*, 5-6, 11-46, 67-68.

administration agreed to make the move, but only if it proceeded slowly with the utmost concern for appearances. Fry could start by recruiting one or two star African-American athletes, but his first recruits would have to be outstanding students and exemplary citizens. At a time when a score of 750 on the SAT exam qualified a white football player to attend SMU, the administration told Fry that his first black recruit needed to score 1,000 on the same test to be eligible to wear the Pony red and blue.<sup>30</sup> They would also need to be willing to endure the stress and possible tribulations that might meet the first African American to play in the Southwest Conference. The hiring committee told Fry that SMU would take the historic step, but, with so much at stake, they could not allow it to be unsuccessful.<sup>31</sup> “I knew that whoever we brought in couldn’t be a failure,” Fry later remembered. “He couldn’t be sitting on the bench, he had to be a player. He had to be a real good academic student, and then I had to find someone who had real thick skin.”<sup>32</sup>

Fry accepted the job at Southern Methodist and began working in early 1962, the same year the University admitted its first full-time African-American undergraduate.<sup>33</sup> Remarkably, it would be five seasons before he accomplished his goal and helped break the color barrier in Southwest Conference football. From the start, Fry informed his staff of his intentions and instructed them to help him identify

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<sup>30</sup> *USA Today*, 13 August 2004, pg. C14.

<sup>31</sup> Fry, *Hayden Fry*, 68.

<sup>32</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 18 September 2003, pg. C1.

<sup>33</sup> Desegregation began at SMU in the spring of 1951 when the Perkins School of Theology, the Methodist divinity school on campus, accepted its first two African-American students for graduate study. Neither student survived the first semester academically, however, and this initial attempt failed. After extensive recruiting efforts, five new black students enrolled at Perkins in the fall of 1952. All five successfully completed their studies and graduated, as SMU became the first major private university in the South to begin desegregating. In the fall of 1955, Ruby Braden Curl from Dallas became the first African-American student to enroll in the SMU law school. Undergraduate studies at the university, however, remained off-limits to blacks until 1962 when Paula Elaine Jones of Albuquerque, New Mexico enrolled for the fall term. Scott Alan Cashion, “‘And So We Moved Quietly’: Southern Methodist University and Desegregation, 1950-1970,” (PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 2013), 79-87, 111-116.

potential recruits by scouting the black high schools of Texas' Prairie View Interscholastic League.<sup>34</sup> It took over a year, but they finally identified a young man they felt possessed both the athletic and character qualities needed to make desegregation a success—Jerry LeVias, a sophomore at Hebert High School in Beaumont, Texas. At 5-foot-8 and 160 pounds, LeVias was not the most imposing black athlete in Texas, but he possessed world-class speed and was an outstanding all-around performer who played quarterback, running back, wide receiver, and returned punts and kickoffs. Just as importantly from the coaching staff's perspective, he was an outstanding student, deeply religious, and came from a stable family. When Fry went to witness LeVias in action, he left feeling the young speedster was the most exciting athlete he had ever seen play high school football in Texas; subsequently, he became committed to doing all he could to bring him to SMU. Over the next two years, Fry and his staff developed a close relationship with LeVias and his family, recruiting him heavily but also providing him with a realistic assessment of the challenges awaiting the first black trailblazer in the Southwest Conference. They compared the task LeVias would face to what Jackie Robinson endured in 1947. As Rickey did with Robinson, Fry and his staff warned LeVias that he would have to reach into the depths of his character to survive the overt racism of Texas in the 1960s.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to the support of his family, LeVias also benefitted from his participation in Beaumont's thriving black high school football scene. In the late-

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<sup>34</sup> Prior to the desegregation of the Texas public schools, the Prairie View Interscholastic League (PVIL) served as the governing body overseeing athletics and other extracurricular activities in Texas's black high schools. Organized in 1920 as the Texas Interscholastic League of Colored Schools, the PVIL changed its name in 1923 after Prairie View A&M College assumed control of its operations. The PVIL organization mirrored that of the University Interscholastic League (UIL), the organization that administered the extracurricular activities of white schools. In 1967, PVIL schools began to join the UIL and, in 1970, the PVIL officially disbanded.

<sup>35</sup> Fry, *Hayden Fry*, 69-70.

1950s, both LeVias's coach at Hebert High School, Clifton Ozen, and Willie Ray Smith, the head coach at cross-town rival Charlton-Pollard High School, built impressive programs within the context of Beaumont's segregated public school system. The so-called "Soul Bowl" played annually between the two rival schools featured many future NFL players and the city earned a reputation as a leading source of professional football talent.<sup>36</sup> Smith once boasted, "You can turn on a television set on a Sunday afternoon, and tune in any game in the country, and you'll hear the name of a boy from Beaumont."<sup>37</sup>

Smith arrived in Beaumont in 1957 charged with leading a football program that managed to achieve only a single victory during the previous two seasons. Across the street from Beaumont's waterfront docks, Pollard High served the poorer segment of Beaumont's black community. It was here that Smith first confronted the socioeconomic realities that made winning football games difficult. Many of the school's students lived on the other side of Beaumont and their families had to pay for transportation across town to attend school. Finding that poverty often left his potential players hungry, Smith established contacts with local merchants and secured their pledge to donate food to his program. He took the bags of beans and hams the merchants provided home, where his wife, Georgia Curl Smith, cooked them and then made them available the next day for those who could not afford lunch.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The yearly clash between Hebert and Charlton-Pollard became such an attraction that school officials soon arranged to play the games in the 19,000-seat stadium at Beaumont's Lamar University. Even in this larger venue, crowds still filled the stadium to capacity. *Dallas Morning News*, 8 December 1999, pg. 1B.

<sup>37</sup> Mickey Herskowitz, "The Boys of Beaumont" in *More Than a Game*, ed. John Weibusch. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1974), 23.

<sup>38</sup> Herskowitz, "The Boys of Beaumont," 24. Because of the limited monies provided by the Beaumont School District, Smith lacked the funds to hire an assistant coach and, for many years, Georgia Smith informally filled the role. More than just a cook or administrative assistant, she watched games from the

With basic nutritional needs met, Smith also began building a football playing culture among Beaumont's black youth. In this effort, his three sons Bubba, Tody, and especially the oldest, Willie Ray Jr., played critical roles, as did the Farr brothers, Miller and Mel, cousins of LeVias, who played for Ozen at Hebert. Driving a battered 1955 Chevrolet station wagon, Willie Ray Jr. would make the rounds through town gathering players for daily pickup games that he and Miller Farr organized in black Beaumont's Liberia Park. Before noon, touch football games and football drills were the order of the day. In the afternoons, the youths passed their time playing pick-up basketball or swimming in the park's pool, but by early evening it was always back to football. "We always had enough for two teams and subs," Farr later remembered. "We'd play for hours. By dusk we'd really be digging in. It was touch ball but it was tough. On the line of scrimmage they'd get real angry."<sup>39</sup>

Both Ozen and Smith were disciplinarians who took the raw energy of the sandlot and molded it to build quality football players. Smith won two PVIL state championships as the coach of the black high school in nearby Orange, Texas before moving to Beaumont. He had a simple rule for instilling discipline, developing concentration, and ensuring that his players took practice seriously: make the same mistake twice and receive five licks. Smith sometimes used the paddle on his own sons even when they had not made mistakes just to make sure nobody could accuse him of favoritism. At halftime of one Charlton-Pollard game, in front of a surprised crowd, he lined his players up and gave each a lick with his leather belt. Famous professional coach Oail Andrew "Bum" Phillips, a native of Orange who was in the stands and

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stands or the press box and often advised Smith on the opposing team's tactics. *Dallas Morning News*, 27 November 1966, pg. A35.

<sup>39</sup> Herskowitz, "The Boys of Beaumont," 24; *Dallas Morning News*, 8 December 1999, pg. B1.

witnessed the event, noted the effectiveness of Smith's tactics when he commented "business picked up in the second half."<sup>40</sup> Ozen who took the job at Hebert in 1958, one year after Smith came to Beaumont, also used the threat of physical punishment to motivate his players. A large imposing man, Ozen patrolled the practice field with a paddle to inspire those who might be slacking. "Paddle?" LeVias once quipped while remembering Ozen, "more like a two-by-four. I was the fastest guy on the team and I'd get whipped for not being faster." Discipline was not the only secret to the Beaumont black coaching duo's success—both men also possessed shrewd football minds and an eye for ability. "The best judges of talent I've ever seen," remembered fellow African-American coach Joe Washington Sr. who led Bay City Hilliard and Port Arthur Lincoln from 1951 to 1995. "They always put the best kids in the best spots. No politics, no negotiations."<sup>41</sup>

For Ozen, Smith, and other black coaches, high school football and their tough love strategy served a higher purpose: to open up opportunities and provide the means to social mobility. Ultimately, they sought to improve their players' lives and benefit the communities they lived in. "We had it drilled into us," Miller Farr remembered, "that football could make us important. That it was the one best way to break out of the ghetto."<sup>42</sup> Football and the discipline it instilled prepared the players for success in college and the degrees they earned equipped them to assume teaching and other leadership positions. In segregated East Texas, it was a multi-generational approach to racial advancement and the coaches themselves had been brought up in the same system. "Our professors, our coaches, were trying to prepare us for the future—not of

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<sup>40</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 8 December 1999, pg. B1.

<sup>41</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 8 December 1999, pg. B1.

<sup>42</sup> Herskowitz, "The Boys of Beaumont," 24.

desegregation, that came later—but to compete,” Washington later reflected. “Our professors tried to prepare us to teach that black child the very best that he could be taught. That was the way we looked at the future and the way out of things, a way to accomplish things.”<sup>43</sup>

As the two coaches and the year-round clashes in Liberia Park helped build black high school football in Beaumont, they also began attracting attention beyond Texas’s Gulf Coast. After Willie Ray Jr. left Beaumont to play college ball at the University of Iowa and then transferred to the University of Kansas, he brought teammate Gale Sayers back to town to test his mettle in the games at Liberia Park. According to Beaumont lore, Sayers perfected the skills that made him a great running back at the park. When he arrived, Willie Ray Jr. later remembered, Sayers “was just trying to run over everybody,” but the boys of Beaumont “tried to work with him on his cuts and finesse.” Sayers recognized their influence later when he later reflected on his experiences in Liberia Park: “It was good for me. I would work a lot on my moves.”<sup>44</sup> When Willie Ray’s younger brother Bubba went to Michigan State, future AFL great George Webster made his appearance at the park. “The word got around that if you wanted to get in shape you should go to Beaumont,” LeVias later remembered. “But nobody awed us. I don’t care if Jim Brown himself stepped in there. They were nobody until they got tested by the Boys of Beaumont.”<sup>45</sup>

In the late-1950s and early-1960s, the talented black football players of Beaumont also began attracting the attention of college coaches around the country. In an effort to open doors for his players, Coach Smith diligently attended coaching clinics

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<sup>43</sup> Norwood, *Real Football*, 131-132.

<sup>44</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 8 December 1999, pg. B1.

<sup>45</sup> Herskowitz, “The Boys of Beaumont,” 24.



throughout Texas and cornered visiting coaches to tell them about Beaumont's best prospects. "Some of the coaches wouldn't even talk to me," Smith recalled. "But those who would listen, I knew I could sell them."<sup>46</sup> And sell them he did; Soon, a steady stream of Beaumont's best black athletes began enrolling in colleges around the country. Oklahoma's Bud Wilkinson sought out Willie Ray Jr. while he was desegregating his team and looking for a roommate for Prentice Gautt, but Smith's oldest son, perhaps balking at playing a pioneering role, declined the offer and left for the University of Iowa before later transferring to the University of Kansas. Miller Farr joined Willie Ray Jr. in leaving the state of Texas and heading for Kansas when he accepted a scholarship offer from Wichita State. After UCLA coach Bill Barnes came to town, brother Mel also left segregated Texas for the more racially accepting confines of Southern California. When coaches in the Big Ten began taking notice, Smith and Ozen stood ready to supply college football's most prestigious conference with some of Beaumont's best. Coach Duffy Daugherty and Michigan State benefitted the most when Smith's second son, Charles Aaron "Bubba" Smith, and Pollard teammate Jess Phillips left Beaumont to star for the Spartans' two Big Ten championship teams in 1965 and 1966.<sup>47</sup> Daugherty's integrated program tapped further into the wealth of Texas's black high school football talent by signing Eugene "Gene" Washington, a receiver with world-class speed, from nearby La Porte, Texas. When Michigan State emerged as one of the dominant teams of the mid-1960s, some college football fans in the state must have wondered about the competitive wisdom of segregation. The quality of Smith and Ozen's programs and the pickup games in Liberia Park ensured

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<sup>46</sup> Herskowitz, "The Boys of Beaumont," 24.

<sup>47</sup> Herskowitz, "The Boys of Beaumont," 24-25.

that the most talented black athletes in Beaumont would draw the attention of coaches like Fry and his staff as the contemplated challenging segregation.

During his final two years of high school, LeVias grew three inches and added fifteen pounds while turning in the types of performances on the football field that drew national attention. His 9.5-second time in the 100-yard dash combined with the forty-two touchdowns he scored during his junior and senior seasons made him a top prospect. While other white coaches in Texas continued to overlook him, their peers in the North and West, who had grown accustomed to raiding Texas's black talent did not. During his senior year in 1964, LeVias averaged 10.8 yards per rushing attempt, 45.6 yards per punt return, and a whopping 51.1 yards on kickoff returns; he also scored seventeen touchdowns and passed for four others. LeVias's statistics proved so impressive that his high school coach, Ozen, felt compelled to bend the truth and downplay them when talking to potential recruiters in order to keep them from thinking they had been dishonestly inflated. By the end of his senior season, nearly 100 schools were actively recruiting LeVias, but SMU and UCLA emerged as the two most likely to secure his services. The Mustangs offered the advantages of being close to home and providing the opportunity to fill a historic role, but UCLA had much to offer as well. With a long history of integrated athletics extending back to the 1930s and highlighted by the Bruins' 1939 team featuring black stars Kenny Washington, Woody Strode, and Jackie Robinson, LeVias would face none of the pressures of being a racial pioneer in Los Angeles. In addition to a quality education, the Westwood campus also offered the opportunity for LeVias to reunite with a familiar face—his cousin Mel Farr—who starred in the Hebert High backfield with him two years earlier before enrolling at

UCLA.<sup>48</sup>

In the first week of May 1965, Coach Fry and SMU broke one barrier when they became the first Southwest Conference school to offer an athletic scholarship to an African-American athlete.<sup>49</sup> On May 22 in Beaumont, LeVias broke another when he accepted their offer and became the first black to sign a Southwest Conference letter of intent.<sup>50</sup> Fry and SMU assistant coach Chuck Curtis travelled to Beaumont for the historic event and both beamed with pride at its significance for their program and the larger region. “I hope this signing will open the door for future Negro student athletes in the Southwest Conference,” said Fry as he fulfilled his long-term goal of bringing desegregation to Texas football. “The conference has been losing too many fine Negro athletes in the past. I hope this will open the door...that we can keep them in the state now,” he added demonstrating how closely the quest for racial justice joined with unabashed self-interest in bringing racial change to college football. “Yes, I thing (sic) this may give SMU an inside track on other Negro athletes now,” Fry concluded hopefully.<sup>51</sup>

Ozen, LeVias’s coach at Hebert, was also on-hand to celebrate the historic moment; an event he had worked long to help achieve. Ozen first met LeVias when young Jerry showed up to watch Hebert practices and then coached him through his teen years as his athletic talents blossomed. Now he felt his young charge was well prepared athletically for the college game. “The only thing that will keep him from playing (right away) ... is the freshman rule,” he told the press. As LeVias emerged as

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<sup>48</sup> *New York Times*, 23 May 1965, pg. S5; *Chicago Defender*, 21 August 1965, pg. 18; Fry, *Hayden Fry*, 70; *Sports Illustrated*, 25 November 1968.

<sup>49</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 8 May 1965, pg. 22.

<sup>50</sup> *New York Times*, 23 May 1965, pg. S5.

<sup>51</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 23 May 1965, pg. B1.

a high school star, Ozen recognized that his abilities as a student and his exemplary character made him an ideal candidate to break the color barrier in the Southwest Conference. With schools from around the country seeking his star player's services, Ozen worked to persuade him to stay in Texas and take on a historic role. He contacted Royal about LeVias playing for Texas, but the Longhorn coach said he was too small. Once Fry and SMU expressed interest, Ozen helped them secure LeVias's commitment. At the press conference announcing the signing, he reassured sports fans in the region by emphasizing LeVias's character. "He's an all-around good boy," Ozen told the reporters, "just exactly what the doctor ordered. He's the ideal type for the first colored player in the Southwest Conference."<sup>52</sup>

LeVias's signing with SMU, however, did not end the recruiting war for his services. In 1965, the letter of intent only applied to schools within the Southwest Conference and other conferences that agreed to honor it. Because UCLA belonged to the Athletic Association of Western Universities (AAWU), a conference that did not honor the letter, they remained free to pursue LeVias.<sup>53</sup> If the Beaumont star changed his mind and decided to head west, neither he nor the Bruins would face any sanctions. Led by new head coach James Thompson "Tommy" Prothro, Jr., a former Bruin assistant who spent the previous ten seasons turning the Oregon State program into a West Coast power, UCLA seemed determined to make that happen. Like UCLA, Prothro had a great deal of experience with black athletes and ten of the forty-seven

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<sup>52</sup> Unidentified, undated newspaper clipping in Heritage Hall, Box 6: Kriel – Lewis, Folder: LeVias, Jerry Football – Clippings, SMU Archives, Degolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas; Jim Dent, *The Kids Got It Right: How the Texas All-Stars Kicked Down Racial Walls* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013), 42-45, 67-68, 71, 118-120, 126-127, 129.

<sup>53</sup> The AAWU served as the conference of the major West Coast football powers between 1959, following the demise of the scandal-ridden Pacific Coast Conference, and the 1968 creation of the Pacific 8 Conference.

players on his 1956 Rose Bowl team at Oregon State were African Americans.<sup>54</sup> Late in the summer of 1965, LeVias traveled to Hershey, Pennsylvania for the annual Big 33 All-Star Game, a contest pitting high school stars from Texas against their counterparts from Pennsylvania. In Hershey, word leaked out that he would meet with Prothro after the game. “I’m kind of thinking about a switch,” LeVias told a reporter from the *Dallas Times Herald*. “They contacted me...and asked if they could come up and talk. I told them it would be all right.”<sup>55</sup> A pioneer on the football field, LeVias blazed a new path off it as well. As a highly sought after recruit, he forced powerful and prestigious members of the white community to compete for his services, a feat that very few black males in Texas had ever experienced.

On Saturday, August 14, after LeVias helped lead the Texas all-stars to a 26-10 victory over their opponents from Pennsylvania, the recruiting battle between SMU and UCLA escalated into an actual physical confrontation. In the era before the national letter of intent, limited recruiting visits, and a national signing day, incidents like this one in Hershey (minus the fisticuffs) were commonplace as coaches did whatever they could to lure and secure top recruits. Prothro flew to Pennsylvania for the all-star game and hoped to convince LeVias to return to Los Angeles with him for a visit to the UCLA campus and an eventual commitment to become a Bruin. Aware of Prothro’s intentions, Fry and his staff dispatched assistant coach Curtis to Hershey to supervise LeVias and ensure that Prothro did not steal the Mustangs’ prize recruit. The situation came to a head after the game as LeVias and Curtis approached the Texas team bus and met Prothro. With the UCLA coach making his strongest pitch and Curtis, who had

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<sup>54</sup> Dent, *The Kids Got It Right*, 68.

<sup>55</sup> *Chicago Defender*, 21 August 1965, pg. 18.

convinced LeVias not to make the trip to California, intent on seeing his prospect get on the bus, a shoving match erupted between the two coaches in full view of the Texas team and its coaches.<sup>56</sup> A Southwest Conference coach who witnessed the altercation defended Curtis' actions. "Anybody in Chuck's shoes would have done the same thing," the coach, who wished to remain anonymous, told the *Dallas Morning News*. "Prothro just wouldn't lay off."<sup>57</sup> Eventually, Curtis won the standoff. LeVias got on the bus, went back to Texas with the team, and enrolled at SMU for the fall semester. Prothro returned to California empty-handed, though his first Bruin team finished 1965 as AAWU and Rose Bowl champions. Attempting to defend Prothro's actions, *Los Angeles Times* sports columnist Jim Murray attributed the coach's overzealous actions to the desperation of a new coach trying to rebuild a program and facing a less than stellar recruiting season. When Curtis "carried LeVias off to the back of the bus," Murray sarcastically quipped, "It might have been the greatest single day for the Lone Star State since the battle of San Jacinto."<sup>58</sup>

Ultimately, LeVias based his decision on the strong relationship Fry built with his family and the opportunities an SMU education could unlock for him, rather than any desire to be a racial pioneer. "I'm not a brave man. I didn't go to SMU to be a pioneer," LeVias said reflecting on his decision years later. "I believed that I could get a good education. Playing football was secondary."<sup>59</sup> Fry built a trusting bond with the LeVias family by choosing not to focus on the potential path-breaking role their son might play but instead on his life beyond college. With interest from more than one

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<sup>56</sup> *Chicago Defender*, 17 August 1965, pg. 28.

<sup>57</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 18 August 1965, pg. B3.

<sup>58</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 20 August 1965, pg. B1.

<sup>59</sup> *USA Today*, 13 August 2004, pg. C14.

hundred schools, LeVias found that Fry was “the only coach that talked to me consistently about education and about being a person.”<sup>60</sup> “He said, You’re 18 now. You’ll be 22 or 23 when you graduate. The life expectancy for a normal person is 70. What are you going to do for the rest of your life?”<sup>61</sup> Fry’s standing in the devoutly religious LeVias household also received a boost when Jerry’s pious grandmother commented after meeting the coach that, “There’s something godly about that man.”<sup>62</sup>

When LeVias entered SMU in the fall of 1965, he became the first African-American to attend a Southwest Conference school on a football scholarship; still, his and his coach’s experiences as racial pioneers were only beginning. In recruiting and playing LeVias, Fry faced criticism, threats, and pressure from members of the SMU community and other football fans in Texas who preferred to keep things as they had always been. At times, he also faced the ostracism and criticism of his peers in the Southwest Conference coaching ranks. In 1965, Texas A&M coach Gene Stallings told the press that he did not think a mixed-race team could compete at the league’s highest level because it would lack cohesion. Contemplating the desegregation of his own squad he said, “What we need is a team that will work and pull and fight together and really get a feeling of oneness. I don’t believe we could accomplish this with a Negro on the squad.” LeVias gained a sense of the opposition his coach faced when he accidentally overheard an important donor tell Fry, “If you let that nigger play, I’ll never give another dime.”<sup>63</sup> “Coach Fry and I basically had to fight the whole world,” LeVias later remembered. “All the spotlight was on me and what I did, but they don’t consider

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<sup>60</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 18 September 2003, pg. C1.

<sup>61</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 30 November 1995, pg. B6.

<sup>62</sup> *Sports Illustrated*, 7 November 2005, pg. 58-69.

<sup>63</sup> *Sports Illustrated*, 7 November 2005, pg. 58-69.

what Hayden had to go through.”<sup>64</sup> Fortunately, the SMU administration stood firmly behind Fry and their backing and commitment to desegregation shielded the coach from the most intense pressures and allowed the university’s experiment in muscular assimilation to move forward.

Since freshmen were not eligible for varsity athletics, LeVias could focus his attention on breaking down barriers on the SMU campus during his first year. Initially, he received a chilly reception from both classmates and teammates who were not sure what to make of the first African American they met in a setting of equality. Student assistants, on the training staff, refused to tape his ankles and a teammate, unhappy about playing with an African American, spat in his face on the practice field. Early on, he also noticed that the team showers would quickly empty when he walked in, so he began to stay longer at practice, working to improve his skills and avoiding the embarrassing racial ostracism.<sup>65</sup> During his first scrimmage with the freshman team, LeVias impressed his upper-class teammates in attendance with several outstanding catches and scoring plays, but then suffered three broken ribs on a questionable blindside hit delivered by a frustrated fellow freshman. It would not be the last time he suffered physical punishment for his success, nor was it the last time it came at the hands of a fellow Mustang. With his time on the practice field temporarily limited, LeVias began adjusting to the campus community and the rigors of college academics. He struggled in the classroom at first, spending too much time playing poker and not enough studying. A reprimand from Fry convinced him to focus on his studies and he settled in for a successful first year of what would be a stellar academic career at

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<sup>64</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 18 September 2003, pg. C1.

<sup>65</sup> *Sports Illustrated*, 7 November 2005, pg. 58-69.



SMU.<sup>66</sup>

Outside of academics, however, things did not go as well and the social isolation he confronted on the nearly all-white, elite SMU campus proved one of the most difficult parts of his college experience. In the fall of 1965, when LeVias began classes at SMU, he and the three other incoming African Americans who joined him in classes became only the second, third, fourth, and fifth black undergraduates to attend the university on a full-time basis. Early on, LeVias noticed that none of his white classmates wanted to sit near him, and, in class, he often had an entire row of seats to himself.<sup>67</sup> Along with this subtle racism, he occasionally confronted more blatant examples of animosity such as when fellow students asked professors, in his presence, questions like “Is it true blacks are born with smaller brains than whites?” and other equally degrading vestiges of the pseudo-scientific and popular racism that dominated American (and especially Southern) thought just a few decades prior.<sup>68</sup> One of the worst blows came early in his freshman year when LeVias received a summons to the dean’s office. Having already lost his first roommate after the roommate’s parents threatened to withdraw their son from the university rather than allow him to room with an African American, the dean now informed him that his second assigned “roommate didn’t want to be...[his] roommate anymore” because “it was killing his social life.” Rejected by his peers, LeVias found himself “with absolutely no one to interact with”

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<sup>66</sup> Richard Pennington, “Racial Integration of College Football in Texas,” in *Invisible Texans: Women and Minorities in Texas History*, ed. Donald Willett and Stephen Curley (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004), 218-220; *Dallas Morning News*, 27 January 1995, newspaper clipping in Heritage Hall, Box 6: Kriel – Lewis, Folder: LeVias, Jerry Football – Clippings, SMU Archives, Degolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas; Fry, *Hayden Fry*, 70-71.

<sup>67</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 30 November 1995, pg. B6.

<sup>68</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 10 December 2003, pg. C5.

on a daily basis.<sup>69</sup> “I think the worst thing for him was no social life,” remembered SMU chemistry professor and athletic booster Harold Jesky. “We didn’t have many black girls, and in those days blacks and whites didn’t date at all.”<sup>70</sup> Moreover, even among fellow African Americans, LeVias found himself something of a pariah. “Racism goes both ways,” he later reflected. “There were black people who called me an ‘Uncle Tom’ and ‘Whitey’ because I wanted to go to SMU.”<sup>71</sup>

Eventually, LeVias became friends with some of his professors as well as select members of the SMU booster community, people spiritually outside of Dallas’s cultural mainstream. Much of the SMU faculty came from out of the state and outside of the South. As a top student and important public figure, LeVias attracted their attention and began building relationships during his freshman year that lasted for decades. Off campus, LeVias developed a close friendship with the family of Mustang booster Bert Flashnick, a Jewish businessman from Queens, New York, who grew-up in an integrated environment. “Bert’s father was a liquor salesman, and one of his territories was up in Harlem,” Elsie Flashnick, Bert’s wife, later remembered, “he brought home a lot of black fellows for dinner.”<sup>72</sup> The Flashnicks opened their home to many Mustang athletes and LeVias soon found a comfortable place where he could spend evenings enjoying dinner and social interaction. Still, even in this sanctuary, the pressures of being a racial trailblazer sometimes intruded. LeVias occasionally brought examples of the hate mail he received with him on visits; on one occasion, an anonymous hostile fan called the Flashnick home to vent his frustrations over the momentous changes LeVias

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<sup>69</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 6 December 2003, pg. C2; *Sports Illustrated*, 7 November 2005, pg. ??.

<sup>70</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 18 September 2003, pg. C1.

<sup>71</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 6 December 2003, pg. C2.

<sup>72</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 18 September 2003, pg. C1.

represented. Another teammate at the house that evening answered the call and, after the caller burst into a racist rant, turned to the others present and jokingly said, “Jerry, I think this guy wants to talk to you.”<sup>73</sup> Facing the daunting task of desegregating one of the most beloved portions of Southern culture pioneers like LeVias did so with very little support and from a position of forced social isolation. They also did so when they were just reaching adulthood. With a few exceptions—a friendly face on the coaching staff, a small number of open-minded teammates, a few sympathetic professors, and the odd booster providing occasional camaraderie—loneliness and isolation dominated much of their university experience.

As a new football season approached the following fall, many Texas football fans no doubt expected LeVias to break another barrier. However, on September 10, 1966, they may have been surprised when John Hill Westbrook of Baylor University became the first African American to take the field for a varsity football game in the Southwest Conference. That afternoon, late in the fourth quarter, a national television audience watched as Baylor head coach John D. Bridgers inserted Westbrook at running back and immediately called on him to carry the ball. With a season opening upset of seventh-ranked Syracuse University in hand Westbrook rushed for nine yards on the ensuing play. As he broke through the Syracuse line, one of the great symbolic pillars of Southern segregation—all-white major college football—came crashing to the ground in Texas and the Southwest Conference.<sup>74</sup> By an accident of scheduling, Westbrook, a walk-on player who had only recently won a scholarship, beat out his highly publicized contemporary, LeVias from SMU—the first African-American

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<sup>73</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 18 September 2003, pg. C1.

<sup>74</sup> The Atlantic Coast Conference began desegregating in 1963, the Southeastern Conference in 1967.

football player to receive a scholarship—for the honor. LeVais would make his first varsity appearance one week later against the University of Illinois in SMU’s opening game at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas. This day, however, marked the only time in Westbrook’s Baylor career that he would challenge LeVias for headlines in either the region’s newspapers or the minds of its fans. While historically Westbrook’s appearance serves as largely a footnote in the history of athletics and racial desegregation, the larger story of his athletic career at Baylor stands as a powerful example of the barriers pioneering black athletes faced and of the limits of meaningful integration in what is popularly considered a heroic period.<sup>75</sup>

From Jackie Robinson’s path-breaking 1947 season in major league baseball through LeVias’s mid- to late-1960s integration of SMU and the Southwest Conference, the popular lore of sport is replete with stories of pioneer athletes who endured stern challenges but thanks to their talent, discipline, and persistence, emerged triumphant. Often overlooked, however, are the tales of those who were less successful, black athletes who because of injury, lesser skills, or the prejudices of coaches, did not succeed on the athletic field or on the university campus.<sup>76</sup> While not inherently more

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<sup>75</sup> Westbrook’s career at Baylor received a fair amount of coverage in the popular press of the period, but the historical record of his experiences profited greatly from the work of scholars, researchers, and popular writers in the years since. In 1972, Drs. Thomas Carlton and Rufus B. Spain interviewed Westbrook as part of the Baylor University Program for Oral History. The resulting 120-page transcript provides, in his own words, a rich, in-depth account of Westbrook’s life to that point. *Oral Memoirs of John Hill Westbrook*, 1972, Baylor University Project, Baylor University Program for Oral History, The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas. Texas sports historian Richard Pennington’s book *Breaking the Ice: The Racial Integration of Southwest Conference Football* gives a detailed description of Westbrook’s career and the many trials and tribulations he faced. Richard Pennington, *Breaking the Ice: The Racial Integration of Southwest Conference Football* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1987). A 2010 series of articles by T. Perry adds a lot to the Westbrook story, but unfortunately does not include documentation of its sources. T. Perry, “For Thou Art With Me (Part One-Four),” The Official Site of Baylor Athletics, April 21-26, 2010, <http://www.baylorbears.com/sports/m-footbl/spec-rel>.

<sup>76</sup> Popular critics of sport and sport scholars avoid this blind spot and find some of their best material at this intersection of sport and race. In *Integrating the Gridiron*, Lane Demas utilizes the 1923 death of Iowa State’s Jack Trice, the 1951 beating of Drake University’s Johnny Bright by opponents from

revealing, their stories provide a stark contrast to the more familiar narratives of success and place in stark relief the boundaries of athletics and integration.<sup>77</sup> As a player who demonstrated early promise, but eventually succumbed to injury, prejudice, and (at least in the opinion of some) lack of talent, John Westbrook's years at Baylor encompassed many aspects of just such a tale. Shunned by his peers and pushed to the fringes of the university community, he battled racist assistant coaches as well as isolation and poverty throughout his college years. In all, his experiences at Baylor also serve to demonstrate the many obstacles, hardships, and prejudices faced by African-American athletes in mid-1960s Texas.

Born in Groesbeck, Texas on November 13, 1947, John Westbrook grew up in a series of small towns before his family settled in Marlin. In 1959, the family relocated to Elgin, a small, segregated central Texas town, twenty-three miles east of Austin.

Westbrook's father, Robert, Sr., was an educated, middle-class professional who

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Oklahoma State, and the expulsion of the University of Wyoming's "Black 14" in 1969 to illustrate the complex and uneven process of college football integration across regions and several decades. Lane Demas, *Integrating the Gridiron: Black Civil Rights and American College Football* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 8-9, 58-71, 102-138. Even black athletes who succeeded on the playing field could find their success jeopardized if they did not conform to accepted racial attitudes. Baseball player Richie Allen became the National League's Rookie of the Year in 1964 and a star slugger for the Philadelphia Phillies, however, his failure to conform to accepted standards of conduct for elite black athletes led to a souring of his relationship with sportswriters and the public, and, eventually, to his being traded from the team. William C. Kashatus, *September Swoon: Richie Allen, the '64 Phillies, and Racial Integration* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 39-200.

<sup>77</sup> Gender theorist Judith Halberstam points to the potential insights of studying what she labels "a counterhegemonic discourse of losing." According to Halberstam, stories of failure "poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life" and highlight the contradictions and limitations in dominant cultures. Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 1-12. Building on Halberstam's work, Ben Carrington utilizes sport to explore "the ambivalent spaces of racialized hegemonic masculinity" and the ways they challenge dominant "patriarchal standards." Ben Carrington, *Race, Sport, and Politics: The Sporting Black Diaspora* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2010), 130-131. Thomas Patrick Oates analyzes the portrayal of failure and defeat in two contemporary sport documentaries about former football players. He finds that documentary profiles of Marcus Dupree and Todd Marinovich "open opportunities for resistance to the patriarchal myths that dominate coverage of" the game, but are framed in ways that "blunt productive subversions." Thomas Patrick Oates, "Failure Is Not an Option: Sport Documentary and the Politics of Redemption," *Journal of Sport History* 41.2 (2014): 218.

worked as an educator, coach, and minister. He challenged his children to set their goals high and spent his life pushing against the edifice of Jim Crow in Central Texas. As a student at Paul Quinn College in Waco during the 1920s, the elder Westbrook played tackle on the school football team and earned recognition on black All-American teams as well as his diploma. A teacher and coach until 1942, Robert Westbrook, Sr. served as a minister in several small Texas locales after that date. Active in voter registration efforts and the local NAACP, his life embodied the dichotomy between black middle-class respectability and resistance to the daily injustices of a segregated society. For Robert, Sr., the internal tensions this created could on occasion boil to the surface. While serving as the principal of the black high school in Georgetown, Texas, he once staged a public book burning to draw attention to the age and poor condition his students' textbooks. His employment in Georgetown ended when he punched his boss—the white school superintendent—after a dispute in which the later referred to several of his employees as “those old nigger women.” Recognizing the danger his actions placed his family in, Robert Sr. resigned his position and hurriedly moved from the city.<sup>78</sup>

Smart and articulate, the Westbrook family's second, and last, child, John, excelled in both athletics and academics. The salutatorian of his senior class at Elgin's segregated Booker T. Washington High School, Westbrook distinguished himself in debate, played the cornet in the band, and became an ordained minister at the age of fifteen. In sports, he captained the football, basketball, baseball, and track teams, made the all-district football team as both a fullback and linebacker, and scored thirty-five touchdowns during his junior and senior seasons. He also made the black all-state track

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<sup>78</sup> *Oral Memoirs of John Hill Westbrook*, 8.

team as a high jumper.<sup>79</sup>

In many ways, Westbrook's education at Booker T. Washington reflected both the best and the worst of the segregated school experience for African Americans. In the classroom, students suffered the dual handicaps of poor facilities and out-of-date materials. The athletic department and other extracurricular groups made due on the barest of budgets and with the crudest of equipment. Students who strove for excellence in any area did so with the knowledge that the rest of Texas (and the larger United States, more generally) thought and cared little about the potential of their contributions. Despite these limitations, however, the African-American school system served a vital function in the black community. It provided a profession for educated members of the black middle class, an institutional focal point for community activities such as athletic events, and a positive learning environment where African-American students matured under the watchful eye of black authority figures.<sup>80</sup>

In this nurturing environment, Westbrook developed the public speaking skills that would serve him well throughout his life. Vivian Bryant, a black teacher and debate coach at Washington, recognized Westbrook's potential as a public speaker and pushed him to excel in debate. During his sophomore year in high school, Westbrook finished third among black high school students at the state debate competition, a result

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<sup>79</sup> Pennington, *Breaking the Ice*, 52-53.

<sup>80</sup> Adam Fairclough confirms the positive role played by black schools and teachers in the Jim Crow South. Facing tremendous discrimination, they laid the foundations of the black education system, began to pry open the doors of opportunity, and paved the way for the Civil Rights Movement in the mid-twentieth century. Dependent of the financial goodwill of the largely white public, these middle-class professionals did not challenge Jim Crow openly, but did play an important role in its ultimate defeat. Adam Fairclough, "Being in the Field of Education and Also Being a Negro ... Seems ... Tragic': Black Teachers in the Jim Crow South," *Journal of American History* 87.1 (2000): 65-97.

that matched his third-place finish in the state high jump competition that same year.<sup>81</sup> His public speaking skills also introduced him to the larger world beyond Texas. In 1964, as the State President of the Central Texas District Association of Student Councils, the sixteen year-old Westbrook earned a trip to Bangor, Maine, where he had a chance to experience life outside of the Jim Crow South. The trip marked a turning point in terms of racial awareness for the Texas youth because, as he later remembered, “for the first time in my life, I stayed in a home with somebody who was not black.” More importantly, he also sensed the lifting of the etiquette of race that dominated every day life in central Texas. Maine was “the first place I’ve ever been able to walk down the street and feel like no hostility and nobody looking down on me,” Westbrook later remembered. “I saw black girls and white boys and vice versa together and I said, ‘This is different. This is heaven.’”<sup>82</sup>

During his youth, the church pulpit also provided the forum for Westbrook to develop his public speaking skills. Ordained in the black church as a teenager, Westbrook came from a long line of preachers. On his father’s side, his great-grandfather, grandfather, and father, all served as ministers and so did his grandfather on his mother’s side. An experienced preacher by the time he finished high school, evangelical religion played a large role throughout Westbrook’s life.

With scholarship offers from Prairie View A&M, Texas Southern, and Southern University during his senior year of high school, Westbrook had the opportunity to follow a well-trodden path of talented young African Americans to the all-black colleges of the South. Opting for a different direction, he believed that a diploma from

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<sup>81</sup> T. Perry, “For Thou Art With Me (Part One),” The Official Site of Baylor Athletics, April 21, 2010, <http://www.baylorbears.com/sports/m-footbl/spec-rel/042110aah.html>.

<sup>82</sup> *Oral Memoirs of John Hill Westbrook*, 26-27; Pennington, *Breaking the Ice*, 53.



a more prestigious school like Baylor would be more valuable: “I figured in 1965, if I was going to compete in a world that was becoming more and more integrated I should go to an integrated college.”<sup>83</sup> As a bright young Baptist from Central Texas, Westbrook dreamed of going to Baylor in his youth. “I always wanted to come to Baylor even before I could come here,” he told the student newspaper during the spring of his freshman year.<sup>84</sup> In the end, academic considerations and the desegregation of the region’s universities drove his decision. Baylor was one of the few schools that offered a double major in his areas of interest. “I wanted to major in psychology and religion,” he remembered, “and the schools had opened up—and I thought about Baylor.”<sup>85</sup> The challenge of overcoming traditional barriers also factored into Westbrook’s decision as he found that not all members of the African-American community thought his efforts wise: “I had a lot of people...discourage me. A lot of black educated people who...said...I couldn’t make it coming from a [small] black school.”<sup>86</sup>

Over the objections of his father and others close to him who worried about the abuse he might face as well as the cost of attending a private school at his own expense, Westbrook enrolled at Baylor in the fall of 1965. None of the fanfare and publicity that accompanied LeVias’s arrival at SMU greeted Westbrook when he arrived in Waco. The idea that the poor African-American freshman, with few financial resources and only the dream of playing for the University’s football team, might integrate one of the great Southern college football conferences the following fall seemed apparent to no

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<sup>83</sup> Pennington, *Breaking the Ice*, 55.

<sup>84</sup> *Baylor Lariat*, 24 March 1966, pg. 4.

<sup>85</sup> *Oral Memoirs of John Hill Westbrook*, 33.

<sup>86</sup> *Oral Memoirs of John Hill Westbrook*, 35.

one. A visit with the football coaching staff and a positive report from their call to his high school solidified his chance to walk-on to the football team.<sup>87</sup> Westbrook's academic achievements and fine citizenship evidently impressed Coach Bridgers and his staff and convinced university administrators to give their blessing to the first attempt at the desegregation of the school's most prestigious extracurricular activity. Much like Jackie Robinson almost two decades earlier, and Jerry LeVias his contemporary, Baylor's first African American would not only need to be an outstanding athlete, but would also have to exhibit the character traits valued by the white middle class (even as a walk-on). Assistant coach Jack Thomas welcomed Westbrook to the team, "Well, you sound like the kind of guy we'd like to have break the ice here," but also warned him he would "have to walk...a tight line," and laid out some behavioral patterns for his success. "I think you know what I'm talking about," the assistant said, pointing to both men's shared awareness of the Southern etiquette of race. "You have to make good grades," Thomas told Westbrook, and added, "There are going to be a lot of people that are going to try to make you mad, deter you...and...watch yourself with the girls," warned the generally supportive assistant.<sup>88</sup>

As a small Southern Baptist campus in the heart of central Texas, Baylor University seemed an ideal place to take the next steps toward racial desegregation in Texas in the mid-1960s. A tight-knit community of the best and the brightest young

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<sup>87</sup> Westbrook first introduced himself to the Baylor coaching staff the summer before his senior year in high school when he walked, unannounced, into their offices and told assistants Jack Thomas and Clyde Hart that he hoped to enroll in school there and play on the football team. Westbrook said the two seemed surprised and impressed by his courage and even suggested that they would send a scout to Elgin to evaluate him during his senior season. Whatever their intentions at the time, however, no one on the Baylor staff made the trip to see him that next fall. As Bridgers later remembered, "We didn't pay much attention to him. We didn't even go down to Elgin to see him play." T. Perry, "For Thou Art With Me (Part One)."

<sup>88</sup> *Oral Memoirs of John Hill Westbrook*, 49-50.

Baptists from around Texas, the campus's faith in the mandates of Christian charity seemed to offer hope that Westbrook would find acceptance. "I thought it would be a little better ... since it was a Baptist institution," Westbrook said, explaining his thinking when he enrolled, "and I figured, well now, this ought to be the ideal place ..."<sup>89</sup> The presence of Bridgers as head coach also seemed to bode well for the young black freshman. In addition to being, by all accounts, a caring and compassionate man, Bridgers oversaw the desegregation of the Johns Hopkins University football team in 1956 when he coached Ernie Bates, the school's first African-American football player. As an assistant with the Baltimore Colts in 1957 and 1958, Bridgers also worked with a number of the Colts' African-American stars. The situation at Baylor then, while a first for the Southwest Conference, would not be a new one for the Baylor head coach.<sup>90</sup>

Unfortunately, these mitigating factors did little to improve the quality of Westbrook's Baylor experience. The decision to initiate racial change at Baylor came on November 1, 1963, when the University Board of Trustees (in a split vote) approved a committee report directing that, "neither race or color be a factor to be considered in the admission of qualified students to Baylor University."<sup>91</sup> Three weeks later, on November 23, the school's Athletic Council, led by University President Dr. Abner V. McCall (who also served as Baylor's faculty representative to the Southwest Conference) "announced [the] integration of all athletic teams."<sup>92</sup> In the spring of

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<sup>89</sup> Pennington, *Breaking the Ice*, 57.

<sup>90</sup> Pennington, *Breaking the Ice*, 62.

<sup>91</sup> *Waco Times-Herald*, 2 November 1963.

<sup>92</sup> *Waco Times-Herald*, 24 November 1963. Asked to comment on the implications of the announcement for Baylor football, Coach Bridgers said, "we don't know of any Negro athletes right now that we're interested in, but there may be some we will want to look at and investigate." Regarding the potential impact of black athletes on Southwest Conference football, Bridgers was less direct but still affirmed black athleticism. "I think the Southwest Conference has improved anyway since I've been here, and I

1964, the University officially accepted its first black students, although these five racial trailblazers on the nation's largest Baptist campus would all attend evening classes.<sup>93</sup> In the year and a half between the start of desegregation and Westbrook's arrival on campus, however, little real progress took place. One of only seven African Americans in a student body of nearly 7,000, Westbrook faced social isolation throughout his college years. While overt racial confrontations were rare at Baylor, the isolation of white students from any part of black life in Texas left most of them unable or unwilling to interact with the black students on campus. When Westbrook and his assigned roommate, African-American track athlete Charles Houston, failed to become friends, he found himself forced to adjust to the realities of his new campus life largely alone.<sup>94</sup> Looking back on his early experiences in Waco, Westbrook later reflected, "Maybe my expectations were too high."<sup>95</sup>

Things were hardly better at football practice. As a walk-on, Westbrook garnered little attention from a coaching staff more concerned with evaluating the athletic talent of its scholarship players. As a black man, he often faced hostility in the form of isolation from his teammates and harassment from assistant coaches. "The other freshmen treated me as if I were nonexistent," Westbrook remembered, "the coaches more or less the same."<sup>96</sup> "I would go out to practice by myself and come back mostly by myself. I started to quit the first day of football."<sup>97</sup> Despite being the third fastest athlete on the freshman team, he saw the field for only three minutes during their

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think it will continue to improve. Of course, there are some tremendous Negro athletes all over the country."

<sup>93</sup> *Waco Times-Herald*, 28 January 1964.

<sup>94</sup> Pennington, *Breaking the Ice*, 57-58.

<sup>95</sup> T. Perry, "For Thou Art With Me (Part One)."

<sup>96</sup> Pennington, *Breaking the Ice*, 58-59.

<sup>97</sup> T. Perry, "For Thou Art With Me (Part One)."

games that fall. Loneliness in the locker room compounded the outright racism some members of the coaching staff directed toward Westbrook. Hard-driving freshmen coach Milburn A. “Catfish” Smith, a Texas high school basketball and football coaching legend and product of an earlier generation, taunted Westbrook with the nickname “Sambo” as he pushed his team through vicious contact drills.<sup>98</sup> In the last seconds of one freshmen game, Smith rather cruelly ordered Westbrook to enter the game on offense and then watched as time expired before the black player could sprint to the huddle.<sup>99</sup> Evaluating his freshmen season with Smith later in life, Westbrook concluded that the deck had been stacked against him, “I don’t think Coach Smith ever had any intentions of playing me.”<sup>100</sup>

While the abusive treatment of some coaches dimmed Westbrook’s enthusiasm, his limited financial resources, coupled with the high costs of attending Baylor, posed the most serious threat to his future at the school. With a \$15 Parent Teacher Association scholarship his only financial aid during his freshman year, times proved particularly hard.<sup>101</sup> Suffering not only financially, but also from the scorn of his coaches and teammates, Westbrook received an unexpected boost when assistant coach

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<sup>98</sup> Pennington, *Breaking the Ice*, 58-59. Smith, who led high schools in Carey and Mount Vernon, Texas to football and basketball glory in the 1930s and 1940s, coached at East Texas State University from 1951 to 1953, where he guided the Lions to a 30-2-1 record that included a thirty-game winning streak and two births in the Tangerine Bowl, before joining Bridgers’ Baylor staff. Glen Olney, *Coach “Catfish” Smith and His Boys* (Santa Fe: Sunstone Press, 2004), 7-11.

<sup>99</sup> Pennington, *Breaking the Ice*, 58-59.

<sup>100</sup> T. Perry, “For Thou Art With Me (Part Two),” The Official Site of Baylor Athletics, April 23, 2010, <http://www.baylorbears.com/sports/m-footbl/spec-rel/042310aab.html>. Interestingly, Smith developed a warm, father-like relationship with many of his white players. Westbrook’s contemporary at Baylor, quarterback Ken Stockdale played on the Bear freshmen team two years before the program integrated and built a lifelong relationship with “Catfish” Smith. According to Stockdale, Smith played the strict, but compassionate, disciplinarian role to the hilt in building team camaraderie and inspiring his charges on the football field. “Catfish was more than just our freshmen coach. He was our dad away from home,” Stockdale later remembered. Ken Stockdale, *Southwest Conference Football: The Classic 60’s* (Shippensburg, PA: Companion Press, 1992), 44-52.

<sup>101</sup> *Oral Memoirs of John Hill Westbrook*, 34.

Gwinn E. Corley pulled him aside for a few words of encouragement at the end of his first season: “Big’un, don’t quit. We should have played you more. Come spring training, I want you to get out there and give it all you got.”<sup>102</sup>

By the spring of 1966, Westbrook needed to earn a scholarship to continue both his college education and his football career. He entered spring practices in prime physical condition and distinguished himself in drills and scrimmages on both sides of the ball. “I was hungry, I wanted that athletic scholarship,” the Elgin, Texas product later remembered.<sup>103</sup> Driven by his hunger, Westbrook emerged as a top-notch prospect during the Bears’ spring drills. The first time he carried the ball, he rushed for a sixty-yard touchdown. Over the course of the spring he averaged nine yards each time the offensive coaches called his number. Performing even better on the defensive side of the ball, Westbrook found himself scrimmaging with the first-team as a member of the starting defensive backfield. Nevertheless, several of the assistant coaches on Bridgers’ staff still opposed giving him a scholarship. Assistant Taylor McNeal, a native Mississippian, captured some of their attitudes toward the talented, new charge when he explained, “Now listen, Hoss, I’m from Mississippi. I hope that doesn’t bother you, because it doesn’t bother me. Now you know good and well, you’re gonna have to be twice as good as any of my ballplayers out here before you even sit the bench. . . . That’s just the facts of life.”<sup>104</sup> The assistant coach’s advice may have been intended to encourage and support Westbrook, but his explicit articulation of the double-standard pioneering black athletes faced at this time must have provided Westbrook little comfort as spring practices came to an end and his future hung in the balance. Only the willful

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<sup>102</sup> T. Perry, “For Thou Art With Me (Part Two).”

<sup>103</sup> T. Perry, “For Thou Art With Me (Part Two).”

<sup>104</sup> T. Perry, “For Thou Art With Me (Part Two).”

interdiction of Bridgers, who was motivated perhaps by a sense of social justice or, more likely, by a desire to win football games, overruled the desires of the coaching staff and secured a football scholarship for the deserving, soon-to-be sophomore who was also performing well in the classroom.<sup>105</sup> The head coach remarked to reporters: “I think he has the ability to be a good football player. I’d say that on the basis of spring practice, he’s been one of our more impressive boys.”<sup>106</sup>

As the 1966 football season opened, both SMU’s LeVias and Baylor’s Westbrook stood poised to integrate varsity football in the Southwest Conference. Through the intervention of fate and network television executives, it was Westbrook who received the honor. The Mustangs’ first game against the University of Illinois in Dallas, was initially scheduled for September 17—the same day Baylor would take on seventh-ranked Syracuse University at home in Waco. However, hoping to attract a big audience with an exciting intersectional matchup to kickoff the new campaign, executives from ABC approached officials at Baylor and Syracuse prior to the season about moving their game up a week. The game promised to pit the best team in the east against a top Southwest Conference program and showcase Syracuse coach Ben Swartzwalter’s high-powered rushing offense against Bridgers’ innovative Baylor passing attack.<sup>107</sup> When the two schools agreed to change the date, the lesser-known Westbrook suddenly had a chance to trump LeVias in the race to break the barrier. If Bridgers sent him into the game, on September 10, 1966 John Hill Westbrook of Elgin, Texas could become (as the *New York Times* later put it) “the first Negro to play in a

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<sup>105</sup> Pennington, *Breaking the Ice*, 62-63.

<sup>106</sup> T. Perry, “For Thou Art With Me (Part Two).”

<sup>107</sup> Ken Stockdale, *The Classic 60s*, 93; Perry, T., “For Thou Art With Me (Part Two).”

varsity football game for a member of the Southwest Conference.”<sup>108</sup>

By July, word of Westbrook’s strong spring performance and newly-elevated status in the Baylor program reached the mainstream press who reported that he might be the athlete to break the race barrier after conducting their preseason tour of conference football programs.<sup>109</sup> While LeVias was a known commodity—a great athlete of exemplary character in the drama of athletic desegregation—Westbrook stood as an outsider, an unknown variable in the momentous events about to take place. In a column titled “John The Baptist” a week before the start of the season, Roy Edwards assured his *Dallas Morning News* readers that “the Reverend John Hill Westbrook” fit neatly into the Jackie Robinson mold. The column started with Westbrook quoting one of his favorite biblical passages, Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8 (also the source of a recent number one hit by The Byrds, “Turn! Turn! Turn!”) “To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose.” Throughout the article, Edwards portrayed Westbrook as a fun-loving, scripture-quoting young man of “considerable natural wit and charm” who “came to Baylor on a ministerial scholarship ... and tried freshmen football as a volunteer.” As “a fourth-generation Baptist minister,” he seemed as ideal a fit for Baylor as the University was for him. “I wanted to go to a religious institution,” Westbrook told the writer, “... I’m of the Baptist faith ... I wanted to come here.” Just as importantly, Westbrook possessed the kind of athletic talent that might provide the Baylor program a needed boost, Edwards reported. According to the article, Bridgers praised the young man for his ability. “He is very strong,” the coach reported. “He can break tackles. He just runs right through them. He has very good balance and he has

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<sup>108</sup> *New York Times*, 11 September 1966, pg. 250.

<sup>109</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 7 July 1966, pg. B1



natural instincts to break for daylight.” Bridgers also vouched for the quality of his character to the writer: “He is a very easy boy to work with in every way.” His use of the term “boy” reveals where Westbrook (and no doubt most of Baylor’s white athletes) fit into the coach’s masculine hierarchy: “He is most co-operative and most appreciative of the opportunity to play. You couldn’t ask for a finer young man on a squad.” With his portrait of Westbrook as a non-threatening figure complete, Edwards ended his column by trying to conjure up The Byrds melody in his readers’ minds and by suggesting “a season when it is time for Baylor to win the Southwest Conference football championship.”<sup>110</sup> No doubt, many Baylor fans hoped he was right, but whether or not they shared his views on Westbrook and desegregation remained to be seen.

As 31,000 fans packed Baylor Stadium for the historic game, their attention focused more on the potential outcome of the season’s first major intersectional contest than on the any groundbreaking role Westbrook might play. As the national television audience prepared to enjoy the game being called by Chris Schenkel and Bud Wilkinson, a Baylor teammate approached Westbrook, put his arm around him, and proudly announced, “Our nigger is going to play better than theirs.”<sup>111</sup> The player was referencing Syracuse’s all-American back Floyd Little and while this piece of racially-inspired hyperbole proved inaccurate, the Bears did shock the nation by dominating the more heralded Orangemen on a pleasant September afternoon in Central Texas. Quarterback Terry Southall threw four touchdown passes and his backup, Ken Stockdale, added another on a fake field goal attempt as the Bears handed Syracuse

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<sup>110</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 2 September 1966, pg. B2.

<sup>111</sup> Pennington, *Breaking the Ice*, 63.

their worst defeat since a 41-19 drubbing by Boston University in 1954.<sup>112</sup>

In the middle of the fourth quarter, with the Bears leading 28-6 and the crowd calling for Westbrook, Bridgers made the decision to send him into the game. As the Elgin product trotted onto the field, the public address announcer, Baylor faculty member Dr. George Stokes tried to acknowledge the historical significance of the moment, but only managed the following poor pun: “Here’s another Baylor first: Colored football on colored television.”<sup>113</sup> Following the poor joke, Westbrook gained nine yards on his first play as the Bears pushed the ball deep into Syracuse territory and the color barrier in the Southwest Conference fell. Even as Westbrook’s run captured a symbolic victory for the forces of integration, Southern resistance manifested itself with a powerful symbol of its own. As Westbrook plunged into the Syracuse defense, an unreconstructed Baylor fan in the end zone unfurled the Confederate battle flag and offered a potent counterpoint to the apparent progress on the field.<sup>114</sup> A second two-yard gain by Westbrook gave his team a first down at the Orangemen’s 11-yard line, but

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<sup>112</sup> *New York Times*, 11 September 1966, pg. 250.

<sup>113</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 13 September 1966, pg. B2; Pennington, *Breaking the Ice*, 63. Stokes’ comment drew criticism from some members of the press already unhappy with the fact that Bear officials showed “surprising senselessness” by allowing a television camera to be setup in the middle of an already-crowded press box. *Dallas Morning News*, 12 September 1966, pg. B2. One of those sportswriters, Gary Cartwright of the *Dallas Morning News*, reported that “the crowd was not amused” by Stokes’ attempt at racial humor. *Dallas Morning News*, 13 September 1966, pg. B2. However, a Baylor alum, F. Baker Rudolph of Austin, wrote Cartwright the following week to register his disagreement with that fact. Signing his correspondence “Baylor ’63,” Rudolph suggested that “the presence of such an able competitor as a mere TV camera” clouded Cartwright’s judgment because “all the fans, both colored and white, loudly appreciated George Stokes’ introduction of John Westbrook into the SWC.” Cartwright’s tongue-in-cheek response to Rudolph: “That’s 1863, I presume.” *Dallas Morning News*, 24 September 1966, pg. B2. Stokes created another racial controversy on campus two years later when, during a basketball game, he referred to two black janitors sweeping the game floor as members of the Harlem Globetrotters. The “glib remarks” prompted four students to complain in a letter to the editor of the student newspaper that they “were shocked and repulsed” by the “thoughtless, inconsiderate, and unkind” comments. *Baylor Lariat*, 9 February 1968, pg. 2. Their letter, however, prompted another student to defend Stokes by criticizing their “attempt to get at a highly honored man’s good name.” In this writer’s opinion, neither “John Westbrook or the floor sweepers felt any ill-feeling toward the remark or toward Dr. Stokes” and it was the “outlandish quartet” that really deserved criticism. *Baylor Lariat*, 13 February 1968, pg. 2.

<sup>114</sup> *Austin American-Statesman*, 21 December 2000, p. A19.

that is where Westbrook's contribution to the drive ended. Like many other coaches in this early period of desegregation, the Baylor staff decided that an all-white lineup was the best strategy near the end zone. After Westbrook left the game, Southall completed his final touchdown pass, a ten-yarder to Bobby Green that sealed Baylor's 35-12 upset victory.<sup>115</sup>

As they filed out of the stadium, the significance of what they had just witnessed may have been lost on many of those in attendance. In fact, mainstream newspaper coverage of the game and other events of the day—such as stadium announcer Stokes's racially-tinged joke—suggested a general unwillingness to confront the more important implications of what took place.<sup>116</sup> Writing the following day in the *Austin American-Statesman*, Dick Collins provided more analysis than many of his counterparts in the region's press when he noted that, "Baylor, always a leader in passing among Southwest Conference schools, gained another first when... Westbrook... became the first Negro to play in the eight-team circuit."<sup>117</sup> Sam Blair, of the *Dallas Morning News*, made note of Westbrook's achievement, but kept his analysis focused mainly on the football field. The most significant development of the day, he argued, the one that might "prove ever so meaningful in the ultimate scheme of the Bears' football season,"

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<sup>115</sup> Pennington, *Breaking the Ice*, 63-64; *New York Times*, 11 September 1966, pg. 250.

<sup>116</sup> This was not a situation unique to this game, the period, or the region as a whole. As football historian Michael Oriard points out, during the period of the desegregation of Southern college sports, the mainstream press, campus presses, and the black press as well, all avoided an in-depth discussion of the momentous events taking place in their midst. According to Oriard, the need to integrate in order to remain competitive and the mandate to comply in the face of increasing pressure from the federal government, left Southern sportswriters without a story their largely white audiences were interested in reading. For the African-American press, the situation proved more complex. Recognizing the signal importance of desegregation, they also understood its negative impact on the football programs of the all-black colleges of the South, programs with which they maintained close ties. This ambiguity explains their silence in the face of accomplishments by Westbrook and the other gridiron pioneers of this period. Michael Oriard, *Bowled Over: Big-Time College Football from the Sixties to the BCS Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 65-67.

<sup>117</sup> T. Perry, "For Thou Art With Me (Part Two)."

was the unveiling of Westbrook as a potential contributor to Baylor's traditionally weak running game.<sup>118</sup> Still, especially for black Texans, the significance of that afternoon in Waco immediately loomed large. Watching the game from his aunt's living room in East Austin, a young African-American from Elgin swelled with pride and felt like running into the street and shouting about the accomplishment of his following Elginite.<sup>119</sup> For his part, Westbrook chose to align himself with those inclined to downplay the importance of the day's events. Asked about how he felt following the game, Westbrook commented, "I wasn't very nervous—no more so than in any other football game. The fact that I was the first Negro...had no significance. It didn't even cross my mind."<sup>120</sup> Addressing the importance of the game years later, Coach Bridgers discounted his own role in making Westbrook's accomplishment possible and insisted that he acted strictly in his own self-interest. "Sure I was aware of it. I knew he was the first black to play in the conference," the coach remembered, "but I was trying to survive, myself. I was trying to save my job, not make history."<sup>121</sup>

The victory over Syracuse earned Baylor a national ranking—the tenth spot in the Associated Press's first regular season poll. It also garnered Westbrook the attention of *Sports Illustrated*. In its annual college football issue that hit newsstands the week following the upset, the magazine noted, "Westbrook is one of the two Negroes playing varsity in the SWC this season," and described him as "a 9.6 type" who would "bear plenty of watching."<sup>122</sup> The Bears early season momentum suffered a

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<sup>118</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 12 September 1966, pg. B2.

<sup>119</sup> T. Perry, "For Thou Art With Me (Part One)."

<sup>120</sup> T. Perry, "For Thou Art With Me (Part Two)."

<sup>121</sup> Pennington, *Breaking the Ice*, 64.

<sup>122</sup> *Sports Illustrated*, 19 September 1966. Paradoxically, the same article described LeVias as "a 9.8 sprinter."

serious setback in their second game, however, when the Colorado Buffaloes traveled to Waco and handed them a 13-7 defeat. Once again seeing limited time on the field, Westbrook managed 13 yards on his two rushing attempts during the loss. In the games that followed, Westbrook's playing time and contributions to the team steadily increased. During the Bears third game of the season against Washington State in Spokane, Westbrook's fourth quarter touchdown provided the winning margin in a 20-14 Baylor victory.<sup>123</sup> The following week, the Bears opened conference play by traveling to the eastern-most campus in the conference and Westbrook received a strong dose of Southern football—Arkansas style. After enduring racial slurs as the team made their way through a mass of hostile Arkansas fans and into the stadium, Westbrook found himself not only battling a tough opponent, the reigning conference champs and winners of sixteen straight conference games, but also two powerful and enduring symbols of the old, slave South.<sup>124</sup> In the stands, the Confederate battle flag, long a part of the game day tradition in Arkansas, flew prominently throughout the crowd. Further still, throughout the game the Arkansas band played “Dixie” (the unofficial theme song of Razorback football) to rally the home crowd.<sup>125</sup> Westbrook and his teammates withstood the pressure and emerged triumphant. The Baylor defense proved impenetrable and Arkansas coach Frank Broyles made a late strategic blunder that gave the Bears a 7-0 victory. For his part, Westbrook gained 19 yards on five rushing attempts.

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<sup>123</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 2 October 1966, pg. G4; *New York Times*, 2 October 1966, pg. 219.

<sup>124</sup> T. Perry, “For Thou Art With Me (Part Three),” The Official Site of Baylor Athletics, April 25, 2010, <http://www.baylorbears.com/sports/m-footbl/spec-rel/042510aac.html>.

<sup>125</sup> On the role of Confederate traditions at University of Arkansas home football games see: Terry Frei, *Horns, Hogs, and Nixon Coming: Texas vs. Arkansas in Dixie's Last Stand* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 89, 174-176.

As Westbrook's actions on the field contributed to the Bears' successful early season, he found his standing in the Baylor community improving. "There was a certain amount of respect gained. It was played up that I was a Christian and a minister," he remembered. "A lot of people started inviting me to speak in churches."<sup>126</sup> Just like other African-American athletes in the era of desegregation, Westbrook experienced a direct connection between success on the field and acceptance off it. To be sure, his ability to project a safe, wholesome persona proved an essential part of the process.<sup>127</sup> As an individual of stout Christian faith and an ordained minister, the successful young athlete fit in well on Baylor's Southern Baptist campus and it appeared that racial change in athletics was off to a successful start in Waco. According to Westbrook, he received many letters during the season from fans and supporters and all of them were complimentary. He also praised his opponents for their fair treatment and encouragement on the field, telling the press: "I don't know how I could be treated better by opposing players."<sup>128</sup> Unfortunately, Westbrook's football career at Baylor reached its zenith in October 1966; as his contributions to Baylor football glory diminished afterwards, so did his standing in the eyes of many in the Baylor community.

When Baylor faced Texas Christian on October 29 in Fort Worth, the TCU "defense muffled Baylor's high powered offense" in a 6-0 win, but Westbrook seemed

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<sup>126</sup> T. Perry, "For Thou Art With Me (Part Three)."

<sup>127</sup> Here, again, Westbrook's experience was not atypical. In analyzing contemporary discussion of the careers of black athletes integrating Southeastern Conference football just a few years later, Oriard finds the stereotypical image of "good Negroes" emphasized throughout. Mainstream sports journalism in the period "created a single undifferentiated, appealing—nonthreatening—black figure" to serve as a racial pioneer who broke down barriers on the football field, but who respected Southern racial etiquette in all other situations. Oriard, *Bowled Over*, 67-69.

<sup>128</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 20 December 1966, pg. B7. Westbrook did finally receive a "derogatory letter" toward the end of the year. The unsigned letter arrived from Tampa, Florida and advised Westbrook that, "We don't need Negroes in southern schools."

on the verge of a breakout performance on the field.<sup>129</sup> When starting halfback Richard Defee suffered an injury, Westbrook replaced him and carried the ball six times for 32 yards. He also made a spectacular play on a reverse, acrobatically avoiding several defenders and turning what looked like a sure loss into a seven-yard gain. “I’ve never seen a greater seven-yard run than he made on that reverse,” Bridgers said after the game. “He actually shed about five tacklers and two of them had him stood up ten yards behind the line. I feel he has tremendous possibilities as a running back.”<sup>130</sup> Doyle Johnson, a lineman on the Horned Frogs defense, was equally impressed with Westbrook’s performance that day: “Westbrook is hard to tackle, he’s strong. He’s the best running back I’ve seen this year.”<sup>131</sup> Unfortunately, Westbrook’s biggest gain of the day, a 14-yard sweep on his final carry, ended with a powerful blow from a TCU defender and a serious knee injury. The play marked a fundamental turning point in Westbrook’s Baylor experience. The budding young star increasingly became an often-injured minor contributor on the playing field and a, once again, marginalized member of the larger Baylor community off it. Sitting out the next two games, Westbrook tried to return in mid-November against LeVias and SMU, but re-injured his knee on a 28-yard pass reception that proved to be his final play of the 1966 season. Despite ligament and cartilage damage, Baylor’s medical staff advised against surgery and Westbrook spent the winter hoping the knee would heal on its own. By the first day of spring practice in 1967, however, it was obvious to all that it had not and Westbrook and his doctors finally opted for surgery to repair the damage.<sup>132</sup> The rest of

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<sup>129</sup> *Daily Oklahoman*, 30 October 1966, pg. 41.

<sup>130</sup> T. Perry, “For Thou Art With Me (Part Three).”

<sup>131</sup> Pennington, *Breaking the Ice*, 66.

<sup>132</sup> Pennington, *Breaking the Ice*, 66-67; T. Perry, “For Thou Art With Me (Part Three).”

Westbrook's athletic career at Baylor failed to fulfill the potential he demonstrated in the spring and early fall of 1966.

As the 1967 season approached, Westbrook's limitations were not yet apparent and preseason speculation on campus held that Westbrook might start at halfback.<sup>133</sup> Hampered by the recovering knee throughout 1967, he sat on the bench and watched his team lose its first two games. Finally healthy enough to play in the Bears' home opener against Washington State on October 7, Westbrook turned in one of the best performances of his Baylor years. Rushing for sixty-four yards on twelve carries, he helped propel the Bears to a 10-7 win that proved their only victory of the season. Westbrook's critical fumble recovery on a third quarter Cougar punt return setup his team's winning score—a twenty-one yard touchdown pass—one play later. The performance impressed Bridgers, especially given Westbrook's long absence from the team. "The fact (that) he ... was effective was surprising," Bridgers told the editor of the student newspaper. "It has almost been a full year since he played football." Westbrook's return boosted the confidence of Bear fans and gave them hope that their struggling offense might be improving. "Westbrook has got some moves you don't coach," Bridgers said.<sup>134</sup> Assessing Westbrook's value to the Baylor team, the *Dallas Morning News* reported that, "Thanks to the return of their Negro scooter, John Westbrook, they had a measure of (rushing) success."<sup>135</sup> With his knee still not at full strength, Westbrook played in the Bears' next three games, one of them a 10-10 tie against Arkansas in Waco and Baylor's only other non-loss in a 1-8-1 season. However, he missed the final four games of the season after suffering a serious

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<sup>133</sup> *Baylor Lariat*, 1 September 1967, pg. 4.

<sup>134</sup> *Baylor Lariat*, 10 October 1967, pg. 4.

<sup>135</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 8 October 1967, pg. B4.



concussion on the practice field.

The possibility of serious injury is at the heart of the game of football, but for the African-American athletes who helped desegregate college football, the threat of injury often became a reality as opponents, teammates, and coaches (uncomfortable with their presence) often lashed out with physical violence.<sup>136</sup> In Westbrook's case, the attitudes of Baylor's assistant coaching staff sometimes turned the practice field into a racial battleground. During his junior season, Westbrook felt especially targeted by recent graduate and first-year assistant Ramsey Muñiz, a Hispanic law school student from Corpus Christi, Texas. Interestingly, Muñiz later became an important figure in the Chicano Movement and ran for Governor of Texas twice as the candidate of the La Raza Unida Party.<sup>137</sup> Perhaps as a racial outsider himself, Muñiz overcompensated in his attempts to win the allegiance of his players and fellow coaches. He "would tell

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<sup>136</sup> Scholars have given much attention to the most infamous examples of early black athletes who experienced racially inspired violence on the playing field. In 1923, after a game in which opponents at the University of Minnesota targeted him, Iowa State's Jack Trice first received poor medical attention in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area and then, after returning to Ames by train that night, died of internal injuries the following day. John Sayle Watterson, *College Football: History Spectacle Controversy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 309; Donald Spivey, "End Jim Crow in Sports': The Protest at New York University, 1940-1941," *Journal of Sport History* 15.3 (1988): 290-291. In 1951, Drake's Johnny Bright suffered a broken jaw that ended his college playing career in a game with Oklahoma A&M (now Oklahoma State) in Stillwater. Pulitzer Prize-winning photos of the incident taken by a reporter from the *Des Moines Register* and eventually published in *Life Magazine*, demonstrated that an Aggie lineman, far away from the play, deliberately assaulted Bright with a blow to the face. Neither the player nor Oklahoma A&M received a penalty from the Missouri Valley Conference, but the incident produced outrage across the country and Drake temporarily left the conference in protest. Michael Oriard, *King Football: Sport and Spectacle in the Golden Age of Radio and Newsreels, Movies and Magazines, the Weekly & the Daily Press* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 299-300; Martin, *Benching Jim Crow*, 74-75; Watterson, *College Football*, 273-274.

<sup>137</sup> Muñiz remains a controversial and politically active figure today. Since 1994, he has been serving a life sentence in the federal penal system for three felony drug convictions. Like many radical political leaders of the late-1960s and early-1970s, Muñiz blurred the line between conscientious political protest and illegal personal activities. First convicted on drug charges in 1976, he became the target of a Drug Enforcement Agency sting in the Dallas suburb of Lewisville in 1994. Federal agents alleged that the Baylor law school graduate and once respected civil rights attorney tried to facilitate the sale of thirty-nine kilograms of cocaine. Some of Muñiz's former associates in the Chicano movement believe the government's account, but a strong contingent contends that his arrests amounted to a political move designed to silence and discredit the voice of an influential critic. "Ramsey Muñiz," *Texas Monthly*, November 2002.

guys to try and kill me in practice,” Westbrook reported. “He said he wanted to see what I was made of.”<sup>138</sup> In practice the week following a 21-3 Bears’ loss to Texas A&M in College Station (during a particularly viscous contact drill led by Muñiz) it was a blow to the head from a teammate that left Westbrook dazed and delivered the concussion that effectively ended his 1967 season.

Muñez was not the only member of the coaching staff who seemed to target Westbrook. “Some of the assistant coaches confessed after my graduation, they tried hard to run me off...they admitted they taunted me,” Westbrook later remembered.<sup>139</sup> In his opinion, his relationship with the coaching staff particularly soured after his sophomore season knee injury. “I think most of the coaches turned against me, especially Coach Jack Thomas. He just flat out told me that he thought I was on a gravy train. That now I just wanted a free trip.”<sup>140</sup> The antagonism Westbrook faced from the Baylor football staff extended all the way to the equipment manager who did his best to make sure that the Bears’ first black player faced the challenges of integration with shoddy equipment. “I got bad equipment constantly,” Westbrook recalled, and “he was always telling dirty ‘Rastus’ stories expecting me to laugh.” On one of the darkest days in African-American history—the day of Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination—the equipment manager openly joked that “they finally killed Martin Luther Coon” in the young black athlete’s presence.<sup>141</sup> In addition to enduring these indignities throughout his career at Baylor, Westbrook also found his playing time limited by coaches, such as Bears’ backfield coach Pete McCulley—a native of

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<sup>138</sup> T. Perry, “For Thou Art With Me (Part Three).”

<sup>139</sup> T. Perry, “For Thou Art With Me (Part Three).”

<sup>140</sup> T. Perry, “For Thou Art With Me (Part Three).”

<sup>141</sup> T. Perry, “For Thou Art With Me (Part Three).”

Mississippi and later coach of the San Francisco 49ers—with a racially motivated agenda. As his position coach, McCulley most often made the decision about which running backs to send into the game and his bias against Westbrook frequently left the Elgin product on the bench. “I don’t think he (McCulley) ever had any love for me at all,” Westbrook later speculated, “I don’t think he particularly wanted me to play.”<sup>142</sup> For his part, Westbrook felt like he only played when Bridgers went above the assistant coaches’ heads and inserted himself. In doing so, he created hostility between himself and his staff. “Bridgers must have been under some tremendous pressure . . . He was a very fair man,” Westbrook remembered. “I’m positive that some of the assistant coaches used his attitudes toward me to start dissension among the other players.”<sup>143</sup>

In addition to the antagonisms of assistant coaches, Westbrook also endured hatred and ostracism within the larger Baylor community. Anonymous threats and hate mail frequently arrived, including one letter from a particularly ribald segregationist: “A Big Baylor Supporter,” who advised Westbrook “Niggers ought to stay in the cotton fields” when offering his opinion of racial integration.<sup>144</sup> Perhaps the most difficult thing to face, however, was the everyday reality of isolation and exclusion on campus. Westbrook remembered that, “Most of the students weren’t overly antagonistic. But most just looked through me as I walked across campus.” When some did pay attention, Westbrook felt they “acted like black was catching” and tried their best to stay away from him: “In the cafeteria, they’d watch where I picked up my silverware from the tray, then reach clear across to take theirs from the other side. All the little

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<sup>142</sup> T. Perry, “For Thou Art With Me (Part Two).”

<sup>143</sup> Pennington, *Breaking the Ice*, 68-69.

<sup>144</sup> T. Perry, “For Thou Art With Me (Part Three).”

cuts like this began to fester.”<sup>145</sup>

On top of the pressures of life on campus, Westbrook also contended with being a public figure in the age of young black athletic rebellion. With his football career in decline, he found comfort and success in two familiar areas: the classroom and as a public speaker. At the height of the radical 1960s and the black power movement, Westbrook emerged as an outspoken advocate for black issues on campus. Confronting the controversial topics of the time directly, he talked about race relations in a manner that probably outraged some, but that stopped short of a radical stance.

In February 1968, Westbrook appeared as a speaker at the Wednesday evening Baylor Religious Hour where he addressed what he called “the three evils with which the white man surrounds the Negro ... segregation ... discrimination ... and stereotyping.” According to a front-page report in the student newspaper, Westbrook told his audience “he had experienced all three” at Baylor, but that “his Christian faith” allowed him to endure. Addressing the issues of the day, he tried to put black rebellion into a context his predominantly white, middle-class audience could understand. “If I hadn’t known anything about Christ, I would have probably revolted,” he explained to his audience. “You can only put so much water in a cup.”<sup>146</sup>

Two months later, in the aftermath of the King assassination, Westbrook continued his campus political involvement by joining in a fundraising drive to create a

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<sup>145</sup> T. Perry, “For Thou Art With Me (Part Three).”

<sup>146</sup> *Baylor Lariat*, 8 February 1968, pg. 1. Westbrook got the opportunity to speak that evening when Hector Grant the chaplain of Paul Quinn College cancelled. Interestingly, in his talk, Westbrook accepted “segregation, or the denial of the right to belong,” and “discrimination, or the denial of the right to have,” and only challenged “stereotyping, or the denial of the right to be.” As he put it, “It’s all right to deny me the right to belong or to have, but you can’t deny me the right to be.” The one thing all people shared, Westbrook argued, was a common “Creator.” “God made me; therefore, I have a right to be.” While Westbrook emerged as an outspoken critic of the state of race relations in Baptist Central Texas, he remained far from a black power radical and, in this case at least, hesitated to even fully endorse the goals of the Civil Rights Movement.

scholarship fund in memory of the slain leader. Students worked across racial lines in hopes of raising \$10,000 to establish a fund that would “offer a Negro student an opportunity ... denied him because of economic, not academic reasons” and “provide ... Baylor ... members of diversified backgrounds who have varied ideas.” In the aftermath of the assassination and as part of the fundraising effort, Westbrook encouraged everyone to remember their common humanity. “Every man is part of the mainland,” he told the student newspaper. “No matter how the world is divided, it is still one world.”<sup>147</sup>

As his scholastic career progressed, Westbrook continued to involve himself further in campus academics and politics. He joined (and later served as president of) Baylor’s chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the national English fraternity. Late in his junior year, he was appointed to the student government’s Fall Honor Council for the following semester.<sup>148</sup> In May 1968, he participated in a panel discussion on campus sponsored by the Students for Social Action titled “Dialogue in Black and White.”<sup>149</sup> Robert L. Gilbert, who in 1967 had become Baylor’s first African-American graduate, joined Westbrook and his fellow panelists and both discussed their experiences at Baylor to “a racially-mixed group of students and teachers.” The two black men did not hold back and explained to their audience that they had encountered “both open hostility ... and a condescending attitude” from their white counterparts on campus. Westbrook proved the most outspoken member of the panel and his message was a strong call for racial equality. He challenged whites who accepted the current racial status quo and who told blacks “if my daddy made it, so can yours.” “That’s stupid,” he

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<sup>147</sup> *Baylor Lariat*, 16 April 1968, pg. 3.

<sup>148</sup> *Baylor Lariat*, 30 April 1968, pg. 1; *Baylor Lariat*, 26 April 1968, pg. 1.

<sup>149</sup> *Baylor Lariat*, 6 May 1968, pg. 2; *Baylor Lariat*, 7 May 1968, pg. 1.

said emphatically. “Your daddy had a chance that mine didn’t.” Against those who charged blacks with laziness and indolence, he argued that his race did not want “a handout,” but only “a chance.” Westbrook and Gilbert also noted to their audience the growing influence of Black Nationalism and “a trend on the part of Negroes not to be ashamed of their color and natural Negro characteristics.” That said, Westbrook assured the conservative Baylor community that the “trend” toward the use of terms such as “black or Afro-Americans” was, in his opinion, “stupid.”<sup>150</sup>

In the summer before his senior season, Westbrook and Ron Churchill, a white student at Ft. Worth’s Southwestern Baptist seminary, led a youth revival at the 4,500-member Gaston Avenue Baptist Church in Dallas. Tracked down by reporter Roy Edwards of the *Dallas Morning News* and asked to comment on the proposed boycott of the 1968 Summer Olympics—as well as other examples of radical black activism encroaching onto the playing fields of America—Westbrook steered a careful course.<sup>151</sup> He assured Edwards and his readers that he was no radical and that, while he would like to see some changes, he preferred to work for them from safely inside the system.

“There are two ways to rebel,” Westbrook explained to Edwards, “You can get on the

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<sup>150</sup> *Baylor Lariat*, 7 May 1968, pg. 1.

<sup>151</sup> In 1968, the Olympic Project for Human Rights, a small group led by Harry Edwards a young Cornell PhD and sociology professor at San Jose State, organized a black athletic boycott of the impending Olympic Games in Mexico City. The boycott movement grew and eventually focused on the high-profile African-American members of the U.S. track team. Because the Olympic Games represented the pinnacle of achievement for these track stars, the boycott movement itself collapsed, but sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos created one of the most iconic images in the history of sport with their black power salute on the 200-meter victory stand in October 1968. Harry Edwards, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete* (New York: Free Press, 1969); Douglas Hartmann, *Race, Culture, and the Black Athlete: The 1968 Olympic Protests and Their Aftermath* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle: The 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Donald Spivey, “Black Consciousness and Olympic Protest Movement, 1964-1980,” in *Sport in America: New Historical Perspectives*, ed. Donald Spivey (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 239-262; David K. Wiggins, “‘The Year of Awakening’: Black Athletes, Racial Unrest, and the Civil Rights Movement of 1968,” *International Journal of the History of Sport* 9.2 (1992): 188-208.

outside and criticize and tear down ... Or you can remain on the inside and work your best ... and then reconstruct and rebuild from the inside.”<sup>152</sup>

In considering his own situation, Westbrook told Edwards that his Baylor experience “hasn’t been peaches and cream” and that some refused to see him as anything more than “an ol’ colored boy.” “There are lots of things you can feel—you can feel coldness and indifference,” Westbrook continued. “It’s real easy to get angry if you want to sit down and think.” Despite the imperfect situation, Westbrook stressed his continued loyalty to American ideals and the nation they represented. I “wouldn’t go so far as to say America is not my country,” Westbrook told Edwards, referencing basketball player Lew Alcindor’s recent explanation of his decision not to represent the United States in Olympic competition.<sup>153</sup> “I was born here. It’s my home. It’s as simple as that.” While stressing his loyalty and patriotism, Westbrook, at the same time, identified himself with the rising spirit of Black Nationalism resurging in the African-American community: “My ancestors came from Africa, and I feel a kinship to black people in Africa and everywhere. There’s something about being black that sets us apart.” Pulled in competing directions by the integrationist dream and separatists’ call for black nationhood, Westbrook decided that some of the tactics of radical black

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<sup>152</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 24 July 1968, pg. B2.

<sup>153</sup> On basketball great Lew Alcindor’s important role in the boycott protest movement see: John Matthew Smith, “‘It’s Not Really My Country’: Lew Alcindor and the Revolt of the Black Athlete,” *Journal of Sport History* 36.2 (2009): 223-244. Smith argues that, “as the most dominant and publicized college athlete of the time, Alcindor’s role legitimized the movement.” As the first major college star to speak out against American racism, Alcindor also helped shift the emphasis within the black athletic rebellion from the few, outspoken professional athletes to a much larger group of college athletes on campuses around the country. Ultimately, Alcindor conducted his own personal boycott of the Olympics and did not play for the U.S. basketball team. Unlike the stars of the American track team, however, Alcindor looked forward to the possibility of a long and successful career in professional basketball and the Olympics did not represent his highest possible athletic achievement.

power leaders went too far and that for him a more moderate course was appropriate.<sup>154</sup>

“I’m not going to rebel,” he said. “I am ... [going] to try to bridge some of the gap. I think some of my black brothers go about it a different way. ... The good comes with the bad. I wish maybe some of the other black athletes could think this way.”

Rejecting the path of open rebellion, Westbrook reiterated his desire to adopt the goals of integration and gradual change, telling Edwards that he would “stay on the inside, changing minds, creating areas of trust” and building on “faith, our Christian heritage and the brotherhood of man.”<sup>155</sup>

By his senior season, Westbrook seemed more focused on completing his degree than on duplicating the physical conditioning that allowed him to crack the Baylor lineup as a sophomore. Out-of-shape and still suffering from the lingering effects of the knee injury two years earlier, he only played sparingly and mainly on special teams during his final year. Westbrook’s last game at Baylor turned out to be the end of Coach Bridgers’ ten-year tenure at the school as well. On the Friday before the 2-7 Bears met winless Rice in the season finale, the University let the innovative coach know that he would not be back for the following season. Bridgers’ high-octane passing offense produced tremendous statistics and garnered some big wins during his first eight seasons at Baylor. In the era before bowl game proliferation, Bridgers took the team to three post-season contests his first five years on campus; but with only two Southwest Conference wins in the last two seasons, the Baylor administration decided to move in another direction. For his part, Westbrook felt that Bridgers’ firing resulted

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<sup>154</sup> On the long struggle between the integrationist and separatist impulses in African-American history, from the antebellum rivalry between Frederick Douglass and Alexander Crummel to conflicts among modern rap musicians, see: Dax-Devlon Ross, *The Nightmare and the Dream: Nas, Jay-Z and the History of Conflict in African-American Culture* (Jersey City, NJ: Outside the Box Publishing, 2008).

<sup>155</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 24 July 1968, pg. B2.



(at least partially) from his decision to allow a black player to integrate his program and the opposition it aroused among his assistants. “They used his attitude toward me to stir up dissention among the players,” Westbrook later suggested. “I’m positive the reason we didn’t win a lot of games was not...Coach John Bridgers...it was people on his staff who were not committed to him and stirred up players to be against him.”<sup>156</sup> Bridgers demonstrated his commitment to Westbrook during their final season by trying to secure proper medical attention for his knee injury. “I would like to see you go to Houston or somewhere and get the best treatment...,” he told him. “I don’t want you to feel that we’ve used you and now we don’t care about you.”<sup>157</sup> Bridgers’ dismissal ended his ability to help Westbrook find better medical treatment at Baylor’s expense. The University’s first black football player would leave school with an injury that would affect his quality of life going forward.

As fate would have it, Bridgers and Westbrook’s final game took place on a rainy, sleet-filled, afternoon in front of a minuscule crowd (official reports put the crowd at between 2,500 and 4,000 fans), with purportedly “the smallest attendance at a Southwest Conference game in years.”<sup>158</sup> After “a listless first half,” Baylor rallied to give their departing coach a 10-7 lead with five minutes to go in the final quarter.<sup>159</sup> As the wet, freezing weather drove all but the hardiest fans home, the few remaining watched as Bridgers inserted Westbrook into the game for the final drive of their Baylor careers. Although rarely carried the ball that season, Westbrook responded by gaining

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<sup>156</sup> T. Perry, “For Thou Art With Me (Part Four),” The Official Site of Baylor Athletics, April 26, 2010, <http://www.baylorbears.com/sports/m-footbl/spec-rel/042610aab.html>.

<sup>157</sup> T. Perry, “For Thou Art With Me (Part Four).”

<sup>158</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 1 December 1968, pg. C9. According to Thomas E. Turner of the *Dallas Morning News*, the crowd was even smaller. “A few hundred hardy fans huddled in the near-freezing dripping gloom during the first half, but most of them fled” at the intermission, Turner reported. *Dallas Morning News*, 1 December 1968, pg. B1.

<sup>159</sup> *Daily Oklahoman*, 1 December 1968, pg. 38; Pennington, *Breaking the Ice*, 72-73.

25 yards on five attempts, including a slashing fourteen-yard gain to the Rice 4-yard line. On his final play, Westbrook burst up the middle a four-yard touchdown—the second touchdown of his career—as Baylor drove 96-yards to seal the 16-7 victory. The Bears carried Bridgers off the field on their shoulders. Pioneers in the desegregation of Southwest Conference football, the coach and the player ended a frustrating two years with a few moments of triumph in the cold, nearly-empty Baylor stadium.<sup>160</sup>

Compared to other triumphant stories of racial change in college athletics, Westbrook’s Baylor experience was lacking in both dramatic turning points and tales of grudgingly won acceptance. It began and ended with isolation, frustration, and disappointment. As Westbrook saw it, it was “four of the most miserable years of my life.”<sup>161</sup> Facing overt antagonism from members of the coaching staff and a mix of ostracism and indifference from the larger Baylor community, Westbrook nevertheless accomplished his academic goals when he graduated with a degree in English in 1969. More than anything else, he was happy to be leaving: “I wanted to put it behind me as much as possible.”<sup>162</sup> A young man of stout Christian faith, Westbrook found the rebuff of his fellow believers on the Southern Baptist campus especially painful.

In the end, Westbrook triumphed on his own terms. After graduation, he won a position on the national staff of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes where he toured campuses speaking about his life and faith. A man of principle throughout his professional career, Westbrook resigned from the organization when his superiors asked

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<sup>160</sup> Pennington, *Breaking the Ice*, 73; *New York Times*, 1 December 1968, pg. S3; *Washington Post*, 1 December 1968, pg. M12; *Dallas Morning News*, 1 December 1968, pg. B1; *Dallas Morning News*, 3 December 2006, pg. C2.

<sup>161</sup> Perry, T., “For Thou Art With Me (Part Four).”

<sup>162</sup> Pennington, *Breaking the Ice*, 75.

him to tone down the racial component of his presentations. In the summer of 1970, professional football's Cincinnati Bengals thought enough of the Baylor backup's talent to invite him to their preseason training camp. Westbrook's football career officially ended early in the camp. In mid-July, Bengals' coach Paul Brown released him along with six other players.<sup>163</sup> With the encouragement and support of key Baylor faculty members, he then attended graduate school at Southwest Missouri State College in Springfield, Missouri. There, he earned a masters degree in English while also leading an innovative tutoring program for struggling students. After leaving Springfield, Westbrook worked on the national staff of the Southern Baptist Convention where he traveled to West Africa and toured the U.S. with the Reverend Billy Graham. In 1973, Westbrook won appointment to the Board of Directors of Ministry to Blacks in Higher Education. After which, he took on another innovative role when Bridgers, now the athletic director at Florida State University, hired him as the director of academic counseling for the Seminoles' athletic programs. "John has presented a great many ideas ... I think he could bring a whole new concept to academic counseling for athletes," Bridgers told the press when announcing the hire.<sup>164</sup> As an advisor, Westbrook worked to help Seminole athletes succeed academically; however, when the coaching staffed pushed him to try to convince professors to inflate grades, he resigned on principle following his first year. Returning to Texas, Westbrook returned to his roots in other ways and began preaching in the small Baptist churches of Central and East Texas. Eventually, he secured a permanent position when he became the pastor of the True Vine Baptist Church in Tyler, Texas—a church he would lead for the next four

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<sup>163</sup> *Chicago Defender*, 16 July 1970, pg. 38.

<sup>164</sup> *Atlanta Daily World*, 10 June 1973, pg. 6.

years.<sup>165</sup>

While serving as a minister in Tyler, Westbrook entered politics. In the summer of 1977, he announced his candidacy in the following year's Democratic primary for lieutenant governor. Westbrook launched a populist campaign and began travelling throughout Texas in an attempt to defeat the incumbent, Democrat William P. "Bill" Hobby, scion of a prominent Houston political family that owned the *Houston Post*. Hobby, whose father served as governor of Texas from 1917 to 1921, was the establishment candidate and clear favorite, but Westbrook's campaign won the respect of Texas progressives and the ringing endorsement of the *Texas Observer*. "Lieutenant Governor Bill Hobby...is not the best of the lot," the periodical opined as it evaluated the Democratic field. "That distinction belongs to John Hill Westbrook—an intelligent, articulate, issue-oriented populist... [who] has won ovations for his thoughtful, straightforward stands for the little people of Texas." Making a realistic evaluation, the *Observer* recognized that "Westbrook will not win this time around," but assured their readers they could hold their heads high knowing they would be voting for "the best man running in 1978 for any statewide office."<sup>166</sup> In the Democratic primary, Westbrook surprised the party establishment by winning 23% of the statewide vote and finishing second to Hobby in a four-way race. More than 277,000 Democratic voters picked the pioneering Baylor athlete in the primary election; foreshadowing the growing weakness of the Democratic establishment in Texas and setting the stage for a historic shift from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party among the Texas

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<sup>165</sup> Perry, T., "For Thou Art With Me (Part Four)."

<sup>166</sup> Perry, T., "For Thou Art With Me (Part Four)."

electorate that fall.<sup>167</sup>

The year following the election, Westbrook accepted an offer to lead the historic Antioch Baptist Church in downtown Houston. Founded in 1876, the church struggled with roughly 600 members when Westbrook took over the pulpit. Under his leadership, however, it developed a vibrant downtown ministry and grew to more than 3,500 members.<sup>168</sup> Unfortunately, as the hard work of building a career and raising a family occupied his time, Westbrook neglected his physical conditioning and his weight soon reached three hundred pounds. John Hill Westbrook died suddenly of blood clots in his lungs on December 10, 1983—he had just turned thirty-six years old.

If he had accomplished more on the football field, perhaps Westbrook would have found greater acceptance at Baylor. According to several African-American stars of the generation that followed Westbrook, racism played little if any role in their college experiences.<sup>169</sup> It seems that athletic stardom had the power to dissolve racial attitudes on an individual level, but in its absence, old prejudices endured. Dr. Abner V. McCall, Baylor's president during Westbrook's years, felt that race had little to do with Westbrook's limited playing time. "John wasn't that good a player . . .," McCall said, "Bridgers deliberately used . . . [him] beyond his capabilities because he wanted to set a precedent and make a Christian point."<sup>170</sup> While McCall's assessment runs counter to Bridgers' assertion that his highest priority was winning games, it is revealing. In the

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<sup>167</sup> In the 1978 Texas gubernatorial race, Republican William P. "Bill" Clements narrowly defeated the sitting State Attorney General, and future Texas Supreme Court Chief Justice, Democrat John Luke Hill. The election made Clements the first Republican governor in Texas since Edmund J. Davis left office during the final days of Reconstruction in 1874.

<sup>168</sup> Perry, T., "For Thou Art With Me (Part Four)."

<sup>169</sup> Commenting on his experiences at the University of Oklahoma in 1973 and 1974, defensive star Tony Peters said, "I think our success on the athletic field did a lot to reduce racial tensions on the campus. I never saw any evidence of racial problems when I was a student." Stephen H. Norwood, *Real Football: Conversations on America's Game* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2004), 293-294.

<sup>170</sup> Pennington, *Breaking the Ice*, 73.

early stages of desegregation, an individual with superior athletic talent, like Jerry LeVias, might experience a measure of genuine acceptance, while those with marginal skills, like Westbrook—at least according to President McCall—had to rely on Christian charity.

By the mid-1970s, Baylor and its fellow Southwest Conference members allowed significant numbers of African-American athletes to compete as equal participants within the meritocratic boundaries of the college football gridiron. While old prejudices and stereotypes endured, the social isolation and racial discrimination confronting John Westbrook off the field began to recede and growing numbers of black players earned a measure of acceptance in the mainstream. In the mid- to late-1960s, however, these gains were almost a decade away. As Westbrook's football career demonstrates, old attitudes bore a heavy burden, particularly on those unable to earn distinction on the field. At the same time, the recruiting and signing of Jerry LeVias by SMU suggested the possibility of change. For years, student editorialists, African-American sportswriters, and other racial progressives dreamed of a day when a supremely talented black athlete would emerge as a major star in the Southwest Conference. In the fall of 1966, LeVias was poised to do just that. The dreamers hoped that such an event would fundamentally change racial attitudes in the region. The reality was not so positive—or so simple.

## Chapter Four

### A Black Star in the Southwest Conference: The Triumph and the Torment of

#### Jerry LeVias

Jerry LeVias' career at SMU demonstrated both the potential of African Americans to change the game on the field and the deep-seated resistance such change ultimately faced in the Southwest Conference. Unlike John Westbrook at Baylor, LeVias made a dramatic impact on the playing field and forced college football fans throughout Texas and Arkansas to confront the new realities of a desegregated game.<sup>1</sup> Throughout his award-winning college football career, LeVias demonstrated the dramatic talent elite black athletes could bring to southwestern college football as he played a key role in reviving the fortunes of one of the region's most storied football programs. As he did, his successes forced fans, players, and those in charge of the game to come to grips with the now inevitable fact that African Americans would participate in what had been one of the most privileged of all whites-only spaces: the college football field. For the most part, those in the mainstream of regional life accepted, at least grudgingly, and adapted to the new reality of desegregation. Some did not, however. From this entrenched viewpoint, the most ardent lashed out and targeted LeVias as the most visible symbol of the new era. LeVias's experiences as a racial trailblazer proved difficult; on a personal level, he endured both physical and psychological abuse and emerged with emotional scars that would linger for a lifetime.

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<sup>1</sup> Among the pioneering players who integrated the three major conferences of the old Confederate South, LeVias proved the most successful on the field by far. Darryl Hill at Maryland and Kenneth Henry and Robert Grant at Wake Forest in the Atlantic Coast Conference, as well as Nat Northington at Kentucky and Lester McClain of Tennessee in the Southeastern Conference, successfully broke the color line in their respective conferences, but none achieved superstar status on the gridiron as LeVias did. Charles H. Martin, *Benching Jim Crow: The Rise and Fall of the Color Line in Southern College Sports, 1890-1980* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 124-128, 258-263.

Ultimately, however, his tremendous success on the football field broke down barriers and played an important role in ushering in a new, more racially integrated era on the college football gridiron. With many qualifications, this new era in sport also helped push forward desegregation in other areas of regional life as well.

Despite the abuse LeVias endured, the degree to which the mainstream press in the region and, by extension, their mass readership accepted and encouraged his efforts—while drawing attention to and ridiculing those who opposed the change—is perhaps surprising. In Texas and Arkansas, states founded by slaveholders moving west in search of new cotton lands, with long histories of elaborate, legally codified systems of segregation, the desegregation of college football occurred relatively peacefully and with the general support of large segments of the public at-large. Where terms like nullification, secession, states' rights, and massive resistance once found fertile political soil, the descendants of previously enslaved laborers became Saturday afternoon heroes in the space of a few years. In this regard, timing proved critical. When LeVias burst onto conference sports pages in 1966, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and, just as importantly, its dogged enforcement by the federal courts, made the continued segregation of public spaces impossible. In the face of this new legal and social reality, and bolstered by the rich pool of African-American athletic talent available to its teams, the region took its first halting steps toward desegregated football.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Without a doubt, the athletic talents of African Americans played a critical role in achieving this advance. The work of social scientists demonstrates this link. According to interest convergence principle, for example, privileged white Americans would not help elevate the status of blacks unless they received something of equal or greater value in the exchange. In the cases of Jackie Robinson and the other high profile black athletes, like LeVias, who played pioneering roles integrating major American sports, the talent and success they brought to their teams, combined with the egalitarian image their presence allowed white fans to adopt, to leverage a greater status for themselves and, to some extent, other African Americans. Joshua DeLorme and John Singer, "The Interest Convergence Principle and the Integration of Major League Baseball," *Journal of Black Studies* 41.2 (2010): 367-384.



LeVias's breaking of the color barrier in Southwest Conference football was a powerful symbolic event in the history of the Civil Rights Movement, but viewing it only from within the context of the nonviolent freedom struggle of the 1950s and early-1960s overlooks a portion of its significance. The desegregation of college football came late throughout the South.<sup>3</sup> In the Southwest, it happened as the peaceful civil rights struggle morphed into a more militant call for black power. It is as much the story of how, in the mid- to late-1960s, the region adapted to new social realities, as it is of how athletic path breakers helped usher in a new era of social change.<sup>4</sup> LeVias played the role of a pioneer breaking down barriers and enduring the sharpest of scrutiny to be sure, but he also served an equally important symbolic role as a successful young African American in a newly desegregated and increasingly contentious social order. His experiences revealed much about the opportunities and the limitations African Americans would face going forward.

On September 17, 1966, one week after Westbrook's small role in Baylor's upset of Syracuse, LeVias began his college football career by taking center stage in the Mustangs' season opener against Illinois. Soundly defeated by the Illini—42-0—the previous year in the first ever meeting between the two schools, the Mustangs looked for revenge in a game the *Chicago Tribune* portrayed as a reenactment of the Civil

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Oriard, *Bowled Over: Big-Time College Football from the Sixties to the BCS Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 59.

<sup>4</sup> Historian Lane Demas argues that the tendency in sport history to focus on the roles of pioneering, and usually professional, black athletes, like Jackie Robinson, Joe Louis, and Jack Johnson, when discussing race simplifies sport's connection to the Civil Rights Movement and creates tales focused too narrowly on "race heroes" and the destruction of simplistic "binary racial barriers." On the other hand, the long, "nebulous history" of the integration of college football, Demas contends, "better exemplifies the true struggle behind the story of African-American civil rights in the twentieth century." Lane Demas, "Beyond Jackie Robinson: Racial Integration in American College Football and New Directions in Sport History," *History Compass* 5.2 (2007): 675- 690.

War.<sup>5</sup> In the face of six straight losing seasons, a disappointing crowd of only 28,000 turned out in the rainy mist at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas to witness the season opener and LeVias's historic debut. The game itself was largely uneventful for the first three quarters. SMU grabbed a quick 6-0 lead and then both defenses took over and neither team managed any more points before the start of the final period.

On the second play of the fourth quarter, however, the long-suffering SMU crowd got its first glimpse of the speed and ability of Jerry LeVias. Following an Illinois fumble at the SMU forty-yard line, Mustang quarterback Mac White dropped back to pass, looking for a quick strike to capitalize on the shift in momentum. With LeVias streaking down the field, White threw deep and hit him in stride at the Illini 25. From there, LeVias "executed a picture book run down the sideline" outracing the Illinois defense for a sixty-yard touchdown and giving the Ponies a 13-0 lead.<sup>6</sup> "He just beat me," Illinois defensive back Phil Knell reported after the game. "He's fast and the play caught us off guard a little."<sup>7</sup> The Fighting Illini battled back and scored their own touchdown a few minutes later, but SMU put the game away with two more scores in the game's closing minutes. The final SMU touchdown came as time ran out when backup quarterback Mike Livingston hit LeVias on a twelve-yard scoring pass that LeVias "grabbed ... from his shoe tops with Illinois' Bruce Sullivan draping his

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<sup>5</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 18 September 1966, pg. B1. On the long history of portrayals of intersectional football contests as rematches of the American Civil War see: Michael Oriard, *King Football: Sport and Spectacle in the Golden Age of Radio and Newsreels, Movies and Magazines, the Weekly & the Daily Press* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 88-93; Andrew Doyle, "Causes Won, Not Lost: College Football and the Modernization of the American South," *International Journal of Sport History* 11.2 (1994): 231-251.

<sup>6</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 18 September 1966, pg. B1.

<sup>7</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 18 September 1966, pg. B5.

shoulders” as he crossed into the end zone and sealed a 26-7 victory.<sup>8</sup>

For LeVias and the Mustangs, the season was off to the best possible start. “After a dismal decade of futility,” as the press described it, the team pulled off a convincing victory over a strong Big Ten opponent that finished the previous season with a 6-4 record, including a one-sided shutout victory over the Ponies.<sup>9</sup> For LeVias, the game also established a pattern for the season. He only touched the ball three times, but the “awesome streak of bronze lightning,” as Walter Robertson of the *Dallas Morning News* described him, made his touches count, catching two passes for touchdowns and gaining a total of sixty-eight yards in his debut.<sup>10</sup> Astute observers in the Cotton Bowl that evening saw that LeVias had the talent to be a game changer, but what few could have guessed was that he was about to lead his team to one of the most storied seasons in Southwest Conference history. During Fry’s first four seasons as head coach, SMU only won eleven games, but now, with a group of veteran players and the electric LeVias, the Ponies were not only poised to desegregate the conference, but also to contend for the league championship while doing it.

The following week SMU stayed in Dallas and hosted Navy at the Cotton Bowl where they posted their second victory of the young season thanks in part to two crucial second-half LeVias punt returns. Led by quarterback John Cartwright, the Midshipmen entered the contest billed the “top rated football team in the East,” though they eventually finished the season with a disappointing 4-6 record.<sup>11</sup> With the Mustangs holding on to a slim 7-3 lead in the third quarter and momentum seeming to shift the

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<sup>8</sup> *Rockford Morning Star*, 18 September 1966, pg. C1; *Dallas Morning News*, 18 September 1966, pg. B1; *Dallas Morning News*, 18 September 1966, pg. B5.

<sup>9</sup> *Rockford Morning Star*, 18 September 1966, pg. C1.

<sup>10</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 18 September 1966, pg. B1.

<sup>11</sup> *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 25 September 1966, pg. 128.

Midshipmen's way, LeVias entered the game and dropped to the back of SMU's punt return formation. Fielding the ensuing kick at his 10-yard line, he avoided several Midshipmen and then dashed forty-seven yards into Navy territory before being pulled down at the 43. Mac White led the Ponies into the end zone from there and made the score 14-3. In a tightly fought defensive contest where field position was of paramount importance, LeVias's punt return was the turning point in the game according to the press and Navy head coach Bill Elias. "That runback put the Mustangs in position to score the decisive touchdown," Elias noted. "Until then we thought they were fading."<sup>12</sup> The score remained 14-3 in the middle of fourth quarter when LeVias produced another critical punt return. This time he ran for twenty yards, reversing field position in the Mustangs' favor and shutting down any hope of a Navy comeback. Sportswriter Sam Blair, of the *Dallas Morning News*, credited LeVias with sealing the 21-3 Mustang victory and in his praise foreshadowed the role LeVias would play for the rest of the season. "The game proved...the Mustangs bagged a many-splendored thing when they lured LeVias here from Beaumont," Blair wrote. "Jerry clearly is an athlete who'll keep finding ways to win for you."<sup>13</sup> Lee Corso, the Navy assistant who had three years earlier recruited the University of Maryland's first black player, Darryl Hill, was equally impressed with LeVias. "I swear he wasn't even touching the ground," Corso commented after watching LeVias's game-changing punt returns from the Navy sideline.<sup>14</sup>

After winning their opening two games for the first time since 1950, the Ponies suffered a setback seven days later dropping their first road game, 35-23, to a tough

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<sup>12</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 1 October 1966, pg. B2.

<sup>13</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 25 September 1966, pg. B1.

<sup>14</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 1 October 1966, pg. B2.

Purdue team. Led by senior quarterback Bob Griese, the Boilermakers ultimately finished the season second in the Big Ten behind only Michigan State, the undefeated co-national champions. Scoring on their first possession, Purdue took an early lead and never looked back as they intercepted Mac White twice and built a 35-7 lead by the beginning of the fourth quarter. Backup quarterback Mike Livingston engineered two final quarter scoring drives that produced sixteen points and made the final score more respectable, but when the Mustangs failed to convert after recovering an onside kick with three minutes remaining, their chance for a dramatic comeback ended.<sup>15</sup>

Two weeks later, SMU returned home to squeeze out a 28-24 victory against Rice, thanks to a thrilling last minute drive capped by a LeVias touchdown catch. For both the Mustangs and LeVias, this dramatic comeback win in their first conference game gave observers another glimpse of the dramatic performances that lie ahead. A young Rice Owls team coached by Jess Neely, who was in the final year of his illustrious twenty-seven-season tenure at the school, entered the game 1-2. After facing three tough non-conference opponents, Rice looked to provide the Mustangs with a stern challenge.<sup>16</sup> The Owls defeated LSU 17-15 at home in Houston to open the season, before dropping their second game on the road to Tennessee. A week before traveling to the Cotton Bowl to meet SMU, the Owls lost at home in a come-from-behind thriller to UCLA, the number-two ranked team in the country. A last second Bruin touchdown saved the day for the visitors who escaped with a 27-24 win.

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<sup>15</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 2 October 1966, pg. B4; *Dallas Morning News*, 3 October 1966, pg. B4.

<sup>16</sup> After being forced out at Rice following the 1966 season, Neely accepted the athletic director's position at his alma mater, Vanderbilt University. Vanderbilt, which broke the Southeastern Conference color line in basketball in 1966, was slow to desegregate its football program and many observers blamed Neely. The Commodores did not field an African American on their varsity football team until 1970, Neely's final year at the University. Martin, *Benching Jim Crow*, 266-268. Froggy Williams, *Jess Claiborne Neely* (Houston: Rice Historical Society, 2004), 34.

Led by their own sophomore sensation, quarterback Robby Shelton, the next week the Owls jumped ahead of the Mustangs and carried a 21-7 lead into the waning moments of the third quarter, but then Mustang comeback began. After the SMU defense forced a turnover deep in Owl territory, Pony fullback D.J. Moore scored from three yards out. Following a failed two-point conversion attempt, the Ponies trailed 21-13. Rice responded by driving to the Mustang 5-yard line on their next possession, but settled for a field goal and upped their lead to 24-13 with 9:22 left in the final quarter. On SMU's next possession, as the clock wound down toward seven minutes, the Mustangs had yet to get the ball into the hands of LeVias, their most potent offensive threat. However, that quickly changed as the Beaumont star responded with three of the most spectacular plays of his career. On the next play from scrimmage, White rolled to his right from the Owl 47 and handed the ball to LeVias who sprinted back to the left side of the field on an apparent end-around play. As Rice defenders scrambled to contain the speedy split end, the left-handed LeVias, just before reaching the line of scrimmage, suddenly threw downfield toward a wide-open Larry Jernigan streaking through the Owl secondary. Jernigan "leaped and pulled the ball out of the air like an outfielder" at the 20-yard line, and then raced untouched to the Owl end zone. A successful two-point conversion pass from White to Harold Richardson brought the Ponies to within three points, 24-21.<sup>17</sup>

An onside kick attempt by SMU with seven minutes left failed and the Owls took over and drove to the Mustang 25. There, however, the Mustang defense held, forced a punt, and gave the ball to their offense at their own ten-yard line with just

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<sup>17</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 16 October 1966, pg. B1 and B4; *New Orleans Times-Picayune* 16 October 1966, 128.

under three minutes left to play. From the ten, White carried the offense; with a combination of runs and passes, he marched them down the field to the Owl 23. Then, the drive stalled. With only 53 seconds left on the clock on fourth and nine, Fry sent kicker Dennis Partee out to attempt a difficult game-tying 38-yard field goal. As Partee trotted onto the field, the SMU faithful booed their coach's apparent willingness to settle for a tie. Astute observers, however, would have considered something amiss when the Mustangs broke the huddle and, for the first time all season, LeVias lined up in the backfield to hold for the kick. The Rice sideline realized that a fake attempt was imminent, but their shouts did not draw the attention of the defenders on the field. The Rice defense also failed to recognize that LeVias was lined-up to the left of Partee, the wrong side to hold a kick by a right-footed kicker. LeVias did so because he wanted to avoid Chuck Latourrette, the Owls best defender who lined-up on the opposite side of the formation. As the snap came from center, LeVias leaped "to his feet and turned on all after-burners as he streaked around the left flank." Needing nine yards, he picked up 13 "before he was slammed out of bounds" at the ten by the pursuing Owl defenders.<sup>18</sup> Two more plays brought the Ponies to the five, where, on third down with just over nine seconds left, they needed one more clutch play to complete the comeback victory. On the next snap, White rolled slightly right and thought about throwing the ball away to stop the clock, instead he fired a pass as he saw LeVias streaking toward the right corner of the end zone. LeVias leaped into the air, snatched the ball from a Rice defender's grasp, and then landed with one foot just inside of the end zone.<sup>19</sup> As the Cotton Bowl erupted in jubilation, LeVias triumphantly threw the ball high into the air

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<sup>18</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 16 October 1966, pg. B1.

<sup>19</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 18 October 1966, pg. B1.

and celebrated. With the official signaling the winning touchdown, the improbable Mustang comeback was complete.<sup>20</sup>

At 3-1 and with a conference opening victory, the Ponies began stirring the memories of “the old grads who live in the past, dreaming about the way ol’ Doaker used to pull ‘em out” on the Hilltop in North Dallas.<sup>21</sup> It was an All-American *Life Magazine* cover boy—Doak Walker—who led SMU to glory in the late-1940s. However, if SMU football was to return to its glory days in the mid-1960s, it would need to rely on an African American from the wrong side of the tracks in Beaumont, a member of the state’s most traditionally ostracized group. Perhaps it was this tradition of prejudice, along with White’s inconsistent passing skills, that kept LeVias from touching the ball in the game’s first fifty-three minutes; however, in the final seven minutes, the newly desegregated Southwest Conference was on full display. Judging from the excitement in the stadium, Pony fans were ready converts. *Sports Illustrated* recognized LeVias’s talent and rewarded his clutch performance by naming him the national “Back of the Week” for his critical contribution to the Mustang comeback.<sup>22</sup>

Not everyone was as impressed with LeVias’s performance. Rice’s players and coaches contended that LeVias came down out of bounds on his critical last catch and complained bitterly about the officiating in the week following the game. Immediately after the catch, Robby Shelton, who was on the field as a defensive back for the play, ran to the officials shouting, “his foot’s out of bounds, his foot’s out of bounds,” but to no avail. The following Monday, Neely and assistant coach Harold “Bo” Hagan

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<sup>20</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 16 October 1966, pg. B1 and B4; *New Orleans Times-Picayune* 16 October 1966, 128.

<sup>21</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 16 October 1966, pg. B4.

<sup>22</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 18 October 1966, pg. B1.



questioned the officiating at critical points in the contest when they met with the Rice Quarterback Club. “We thought the man on the last pass was out of bounds,” Neely told his audience. “I don’t think the boy scored.” Later in the event, while narrating the game film for the boosters, Hagan drew attention to a possible clip on LeVias’s touchdown pass to Jernigan. “Our right end . . . had him (LeVias) contained and he definitely was clipped,” Hagan told the audience.<sup>23</sup> While nothing about these complaints indicated that race had anything to do with their bitterness (such were more the universal criticisms leveled by the losers of close contests) given the backgrounds of Neely, Hagan, and Rice University it is certainly possible that losing to a young black man added to their sense of angst. Both coaches were native Southerners—Neely from Smyrna, Tennessee and Hagan from Savannah, Georgia—and both spent their entire playing and coaching careers at southern universities. Moreover, founded in 1912 with the money of Houston cotton merchant William Marsh Rice, Rice University restricted enrollment to white males in its original charter and did not begin accepting blacks students until 1965. Even then, it did so against the wishes of segments of the alumni community, some of whom were probably members of the Quarterback Club. For the coaches, the alumni, and a tradition-bound university then, that mid-October afternoon in the Cotton Bowl no doubt provided an especially bitter defeat. Losing to a conference rival, losing in such a dramatic fashion after seemingly having the win secured, and, for some at least, losing to the league’s first black star, not only seriously hurt prospects for the current season, but also subtly challenged the foundations of the school and its football traditions. For some, it may have served as a wake-up call as well. After the team lost five of its last six games, Hagan replaced Neely—who left for

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<sup>23</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 18 October 1966, pg. B1.

the more segregated Southeastern Conference—as the Owl head coach. Hagan awarded scholarships to the team’s first African-American recruits in 1968 and desegregated the varsity in 1969.

As the national press began to take notice of LeVias, so did opposing coaches in the Southwest Conference. J.T. King, the coach of SMU’s next opponent, Texas Tech, praised LeVias’s all-around athleticism and versatility in the prelude to their upcoming contest. “There’s not a greater threat in the Southwest Conference than Jerry LeVias,” the Raider’s headman opined. “He’ll kill you as a receiver, on returns, as a runner on those reverses . . . and that guy doesn’t throw a bad pass at all,” King continued. “I’ve seen quarterbacks who throw worse.”<sup>24</sup> At the end of the week, SMU proved they could win on the road by convincingly defeating King’s Red Raiders 24-7 in Lubbock.

The day after the win over Tech, the *Chicago Tribune*’s David Condon reported to the nation in his nationally syndicated column that, “LeVias [was] Making 'Em Forget 'Doaker'” in Dallas. He also weighed in with a midwestern perspective on the progress of desegregation at SMU and in Texas.<sup>25</sup> In a column that traded in Texas stereotypes and took a tongue-in-cheek stab at the braggadocio and bravado of the Lone Star State, Condon mocked the slow pace of racial change in the Southwest Conference from his outsider’s point-of-view. Condon also correctly judged that, in the end, LeVias’s talent would make the experiment successful. After various quips about the

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<sup>24</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 19 October 1966, pg. B4.

<sup>25</sup> Condon, a graduate of Notre Dame, officially replaced Arch Ward as the writer of the newspaper’s famous “In the Wake of the News” column in 1955, after he had ghost written the column for almost a decade. A leading figure in Chicago, Condon used his vigorous wit to strike at the pretentious and champion the disadvantaged in the column for twenty-seven more years until his retirement in 1982. Particularly attuned to racial issues, Condon judged heavyweight champion Joe Louis, “The son of a cotton-state sharecropper . . . the most impressive honorable athlete of my time,” for his accomplishments “in a miserable era when sports had scant room for a black man.” *Chicago Sun-Times*, 6 December 1994, pg. 70; *Chicago Sun-Times*, 11 December 1994, pg. 47.

size of egos and fortunes in Texas and some gleeful roasting of some of the state's leading figures, Condon turned to LeVias and race relations. "Dallas folks even are big hearted now," he told his readers sarcastically, "They finally found a Negro who could play on the Southern Methodist football team." While mocking the inability of the SMU coaching staff (and by implication, their conference counterparts) to find qualified African Americans, Condon also pointed out how quickly the region was willing to forget its past transgressions. One fictitious Texan helped Condon understand that LeVias was "no novelty," in Texas; after all, he supposedly told the northern writer "Baylor also has a Negro player." Perhaps because Texans were quick to overlook the collective sins of their past, Condon felt they were on their way to embracing the new era. Ultimately, he posited: "LeVias ... is going to be as popular ... as Doak Walker ... back in days when SMU ruled the pack and filled the Cotton Bowl."<sup>26</sup> While LeVias never quite achieved the legendary status of Walker, Condon proved correct in his prediction that SMU would return to football glory and that the box office at the Cotton Bowl would reflect the enthusiasm a successful desegregated team could generate.

The largely unproven 4-1 Mustangs traveled to Austin the following week to take on the University of Texas with a chance to show they belonged in the conference title hunt. Coach Royal's Longhorns were 3-3, but their losses were all in close games against Southern California, Oklahoma, and Arkansas, and they seemed quite capable of putting an end to Mustang dreams of a Cinderella year, especially at home. Some members of the partisan Longhorn crowd demonstrated that the traditions of an older South died hard by prominently displaying nooses in an effort to amuse themselves and

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<sup>26</sup> *The Oregonian*, 23 October 1966, pg. 109.

intimidate their black opponent.<sup>27</sup> However, in what would emerge as a pattern for the rest of the season, a stout Mustang defense, the clutch placekicking of Partee, and the big-play heroics of Jerry LeVias, combined to confound the conventional wisdom and vault the Mustangs to the top of the standings. In front of 58,500 fans, the Longhorns scored early on the only Mustang defensive breakdown of the day—a 74-yard touchdown run by future All-American Chris Gilbert. Longhorn kicker David Conway missed the extra point, however, leaving the home team with only a 6-0 lead. Early in the second quarter, SMU engineered a tough, 14-play, 62-yard scoring drive, overcoming several negative plays and taking up almost half the quarter. The drive ended when backup quarterback Mike Livingston found LeVias under the goalposts in the back of the end zone for a ten-yard scoring strike. The catch gave LeVias his sixth touchdown reception in his first varsity season, an SMU single-season record. The team's first black player had now achieved more than any pass catcher in Mustang history had in only the first half of the sixth game of the season. With a successful extra point conversion, the Mustangs took a 7-6 lead midway through the second quarter. Texas regained the lead with a field goal before the half and then added another 3-pointer on a 45-yard kick by Conway early in the third quarter. The Longhorns held a 12-7 lead as the game entered its final period. A minute later, Partee capped a 44-yard Mustang drive with a 31-yard field goal that brought the Mustangs to within two and setup a dramatic final fourteen minutes. The SMU defense bent but did not break. Unfortunately, the Pony offensive failed to produce a score and, with just over three minutes left, Texas appeared to be driving to seal the victory. On third down and a foot at the Mustang 33, Longhorn quarterback Bill Bradley plunged into the middle of the

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<sup>27</sup> Martin, *Benching Jim Crow*, 193.

line, but instead of a critical first down, he fumbled and suddenly SMU took possession at the 32. Quarterback Mac White, who had completed only one pass all day, led the SMU offense 53 yards in nine plays to the Longhorn 15 and with eighteen seconds left, Partee kicked a game-winning 32-yard field goal. Suddenly, the Mustangs and their black star were serious contenders for the Southwest Conference title.<sup>28</sup>

Alone atop the conference standings at 3-0 and with surging support in Dallas, LeVias and SMU returned to the Cotton Bowl the next week to host Texas A&M in front of 55,000 fans. As an affront to critics who doubted the Ponies newfound success, many Mustang supporters adorned their jackets and shirts with “Lucky, Hell!” buttons as they entered the stadium.<sup>29</sup> Members of the A&M Corps of Cadets also expressed an opinion on the SMU season thus far—one that focused on racial issues—when they released several black cats on the playing field in an apparent attempt to embarrass and intimidate the Mustangs’ star receiver.<sup>30</sup> Despite a demoralizing 34-0 shutout defeat at home against Arkansas the previous week, the Aggies stood at 3-1 in conference play, which was tied with the Razorbacks for second place. Consequently, they badly needed a win to stay in title contention. On probation for recruiting violations and barred from playing in the Cotton Bowl or any other postseason contest, the conference championship was all the Aggies had left to play for. The week before the game, *Sports Illustrated* unwittingly provided both teams with a motivational boost when it commented that the conference race was all but over, and that the Razorbacks would win it.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 30 October 1966, pg. B1; *Augusta Chronicle Herald*, 30 October 1966, pg. B5.

<sup>29</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 6 November 1966, pg. B1.

<sup>30</sup> *Sports Illustrated*, 07 November 2005, pg. ??; Martin, *Benching Jim Crow*, 193.

<sup>31</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 5 November 1966, pg. B1.

Perhaps it was the Aggies' desperation, or maybe it was the Mustangs' complacency after making it to the top of the conference, but A&M scored first and dominated almost the entire first half. Aggie quarterback Edd Hargett, yet another outstanding sophomore in the conference, connected on two scoring strikes in the second period and the visitors jumped out to a 14-0 lead. The Mustang offense struggled all day, managing its only score with 49 seconds left in the first half. Once again, White proved his ability to lead an end-of-the-half drive by marching the Pony offense 48 yards in 45 seconds and scoring on a quarterback keeper from one-yard out to trim the lead to 14-7. In the second half, SMU's defense rose to the occasion, shutting down the Aggies completely and intercepting four passes. The Mustangs' second theft came late in the third quarter when Wayne Rape stepped in front of a Hargett pass at the Aggie 22 and raced untouched into the A&M end zone for a touchdown that evened the score at 14-14.<sup>32</sup>

Early in the fourth quarter, with the game on the line, racial animosity once again bubbled to the surface when an Aggie defender began to hurl racial taunts at LeVias.<sup>33</sup> As the mood on the field darkened, the game remained a stalemate as both defenses frustrated and shutdown their opponents on the offensive side of the ball. With just less than eleven minutes left, LeVias dropped back into the Mustang defensive secondary to await A&M punter Steve O'Neal's kick. LeVias, "the little sophomore scooter with the knack for the big play," as Harless Wade of the *Dallas Morning News* called him, delivered one here. Fielding O'Neal's punt at his own 17-yard line, LeVias "wiggled and jiggled trying to find a little running room as Aggies

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<sup>32</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 6 November 1966, pg. B1 and B4; *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 6 November 1966, pg. 140; *Augusta Chronicle*, 6 November 1966, pg. B4.

<sup>33</sup> Martin, *Benching Jim Crow*, 193.

converged from everywhere.”<sup>34</sup> Seemingly contained at the 25, he suddenly cut inside and streaked to the middle of the field, racing for the Mustang sideline. A key block near midfield by Mustang defensive end George Wilmot wiped out three Aggies and made it “a simple foot race for LeVias from there.” With his teammates celebrating on the sideline, number 23 in Mustang blue outran the Aggies the rest of the way for the go-ahead touchdown. The Mustang defense took it from there and shutdown the Aggie offense on its final drives. When the final gun sounded, SMU stood at 4-0 in the Southwest Conference with a “championship showdown” scheduled for the following week in Fayetteville against Arkansas.<sup>35</sup>

As the SMU faithful spilled out of the Cotton Bowl in the midst of a frenetic victory celebration, the athleticism, speed, and game-changing ability of the conference’s first black star left a distinct impression on many. The Associated Press called “Big play” Jerry LeVias “the boy who won it” for the Mustangs, and “the big punch in every SMU game this season.”<sup>36</sup> Wade, the Dallas sportswriter, labeled LeVias “the key that locked the door on the Texas Aggies.” While Fry, his coach, called his punt return “the big play” of the day, a sentiment that Aggie coach Gene Stallings shared.<sup>37</sup> Walter Robertson, sports editor for the *Morning News*, labeled LeVias “the skitterish sophomore gamebreaker” and credited him, along with the SMU defense, with “again jerking victory from apparent defeat” for the Mustangs.<sup>38</sup> Showing remarkable versatility in the first seven games of his varsity career, LeVias caught, ran,

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<sup>34</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 6 November 1966, pg. B1 and B4.

<sup>35</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 6 November 1966, pg. B1 and B4; *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 6 November 1966, pg. 140; *Augusta Chronicle*, 6 November 1966, pg. B4.

<sup>36</sup> *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 6 November 1966, pg. 140.

<sup>37</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 6 November 1966, pg. B4.

<sup>38</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 6 November 1966, pg. B1.

passed, and returned kicks for a total of 776 yards and eight touchdowns. After touching the ball 47 times in a Pony uniform, he had produced a remarkable 48 points.<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps the best evaluation of LeVias's game-changing impact came from the opponents he had just helped defeat. Aggie defensive back Lawson Howard, for one, was impressed. "He has that great speed and real good moves, but mainly that speed," Howard said. "He just outran us." Howard's teammate Gary Kovar, the deep snapper on the punt team and the last man with a shot at LeVias on the punt return, agreed. "I had a good angle at him at about the 25 or 30," Kovar said. "He faked inside and then went around me. I turned around to try to catch him and that's the last I remember."<sup>40</sup> While his opponents' praise remained safely within the confines of recognizing black athleticism, LeVias's game-winning heroics ensured that fans of Southwest Conference football would not soon forget his name. The conference's first scholarship African-American football player was not only breaking down racial barriers, but was also quickly forging his own place in the storied annals of conference history on the field as well. Fry gave his assessment of LeVias's importance to the team—while also indicating his awareness of how racism might prevent its full recognition—when he commented to the press in the locker room after the game, "If he doesn't make sophomore-of-the-year, there just aren't any sophomores in this league."<sup>41</sup>

With three tough games left on the schedule, the complete story of Jerry LeVias and the 1966 Mustangs remained far from written. Over the course of the next three Saturdays, the Ponies would face Arkansas in Fayetteville on homecoming weekend and then close out the season against fellow private schools Baylor and TCU (two teams

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<sup>39</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 7 November 1966, pg. B3.

<sup>40</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 6 November 1966, pg. B4.

<sup>41</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 6 November 1966, pg. B4.



SMU had not beaten during Fry's first four seasons). For LeVias, those three weeks would offer the sternest test of his character and resolve as he bore the brunt of being a racial pioneer in the game so dear to regional identity. While the narrative of orderly and peaceful desegregation in the Southwest Conference endured its stiffest challenge on the playing field, the Mustangs and their star receiver completed a storybook season that only their most ardent supporters could have foreseen.

Things started badly in Arkansas, however, and remained so throughout. The team's lofty dreams came crashing to earth when they suffered a sound defeat to the Razorbacks. In the week leading to the contest, racial issues also came to the fore as LeVias received hate mail and several abusive phone calls in which, the press reported, "bad things were said about his parents."<sup>42</sup> Given the State of Arkansas's strong commitment to the dictates of "massive resistance," a commitment much more intense than that seen in Texas, it is perhaps not surprising that opposition to LeVias intensified as he prepared to play his first game in the state.<sup>43</sup> A 2:30 am call the night before the game from Razorback fans awoke LeVias and his roommate and set the tone for the heightened racial tensions that shaped the final three weeks of the season. *Dallas Morning News* sportswriter Bob St. John characterized the callers as "cranks who refuse to bury hatchets, centuries old, and continually rise to their knees" and told his readers

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<sup>42</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 20 November 1966, pg. B4.

<sup>43</sup> On "massive resistance," or white Southern opposition to the civil rights movement, see: George Lewis, *Massive Resistance: The White Response to the Civil Rights Movement* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2006) and Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969). In Arkansas, Governor Orval Faubus and mobs of angry whites created a defining moment in the struggle for civil rights when they defied a federal court order and blocked the integration of Little Rock's Central High School in the fall of 1957. Faubus, claiming to act to preserve the peace, embraced populist demagoguery in order to fan the flames of racism and advance his own political fortunes. David L. Chappell, "What's Racism Got to do with It? Orval Faubus, George Wallace, and the New Right," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 57.4 (1998): 453-471; David Wallace, "Orval Faubus: The Central Figure at Little Rock Central High School," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 39.4 (1980): 314-329.

the call targeted LeVias, “only because he is a Negro.”<sup>44</sup> While that conclusion was obvious, the fact that St. John published it demonstrated the extent to which racial attitudes were shifting as the reality of desegregation took hold by late 1966. The *Dallas Morning News*, a newspaper that traditionally “reflected the conservative, pro-business mindset of the city’s well-to-do elite” and “embraced the segregationist status quo” on racial issues during the 1950s, now came out in support of LeVias and the limited changes he represented.<sup>45</sup> At least on the sports pages, St. John encouraged his readers to reject the crude racism and strict racial separation of an earlier era.

Entering the stadium later that day, LeVias confronted proudly displayed Confederate battle flags and an Arkansas band that erupted in “Dixie” at what seemed like every turn just as John Westbrook had earlier in the season. Unable to get their offense on track, the Mustangs turned in their worst performance of the season in a 22-0 shutout defeat that seemed to bring to an end any dreams of a Cinderella Cotton Bowl season. Symptomatic of the Mustangs’ struggles that day was their inability to get the ball to LeVias—their most potent offensive threat. In the second quarter, LeVias broke open all alone deep behind the Arkansas defense. As White attempted to throw downfield, he twisted his knee and badly under threw his target, injuring himself and bungling one of the Ponies’ best offensive chances. For his part, LeVias missed another opportunity when he dropped a Mike Livingston pass that hit him in full stride as he sprinted across the middle at his own 40-yard line with the Mustangs trailing only 9-0 early in the final period. In the end, LeVias caught just two passes for 33 yards. With

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<sup>44</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 21 November 1966, pg. B4.

<sup>45</sup> For more on the editorial viewpoint of the *Dallas Morning News* and its support of racial segregation in the early-1950s see: Camille Kraeplin, “Two Tales of One City: How Cultural Perspective Influenced the Framing of a Pre-Civil Rights Story in Dallas,” *American Journalism* 25.1 (2008): 79-80.

one game remaining on their schedule, Arkansas scored a convincing victory and appeared to secure their third straight Cotton Bowl birth.<sup>46</sup>

While the racial atmosphere in Arkansas proved tense, sportsmanship prevailed on the football field that afternoon, at least according to Arkansas safety Martine Bercher. After the game, Bercher, whose 69-yard second quarter punt return for a touchdown gave the Razorbacks a 9-0 lead, told reporters that he and LeVias carried on a friendly banter in the Arkansas secondary during the game. “He was saying ‘attaway to go, safetyman,’ and I was talking to him,” Bercher said. By the end of the day, Bercher smoothly transitioned into the world of desegregated college football. “That LeVias is a fine guy,” he said. “I think the world of him.”<sup>47</sup> While Bercher’s characterization of LeVias’s speech patterns demonstrated the enduring power of racial stereotypes, his overall acceptance of him as an equal competitor on the gridiron showed that the potential for change was real. Overall, LeVias’s foray into Arkansas brought the debate over racial change to the forefront. On one side, unreconstructed opponents of change, such as those who sent hate mail and prank called in the middle of the night, stood ready to obstruct, bully, and intimidate in an effort to forestall what had become inevitable, desegregation. On the other side, those like Bercher and St. John moved forward and began accepting the newly integrated sports world and the participation of LeVias and others who would soon follow.

The following Saturday, the deflated Mustangs prepared to face Baylor at home without their star quarterback White who was still suffering from the knee injury against the Razorbacks. Any remaining hopes for a conference championship rested on

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<sup>46</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 13 November 1966, pg. B1; *Dallas Morning News*, 15 November 1966, pg. B2; *Augusta Chronicle*, 13 November 1966, pg. B4.

<sup>47</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 13 November 1966, pg. B4.

the ability of the 3-6 Texas Tech Red Raiders to defeat sixth-ranked Arkansas in Lubbock that same day, as well as on SMU winning against both Baylor and a week later at TCU. Very few observers gave Tech much of a chance against the Razorbacks; while Baylor, the only conference team to defeat Arkansas, seemed poised to offer a stern test for the Mustangs. *Sports Illustrated's* early prediction that Arkansas would represent the conference in the Cotton Bowl now seemed like a foregone conclusion to many. With a 6-2 record, the Ponies still retained the chance to post their best finish since 1948—when they went 9-1-1 and won their last conference championship—and for most of the 30,000 fans in the Cotton Bowl this seemed reason enough to celebrate a renaissance in SMU football. With two wins to close out the season, SMU appeared likely to secure their second bowl-game appearance in eighteen seasons. Over the course of the afternoon, however, as reports indicated that the Tech-Arkansas game was closer than expected, the stakes quickly got higher. Once again, dreams of a storybook season and a Cotton Bowl appearance seemed within the Ponies' reach.

The first half against Baylor went well for SMU as Livingston, the backup quarterback starting only his second game, led them on an 80-yard touchdown drive, capped by his own four-yard scoring run, in the first quarter. The Mustang defense shutout Baylor's high-powered passing offense throughout the half; in the second quarter, Mustang defender Pat Gibson intercepted quarterback Terry Southall's pass and raced 40-yards to the end zone to give the home team a 14-0 halftime lead. On the first play of the second half, LeVias once again lived up to his increasingly popular nickname, "Big Play" Jerry, when he delivered yet another dramatic and decisive play that looked like it might have put the game away. LeVias fielded the Bear kickoff at his

own goal line and headed up field. Accelerating through the middle of Baylor's kick coverage, he then simply outran the last Bear defender for a dramatic 100-yard kick return. After Partee's successful conversion, the Ponies claimed a decisive 21-0 lead just as transistor radios throughout the stadium electrified the crowd with news from West Texas that Texas Tech had taken a 14-10 lead over Arkansas.<sup>48</sup>

Adding to the drama of the moment, in the Cotton Bowl much of the second half belonged to Southall and the Bears' offense who produced a record-setting afternoon. The Baylor quarterback engineered two scoring drives in the third period that cut the SMU lead to 21-12 on a day when he set Southwest Conference records for attempts (50) and completions (29). He also threw for 350 yards, the second most in the history of a conference long known for its wide-open offenses.<sup>49</sup> With just over twelve minutes to go in the fourth quarter, and their team holding a nine-point lead, SMU fans erupted when word arrived that Texas Tech had pulled off the huge upset, downing Arkansas 21-16. Now the fate of the Ponies' season once again rested in their own hands. Moments later, however, they watched as Southall led Baylor on another scoring drive, hitting Tommy Smith on a dramatic long touchdown pass to cut the Mustang lead to 21-19 with 8:31 left. Things got worse when the SMU offense could not manage any threat; then, Southall led another drive for 53 yards, culminating in a 44-yard Bear field goal. Suddenly, with 2:37 showing on the clock, Baylor took its first lead of the day,

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<sup>48</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 20 November 1966, pg. B1 and B4.

<sup>49</sup> As college football grew and matured in the first-half of the twentieth century, teams from various regions became associated with certain styles of play in the minds of the sporting public. In the 1920s and 1930s, teams from Texas and the Southwest Conference, according to football historian Michael Oriard, "became legendary for pass-happy, crowd-pleasing offenses" which featured "Wild West, shoot'em-up gunslinging football: the air filled with balls thrown from everywhere on the field at anytime during the game." Michael Oriard, *King Football: Sport and Spectacle in the Golden Age of Radio and Newsreels, Movies and Magazines, the Weekly & the Daily Press* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 93-99.

22-21, and the Mustangs' championship aspirations seemed to be slipping away once again.<sup>50</sup>

For the old-grads who recalled, “the near forgotten days when people like Walker and [Kyle] Rote were performing...magic in the dusk of late autumn,” the course of the second half might have stirred memories of all the frustrating moments since when their beloved Mustangs fell short of recapturing the glory of the late-1940s.<sup>51</sup> Things continued to get worse when the Mustang offense failed to move the ball and a dropped fourth down pass gave possession back to Baylor with just more than two minutes remaining in the game. The Bear offense failed to get a first down, however, and with just over one minute left, Southall dropped back to midfield for a fourth-down punt that seemed likely to pin the Mustangs deep in their own territory. However, this was not the typical Mustang team of the 1950s and 1960s. This was a team with a stout defense, a clutch kicker, and a knack for the big play. It was also a team with Jerry LeVias. All four of those factors came together in the next minute as the Mustangs completed another miraculous comeback; one so improbable that Robertson, the *Dallas Morning News* sports editor called it (with much hyperbole) the Southwest Conference's “ultimate yardstick for calculating incredibility.”<sup>52</sup>

Southall took the fourth-down snap and prepared to punt, but SMU's senior tackle Ronnye Medlen broke through the Bear line untouched, blocked the kick, and then fell on the ball. With exactly one minute showing on the clock, the Mustangs took possession at their own 47, in need of yet another miraculous finish to restore their

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<sup>50</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 20 November 1966, pg. B1 and B4; *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 20 November 1966, pg. 125.

<sup>51</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 20 November 1966, pg. B1.

<sup>52</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 20 November 1966, pg. B1.

dreams of an uncontested conference title and an unlikely Cotton Bowl season. With no timeouts, Livingston started the decisive drive by throwing to LeVias, his most potent offensive weapon; as he had all season, the split end from Beaumont once again delivered a big play. Catching Livingston's 10-yard out as he headed toward the sideline, LeVias sensed that the Baylor defender had overrun the play and, in his words, "cut back toward the middle because there was daylight." LeVias knifed through the secondary breaking numerous tackles on his way to a 32-yard gain. When the Baylor defense finally caught him, however, a solid hit knocked the ball from his grasp and suddenly the game tumbled freely onto the Cotton Bowl grass. Luckily for SMU, tackle Ken Motes dove on the ball and made the recovery at the Baylor twenty-one yard line. In the chaos after the long run and fumble recovery, and with time still running, Livingston hurried the team to the line of scrimmage and then threw the ball out of bounds to stop the clock. On the next play, the backup quarterback rolled right as if to pass, but then kept the ball himself and sprinted down the sideline for eighteen yards to the Baylor three-yard line, where he stepped out of bounds and stopped the clock with fifteen seconds left. Once again, the Mustangs' fate would rest on the accurate placekicking of Dennis Partee; on this occasion, however, the usually steel-nerved kicker seemed a bit unglued. Having missed two field goals earlier in the game, Partee fidgeted nervously with a broken shoestring, apparently lost in his own thoughts and with the pressure of the whole season now on his shoulders. A swift slap from Coach Fry brought him back to the moment and into the game for the twenty-yard attempt. "I was scared to death...just lost, out of it," Partee told the press after the game, "He slapped me and brought me back."<sup>53</sup> Partee's 20-yard attempt from the right hash mark

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<sup>53</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 20 November 1966, pg. B4.

sailed between the goal posts and, suddenly, another improbable comeback was complete. The Ponies were the undisputed leaders of the Southwest Conference and one win away from the league championship and a trip to the Cotton Bowl.<sup>54</sup>

With another critical contribution to yet another dramatic comeback win, the conference's first African-American star now stood on the verge of achieving superstar status. LeVias's one hundred-yard kickoff return, his critical catch and run during the final drive, and a big 68-yard gain on a pass from Livingston earned him recognition as the *Associated Press* college lineman of the week and the *Dallas Morning News* Southwest Conference offensive player of the week.<sup>55</sup> As his stature increased, his accomplishments on the field pushed the issue of his race further to the fore and brought out passionate displays on both sides of the integration debate. Both opponents on the field and Southern traditionalists intensified their attacks on LeVias in the season's final weeks. Moreover, the rising young star now found himself ostracized by the jealousy of many of his teammates. Receiving much of the credit for the Ponies newfound success from the fans and the press, LeVias confronted a rejection that moved beyond race to something that all individual stars on successful teams face to some degree, the envy of those whose contributions receive less acclaim. Hayden Fry's fifth SMU team featured a core of talented athletes who brought the program roaring back from the fringes of Southwest Conference football competition. As the wins mounted, and as the conference's first black star contributed big play after big play, the spotlight inevitably shined brightest on him. "And then," LeVias later remembered, "I was the skunk in the

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<sup>54</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 20 November 1966, pg. B1 and B4; *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 20 November 1966, pg. 125.

<sup>55</sup> *Rockford Morning Star*, 24 November 1966, pg. B2; *Dallas Morning News*, 23 November 1966, pg. B2.



middle of the room.”<sup>56</sup> Once the possibility of an elite black star playing in the Southwest Conference became a reality, the player at the center of the desegregation project faced pressure from all directions. In this increasingly hostile environment, his coach, key teammates, members of the SMU administration, reporters in the regional and national press, and SMU fans rallied to his defense.

Amid all the celebrations of the improbable Mustang victory and the chance at a conference title, the *Dallas Morning News* reported that a crying LeVias received counsel from Fry in the locker room. The star of the game was apparently shaken by the racist taunts of angry Baylor fans. Fry took the opportunity to open up to the press about the difficult season LeVias had endured: “You can’t imagine the punishment this poor kid took, both physically and mentally.”<sup>57</sup> Probably downplaying the full extent of the abuse, Fry told reporters that at least two conference opponents cursed LeVias during the season and that one conference player “spat in his face.” According to Fry, matters got worse just before the Arkansas game and they continued to escalate. The coach announced he would start screening all of his receiver’s mail and have his campus telephone changed to an unlisted number or taken out completely. Fry also confided that the experiment in desegregation had teetered on the brink of failure on occasion and that his best big-play threat “has told me at times he didn’t believe it was all worth it.”<sup>58</sup> “I just don’t understand why people say these things,” LeVias said.<sup>59</sup> The coach reassured Mustang fans that LeVias would not quit and that both he and SMU president Willis Tate were counseling the gifted black star to persevere in what

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<sup>56</sup> *Sports Illustrated*, 07 November 2005, pg. 58-69.

<sup>57</sup> *Rockford Morning Star*, 26 November 1966, pg. B3.

<sup>58</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 20 November 1966, pg. B4.

<sup>59</sup> *Rockford Morning Star*, 26 November 1966, pg. B3.

was essentially a civil rights struggle. “I have told him he is a symbol of his race,” Fry told reporters, “and if he quits he will handicap this program for other people.”<sup>60</sup>

As LeVias struggled with the pressure, several of his teammates and members of the SMU community rallied to his support. Once word of the abusive phone calls reached the public, supportive letters and telegrams began to pour in to the athletic department—more than 200 reportedly arriving on a single day; by the end of the week, over 400 fans had written to express their support.<sup>61</sup> Their sentiments bolstered LeVias and he sent a letter to each correspondent thanking them for their “words of encouragement” and telling them that it was “really great to know that so many people are backing me.”<sup>62</sup> Fry also thanked those who reached out to LeVias and praised his star in the press.<sup>63</sup> “Nobody knows how much the kid means to us, or how popular he is with the rest of the team,” Fry said. His starting quarterback agreed. “Jerry LeVias is one of the finest people I have ever met,” Mac White told reporters. “He’s just great—great in every way you can imagine.”<sup>64</sup>

Not surprisingly perhaps, the national wire services reported LeVias’s problems and portrayed his struggle sympathetically. At the same time, sportswriter Bob St. John of the *Dallas Morning News* emerged as a voice for those within the region who applauded desegregation in college football and who held LeVias up as the ideal role model for achieving it. A member of the Dallas sports establishment, St. John also willingly criticized those who resisted the change. Studying the desegregation of the

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<sup>60</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 20 November 1966, pg. B4.

<sup>61</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 24 November 1966, pg. B2; *Rockford Morning Star*, 26 November 1966, pg. B3.

<sup>62</sup> Jerry LeVias to “Dear Friend,” December 8, 1966, Athletic Department Football, 1916-1975, Box 1, Folder: Football, 1966-69, SMU Archives, Degolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas.

<sup>63</sup> Hayden Fry to “Dear Friend,” December 10, 1966, Athletic Department Football, 1916-1975, Box 1, Folder: Football, 1966-69.

<sup>64</sup> *Rockford Morning Star*, 26 November 1966, pg. B3.

Southeastern Conference, football historian Michael Oriard found that the mainstream press in that region constructed a careful narrative of events that downplayed any signs of racial animosity and emphasized the exemplary, non-threatening character qualities of the pioneering players.<sup>65</sup> St. John's coverage specifically, and his newspaper's, more generally, painted a different picture of the Southwest Conference.<sup>66</sup> While St. John did carefully construct an image of LeVias as a non-threatening figure and a model citizen in the tradition of the "good Negro," he also boldly called attention to the difficulties LeVias faced, an approach unlike his counterparts in the Southeast.

Two days after the Baylor game, St. John began reporting on the prejudice LeVias had endured since agreeing to attend SMU. The writer told his readers that LeVias's "lot has not been an easy one and a lesser young man would have given up a long time ago."<sup>67</sup> He also said that LeVias began receiving derogatory letters and phone calls the previous spring and that he had been upset at several points during the season by the treatment he was receiving both on and off the field. Characterizing LeVias's tormentors as "cranks," St. John portrayed those who resisted athletic desegregation as coming from the worst elements of the white population. Backwards and uneducated, in his view, they refused to leave prejudice behind and join the modern world. In the face of all of their abuse, St. John contended that LeVias had become "an outstanding student and citizen at SMU" and that if the conference gave an award for

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<sup>65</sup> Michael Oriard, *Bowled Over: Big-Time College Football from the Sixties to the BCS Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 65-69. Interestingly, Oriard, based on the work of Richard Pennington, characterizes press coverage of integration in the Southwest Conference in the same way. Oriard, *Bowled Over*, 59-60.

<sup>66</sup> In a sense, both the newspaper and the sports writer adopted an attitude similar to political and business leaders in Dallas who worked with a well-organized black community to bring down the barriers of Jim Crow while avoiding embarrassing mass protests that might hurt the city's image and business prospects. Brian D. Behnken, "The 'Dallas Way': Protest, Response, and the Civil Rights Experience in Big D and Beyond," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 111 (2007): 1-29.

<sup>67</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 21 November 1966, pg. B4.

off-field character, he would be the most deserving recipient. Moreover, despite all the pressure, LeVias maintained his composure and let few see the inner torment he experienced. On campus, and with the team, his bubbly personality and easy demeanor reinforced other acceptable black stereotypes. As teammate Lynn Thornhill reported to St. John, “He’s one of the most happy-go-lucky guys around here.”<sup>68</sup>

In his discussion of character, St. John carefully highlighted qualities LeVias possessed which appealed to his mostly white, middle-class readership.<sup>69</sup> While he was “lightning” on the field, St. John reassured his readers that off the field LeVias was a model young man. Recounting his critical 32-yard catch and run during the final Pony drive against Baylor, LeVias said he called on not only his athleticism, but also his intellect and even his spirituality. “When I usually run, I just take off...I mean I don’t think,” LeVias said. “This time, I was running and thinking...I was running, thinking, and praying.”<sup>70</sup> Filtered through St. John’s reporting, LeVias’s description of the play confirmed for many of the newspaper’s white readers basic prejudicial assumptions about black athleticism while also pointing to the positive potentials of desegregation. In his own words, LeVias made it to SMU based on pure athletic ability (When I...run...I don’t think.”), but now under the tutelage of Fry and others he was developing the characteristics of discipline and self-control valued by the white middle class (“running and thinking”). LeVias’s mentioning of prayer, while made humorously, also worked to reassure white Dallas that he was a Christian—a

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<sup>68</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 22 November 1966, pg. B1.

<sup>69</sup> On white attitudes and perceptions regarding African Americans, especially as reflected in stereotypes in popular and material culture see: Patricia A. Turner, *Ceramic Uncles & Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994); Riché Richardson, *Black Masculinity and the U.S. South: From Uncle Tom to Gangsta* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007); Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*, Fourth Edition (New York: Continuum, 2001).

<sup>70</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 20 November 1966, pg. B4.

meaningful point in a period when more outspoken black athletes began questioning traditional religious beliefs.<sup>71</sup>

Three days after the dramatic Baylor contest, LeVias modified his account of what had taken place the previous Saturday and minimized the larger racial implications of events. The racist taunts of Bear fans did not spur his emotional outburst following the game; instead, the star receiver now told St. John, he merely found himself caught up in the emotion of the moment. “It was because of the championship...the close game we’d just pulled out and I just got emotional,” LeVias now said. “There were no racial slurs directed at me Saturday.” While LeVias shielded Baylor fans from specific accusations of racism, St. John reiterated that some of the abuse LeVias faced during the season had indeed “bothered him,” but he did not identify any specific perpetrators. Following the report that LeVias resorted to tears, the writer also found it important to protect LeVias’s manly image by reporting that the star receiver remained strong and was not “sneaking around and hiding in any corners.” In a strange inversion of the political spectrum, St. John reported that LeVias blamed the antiwar left for his maltreatment. “I’m just trying to look at it this way,” he explained. “The people who direct racial slurs at me are the same ones who burn their draft cards.”<sup>72</sup> Southern defenders of Jim Crow were some of the least likely Americans to join in the protests

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<sup>71</sup> Cassius Clay’s 1964 embrace of the Nation of Islam and his conversion to the Muslim faith, along with his subsequent name change to Muhammad Ali, outraged many whites throughout the country and made him a symbol of black rebellion and a key figure in the Black Power Movement and the larger protests of the 1960s. The literature on Ali’s life and career, as well as his significance as a cultural figure, is vast. The best academic treatments include: Elliott J. Gorn (ed.), *Muhammad Ali, The People’s Champ* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Gerald Early (ed.), *The Muhammad Ali Reader* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1998); David Remnick, *King of the World: Muhammad Ali and the Rise of an American Hero* (New York: Random House, 1998); Thomas Hauser, *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991); David W. Zang, *Sports Wars: Athletes in the Age of Aquarius* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2001), 96-118; Jeffrey T. Sammons, *Beyond The Ring: The Role of Boxing in American Society* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 184-233.

<sup>72</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 22 November 1966, pg. B1.

against the Vietnam War. Still, St. John's and LeVias's contention that they were—as well as their assertion that Baylor fans had not voiced racist taunts—served a larger purpose for supporters of athletic desegregation.<sup>73</sup> Both worked to downplay the conflict produced by racial change while also portraying LeVias as a non-threatening figure in the tradition of the “good Negro.”

Opponents of LeVias's role as a racial pioneer did not produce an able spokesperson, such as St. John, instead their collective voices registered in the myriad acts of protest, discrimination, violence, and intimidation the black sophomore faced.<sup>74</sup> Rice coach Jess Neely was someone who did speak out and he criticized Fry for the way the Mustang headman opened up to the press about the abuse LeVias was facing. Meeting once again with the Rice Quarterback Club in the week following the Baylor-SMU game, Neely told his audience, “That just grips the devil out of me,” as he condemned Fry's blanket assertions because they cast blame throughout the conference without identifying specific offenders. “If a man is going to make accusations, he should say who it is. This way, it could be any of our boys,” Neely opined. While the old coach defended his players against the accusations of an upstart rival, his statement

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<sup>73</sup> On emerging opposition to American involvement in the Vietnam War see: David W. Levy, *The Debate Over Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991) and Tom Wells, *The War Within: America's Battle Over Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>74</sup> The fact that no opponents of integration emerged to offer a well-articulated critique of the desegregation of the conference is not surprising. As historian Kevin Kruse argues in his study of the suburbanization of Atlanta, in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Southerners opposed to racial equality slowly, and at times grudgingly, adopted a change in tactics. Faced with the unrelenting mandates of an activist federal government, they abandoned the racial demagoguery of an earlier era at the same time as the system of *de jure* segregation collapsed. Far from abandoning racial prejudice and embracing a new egalitarian social order, however, Southern racism simply morphed into new forms. Whites physically withdrew from newly integrated urban spaces for the *de facto* segregation of suburbia while embracing a rhetoric that emphasized egalitarianism, freedom of association, and limited government and that avoided directly racist commentary. This new racial order required abandoning the segregation of public spaces, such as the college football gridiron, while at the same time reinforcing and strengthening the ability to maintain segregation in the private sphere. Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 1-7.

also likely reflected a longing for a simpler time—a time when blacks accepted abuse and minor humiliations without protest, and a time when their white allies were more easily discredited.<sup>75</sup>

LeVias's sternest test came in the Mustangs' final game the following week against TCU in Ft. Worth when a death threat prompted fears that an assassin might attempt to take his life during the game. With a conference title and Cotton Bowl birth on the line, the stakes were already high as SMU prepared to face the 2-7 Horned Frogs, a task that did not seem too daunting unless one considered TCU's victories. One came against Baylor, a team that had just given the Mustangs all they could handle, and the other against Texas Tech, the team that defeated Arkansas a week earlier and opened the door for a Mustang championship. In addition, the Horned Frogs had plenty to play for with their coach Abe Martin in the hospital for the last game of what most thought would be his final season. History appeared to work against the Mustangs as well, as no SMU team had won in Ft. Worth since Doak Walker's freshman season in 1945.

As the Mustangs prepared for the contest, the pressure of the big game escalated and took on serious racial overtones when, on Tuesday, an anonymous caller warned SMU officials that, "We're going to shoot that dirty nigger LeVias on Saturday."<sup>76</sup> That Friday, the Ft. Worth police also received a threat indicating that an "assassination attempt would be made (on LeVias) during the game".<sup>77</sup> Believing the threats credible, local law enforcement officials contacted the FBI and began working with Fry and SMU to plan a response. On Saturday, FBI agents and plain-clothed police officials mingled among the crowd on the alert for a potential sniper while a security

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<sup>75</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 22 November 1966, pg. B2.

<sup>76</sup> Martin, *Benching Jim Crow*, 181.

<sup>77</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 27 November 1966, pg. B3.

detail escorted the team from their bus and stayed close to LeVias on the sidelines during the game. The police even enlisted local members of the Boy Scouts who served as ushers in the stands in the effort to watch for a potential gunman. In the locker room before the game, Fry told the heretofore-unsuspecting LeVias about the threat to his life and said that no one would blame him if he chose to sit out the contest. With just a few minutes until kickoff, LeVias, dressed and ready to play, might not have been in the best frame of mind for making such a weighty decision. After such a dramatic season and with so much on the line for the Mustangs that afternoon, he agreed to forego the risk and play in the game. The coach and star player kept the death threats from the full Mustang squad during the game. The Ft. Worth police refused, even after the game, to divulge the threat to the public, asserting that doing so would encourage others to engage in similar activities.<sup>78</sup> Fry modified the offensive game plan by calling for quick counts on most plays and putting LeVias in motion, which made him a more elusive target, more often than he was all year. LeVias ducked down in the middle when the Mustang offense huddled and resigned himself to playing in the game with the knowledge that at any moment he might find himself in an assassin's site. "I ran faster

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<sup>78</sup> Amid radio reports of the threats on LeVias's life, Fry informed the team about them on the bus trip back to Dallas, but continued to deny their existence to the press. Later that night in Dallas, he told the Associated Press that he had no knowledge of the threats and "said as far as he could find there hadn't even been a rumor of one." Pressed as to why there was a greater police presence at the game, Fry contended that there was not and that Ft. Worth police "were only taking the usual precautionary measures to protect a football team." The SMU coach further concealed the threats from the public and contradicted himself by adding, rather outlandishly, that the police heard "a rumor that there might be a Nazi demonstration" at the game. He also maintained that they escorted the team to their bus only because "the mob of fans was hollering for Levias and other players" and "these kids will try to tear off clothing or a button or something of the athletes." *The Oregonian*, 28 November 1966, pg. 56. The following Monday the conspiracy of denial collapsed when Ft. Worth police chief Cato Hightower "confirmed" to the press "that extra precautions were taken during the...game...after learning of a threat directed at Jerry Levias." *Omaha World Herald*, 29 November 1966, pg. 28. Fry continued to obscure the truth and avoided acknowledging the threats received on the SMU campus the following Wednesday when he told the press "I never have found out about the TCU rumors." *Rockford Morning Star*, 8 December 1966, pg. D1.



to the bench than I did on the football field,” LeVias later remembered. “But...I had to play ball. We couldn’t just call the game off. If it was going to happen, it was going to happen.”<sup>79</sup>

Under what must have been tremendous personal pressure, LeVias took the field for the biggest game of the year and SMU’s most important in almost two decades. After a season of close games and fantastic finishes, the title-clinching contest proved an easier one for the Mustangs as a team—if not for their star receiver. Both teams started slowly on offense in front of just more than 30,000 fans who gathered on a grey drizzly afternoon to watch SMU attempt to defeat the Horned Frogs for only the third time in twenty years. On the first play of the fourth Mustang possession, with just under two minutes left in the first quarter, quarterback White hit LeVias on a deep pass that put the first SMU points on the board and ultimately provided the winning margin in the game. Returning to play despite a still sore knee, White took the snap at his own 32, faked a handoff, and dropped back into the pocket. LeVias “streaked straight down the left sideline and past Frog cornerback John Richards like he was grown to the frayed turf,” then, angling to the inside, blew past the free safety, and raced under a well-placed White throw that he caught in stride at the Horned Frog 25.<sup>80</sup> From there, it was a foot race to the end zone and no TCU defender could catch LeVias as he sprinted to the first of three Mustang touchdowns in a convincing championship-winning 21-0 victory.<sup>81</sup> As the game ended and LeVias and his security detail entered the locker room, the most dangerous part of the day ended without any sign of the would-be

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<sup>79</sup> *TCU Daily Skiff*, 21 September 2007, pg. 4; *Sports Illustrated*, 7 November 2005, pg. ??.

<sup>80</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 27 November 1966, pg. B1.

<sup>81</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 27 November 1966, pg. B1; *Omaha World Herald*, 27 November 1966, pg. C6; *Rockford Morning Star*, 27 November 1966, pg. C2; *Trenton Evening Times*, 27 November 1966, pg. 65.

assassin. This happily peaceful resolution left it open to debate as to whether the threats had been legitimate or only the malicious idle boasts of dissatisfied segregationists. Either way, while the team and its fans celebrated the resurgence of SMU football and their first conference championship in eighteen seasons, LeVias, Fry, and those at SMU who knew about the death threats must have felt their exhilaration tempered by a sense of relief. Everyone involved with the experiment in desegregation knew from the beginning that they would face resistance, but that opposition reached dangerously frightening levels and severely tested their psyches in the chaotic final week of the season.

LeVias's speed and athleticism impressed his Horned Frog opponents (who knew nothing of the threats to his life) during the championship-winning contest; however, their comments to the press after the game that praised him also reflected some of the deeper prejudices and stereotypes that would endure even after segregation ended. Richards called LeVias "the fastest thing I've had to defend against all year," and ranked him among the top receivers in the conference. He "doesn't have to have a lot of moves," the man who spent much of the afternoon covering him judged, "heck, he just blows right by you." TCU defensive backfield coach Jim Shofner agreed, noting that his team worked all week to defend against the deep pass to LeVias, but even then could not stop it. "We don't have anyone who can run it well enough to stop LeVias," the assistant told reporters. "I've never seen anyone who could run it that good, but he did...that White really made a great throw too."<sup>82</sup> Forward thinking observers in the Horned Frog constituency may have pondered the possibilities of desegregation and

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<sup>82</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 27 November 1966, pg. B4.

opening their team to African-American athletes of a similar caliber to LeVias.<sup>83</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that even as they praised their black opponent's talent, Richards and Shofner worked to minimize it by keeping it safely within the bounds of traditional black stereotypes.<sup>84</sup> Richards seemed hesitant to recognize LeVias's humanity when he referred to him as "the fastest thing" he played against during the season. He also implied that LeVias relied exclusively on natural ability and pure speed when he suggested that he did not depend on the carefully crafted "moves" that other (probably white) receivers might work for years to develop. Talking to reporters after the game, both Shofner and Horned Frog defensive star Porter Williams upheld a long tradition of black participation on the college gridiron when they placed much of the credit for the Ponies' success on the shoulders of White, a talented athlete to be sure, but not the most deserving on the SMU squad.<sup>85</sup> Like many before them and many later, these two diminished the contributions of the black player, LeVias, while inflating the talents of one of his white teammates.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> TCU began integrated its football program following the 1967 season when they signed Linzy Cole a highly-recruited junior college transfer from Henderson County Junior College. Cole starred at wide receiver for the Horned Frogs in 1968 and 1969.

<sup>84</sup> On racist white stereotypes of black athletic accomplishment see: David K. Wiggins, "'Great Speed but Little Stamina': The Historical Debate over Black Athletic Superiority," *Journal of Sport History* 16.2 (1989): 158-185; Patrick B. Miller, "The Anatomy of Scientific Racism: Racist Responses to Black Athletic Achievement," *Journal of Sport History* 25.1 (1998): 119-151.

<sup>85</sup> Williams praised the Mustang team generally and singled out White for special accommodation calling him "a damn good operator." *Dallas Morning News*, 27 November 1966, pg. B4.

<sup>86</sup> One example of how this process affected a talented African American and a particularly famous white player occurred at the University of Michigan in 1934. At the beginning of the season, the players on the squad chose their center, future President Gerald R. Ford, as team captain, overlooking the contributions of star end Willis Ward, an African American, in the process. At the end of the year, the *Chicago Tribune* similarly snubbed Willis when it selected Ford the Wolverines' most valuable player. Black sportswriter Al Monroe of the *Chicago Defender*, saw racism behind the decision. Calling Ford "a mediocre center," Monroe described Ward as "the best athlete at Michigan or any other school during the past grid season." *Chicago Defender*, 15 December 1934, pg. 16. For more on the controversy surrounding Ward and his benching for a 1934 home game against Georgia Tech see: Charles H. Martin, "The Color Line in Midwestern College Sports, 1890-1960," *Indiana Magazine of History* 98 (2002): 97-98; and Charles H. Martin, "Racial Change and 'Big-Time' College Football in Georgia: The Age of Segregation, 1892-1957," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 80 (1996): 544-549.

Among the newspapermen who covered the Southwest Conference and, by implication, significant segments of their middle- and working-class audience, the end of the season brought LeVias the recognition that his talents and contribution to SMU's success deserved. A week after the TCU contest, a *Dallas Morning News* poll of regional sportswriters named LeVias the conference's Offensive Player of the Year. Of the thirty-two writers polled, thirty-one placed the sophomore receiver's name on their ballot at least once while also voting LeVias the sophomore Offensive Player of the Year and an All-Conference wide receiver as well. The league's first African-American recruit and its first black star—in what was already a historic season—put together a year for the ages on the football field (and perhaps one of the best in the history of the league) even as he endured the pressures and abuse of his pioneering role. Although he touched the ball on only 66 plays all season and primarily served as an offensive decoy, LeVias produced 60 points, almost 30 percent of the Mustang's 201 total points. He led the conference in scoring with 54 points and in kick returns with 15 for 393 yards and two scores. While he caught only 18 passes on offense, seven of them ended up as touchdowns, one short of the conference record for a single season.<sup>87</sup> He also completed a touchdown pass of his own against Rice. Statistics by themselves, however, fail to capture the full magnitude of LeVias's contribution to his team's success. Throughout the season, when the game was on the line—just like the legendary Walker two decades before—LeVias came through with the big play when it mattered most. In six of the Ponies eight wins, LeVias either directly scored or played a major role in securing the points that provided the winning margin.<sup>88</sup> On the

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<sup>87</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 4 December 1966, pg. B5; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 8 December 1966, pg. 73.

<sup>88</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 18 September 2003, pg. C1.

meritocracy of the college gridiron, LeVias had proven his worth and the professionals of the region's sporting press recognized his accomplishments without hesitation.

The support of the sporting press undoubtedly helped buy LeVias acceptance with the public at large and contributed greatly to the ultimate success of Fry's efforts to desegregate the conference. Behind the scenes, however, the athlete at the center of events paid a high emotional price and, at times, his emotions bubbled to the surface. Three days after earning conference Offensive Player of the Year honors, and four days after playing under the pressure of a death threat, LeVias contemplated ending the experiment in gridiron integration. On Wednesday, December 7, the *Dallas Times Herald* reported that LeVias planned to talk with his parents about leaving SMU and transferring to another school at the end of the fall semester. During practice later in the afternoon, LeVias backed away from his earlier comments and told reporters that he wanted to remain in school. He explained that his father was concerned about the situation, particularly after the death threat in Ft. Worth, but now he felt he could allay those fears and get his father's consent to continue his education in Dallas.<sup>89</sup> "I've got to convince my parents that there is not as much to it as they have heard second-hand," LeVias said.<sup>90</sup> Whether it was his parents' concerns or his own frustrations that led LeVias to question his commitment to continuing at SMU, he quickly contained his emotions and returned to his typical public position: that things might occasionally get tough, but that it was nothing that he could not handle. Fry, who talked to LeVias about the situation during the day, assured the public that the star receiver would stay at SMU and reminded everyone of the importance of their undertaking. "It would be the worst

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<sup>89</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 8 December 1966, pg. B3; *Rockford Morning Star*, 8 December 1966, pg. D1.

<sup>90</sup> *Rockford Morning Star*, 8 December 1966, pg. D1.

thing in the world if we let a few weak-minded people run this boy off from the South,” the coach opined.<sup>91</sup>

At the winter meeting of Southwest Conference head football coaches and athletic directors the following day in Dallas, conference leaders did their part to support the star sophomore receiver when they took the unprecedented step of publically supporting racial change. During the meeting, conference executive secretary Howard Grubbs shocked many when he broke years of official silence on race and opened a discussion of the treatment LeVias had endured on the field during the season. Grubbs carefully orchestrated a dialogue on the topic. He pushed his colleagues to draft an official statement that legitimized LeVias’s criticisms and implicitly acknowledged the fairness of his allegations. In what Grubbs characterized to the press as a “friendly discussion” of a “conference matter,” the group directly confronted the prejudices LeVias faced and condemned those who perpetrated them. In a joint statement, those present “expressed concern over the allegations and acknowledged they would continue to do everything possible to prevent abuses of any sort against any participant in intercollegiate athletics.” They also agreed to “increase...efforts to promote good sportsmanship” within each of their programs.<sup>92</sup> While the official pronouncement characterized LeVias’s complaints merely as “allegations,” maintained that other conference players experienced “unsportsmanlike...verbal mistreatment” during the season too, and indicated that the conference and its top officials were in no way responsible for the things that happened, it did represent a surprising and significant step forward. Instead of avoiding

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<sup>91</sup> *Rockford Morning Star*, 8 December 1966, pg. D1.

<sup>92</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 9 December 1966, pg. B4.

the issue of race and leaving the pioneering athlete to face animosity alone, Grubbs and the men in charge of Southwest Conference football indicated that their conference would no longer officially sanction such behavior.

Grubbs also seemed to find it important to assert his authority over Fry in the matter, apparently wanting to make a point to the coach for speaking out after the Baylor game. To the press, he stressed that the two-time conference coach-of-the-year filed “no complaint to the conference office,” implicitly condemning Fry’s failure to follow proper procedures. In the official statement, a humble Fry, no doubt feeling the pressure, said he felt “the events were not of such a nature as to warrant further action” and that he regretted “the attention that has been focused on the incidents.”<sup>93</sup> For Grubbs, who had served in his position since 1950, and some of the other veteran coaches in the meeting, this may have seemed an opportune time to teach the young coaching upstart—and now conference champion—a lesson about how controversial matters, especially those as sensitive as race, should be properly handled.

While the statements and concerns of conference officials and coaches did not eliminate the violence and taunting LeVias endured on the playing field or the pressure he felt off it, they did position the establishment leaders of conference football firmly in support of the path to racial integration. The Mustangs finished their Cinderella season with a loss to the University of Georgia in the Cotton Bowl, but LeVias returned for two more memorable seasons in Pony red and blue. Over time, the Southwest Conference and its fans slowly adapted to the mandates of desegregated football and watched as other black athletes followed in Westbrook and LeVias’s footsteps.

The Mustangs’ first game of 1967 made it look as if a repeat of their 1966

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<sup>93</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 9 December 1966, pg. B4.

heroics was in the works. With Mac White gone, Mike Livingston assumed the starting quarterback position, but then broke his leg in the first half of the season opener—a nationally televised game in College Station. Inez Perez, a small (5'4"), but swift backup, replaced him and had an excellent game as SMU won a dramatic back-and-forth contest on a spectacular last second touchdown catch by LeVias in the Aggie end zone. *Sports Illustrated's* "Back of the Week," LeVias picked up right where he left off in 1966 tallying 7 receptions and 193 total yards. His accomplishments included a 24-yard kickoff return and a 29-yard pass reception on the Ponies' final, desperate drive that culminated in his game-winning catch with four seconds on the clock.<sup>94</sup> Coming at the start of the season, it was the Mustangs third straight victory over the Aggies and was an especially bitter loss since the Aggies anticipated contending for the conference championship and a top national ranking.<sup>95</sup> As Fry left the field, a prominent A&M booster approached him and demonstrated that the racial animosity of the previous season had returned as well. "You should feel great Coach Fry," the Aggie partisan said. "You beat us, but it took a Mexican and a nigger to do it!"<sup>96</sup>

After this dramatic season-opening victory, however, injuries, an ineffective offense, and a porous defense quickly ended any Mustang thoughts of another championship season. SMU lost its next seven contests. They avoided the conference cellar and salvaged some respect by winning their final two games over Baylor and TCU. Despite battling injuries himself—including a serious eye injury suffered when a

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<sup>94</sup> *Sports Illustrated*, 25 September 1967, pg. 61-62.

<sup>95</sup> In its season preview issue, *Sports Illustrated* rated the Aggies the fourteenth best team in the nation. *Sports Illustrated*, 11 September 1967, pg. 69. The Aggies further demoralized their fans by losing their next three non-conference games, against Purdue, LSU, and Florida State, but then justified the lofty preseason predictions by winning their remaining six conference games and their first Southwest Conference championship in more than a decade.

<sup>96</sup> Hayden Fry and George Wine, *Hayden Fry: A High Porch Picnic* (Champaign, IL: Sports Publishing LLC, 2001), 77.



Baylor linebacker intentionally punched him in the face and broke three bones around his right eye—LeVias completed another remarkable season. Despite a rash of injuries at the quarterback position, he led the conference with 57 receptions, caught seven touchdown passes, and was the only Mustang selected to the All-Southwest Conference team.<sup>97</sup>

As LeVias continued to battle prejudice, he and the experiment in athletic desegregation also began to win a degree of acceptance in the larger Dallas community. One sign of this occurred in the winter of 1968 when a panel of Dallas women voted LeVias third in a male beauty pageant of sorts held to determine the city's "Most Eligible Bachelor." It is worth noting that five athletes comprised the radio-station sponsored contest's ten finalists, demonstrating both their youthful vigor and the powerful appeal of athletics to city residents. LeVias finished behind Olympic track star and Dallas stockbroker, Earl Young (who went on to be named the "National Bachelor of the Year") and Lance Rentzel, a wide receiver for the Dallas Cowboys. The "flashy" LeVias tied Rentzel for first place in the fashion phase of the competition as the judges found his "coordinated ensemble in pale green" highly appealing.<sup>98</sup> While far from signaling the end of the great Southern taboo against interracial dating, the contest did demonstrate changing attitudes toward potential interracial relationships, at least among certain segments of the population. Customers at an upscale men's clothing store submitted their votes to determine the contest's ten finalists and then an all-female panel of judges that included "local TV personalities, fashion and society editors, models and airline stewardesses" determined the contest's final rankings. The

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<sup>97</sup> Fry, *Hayden Fry*, 78; *TCU Daily Skiff*, 21 September 2007, pg. 4.

<sup>98</sup> *Sports Illustrated*, 11 March 1968, pg. 57; *Dallas Morning News*, 3 March 1968, pg. B2.

event was held at the prestigious Los Siete Soles, a private club on the city's north side.<sup>99</sup> Evidently, neither group of voters felt that LeVias's race prevented him from being a sought after male companion and, given the racial composition of the city, they surely understood that the contest's eligible bachelors would appeal to many young, single white women. For his part, LeVias certainly saw the competition as an opportunity to improve his dating prospects and social life, telling the press: "It's a good contest, and even better, all the girls will know I'm not married. (It) should help business."<sup>100</sup>

As he approached his final year at SMU, LeVias's social prospects expanded beyond the dating realm as well. The weekend following the bachelor contest, he joined fellow African American and world welterweight champion, Curtis Cokes, as one of the featured sports celebrities at the third annual All Sports Banquet in Dallas. The two black athletes sat down among a "who's who on the Dallas sports scene" that included LeVias's coach Fry, Dallas Cowboys president Tex Schramm, Texas A&M coach Gene Stallings, Southwest Conference executive secretary Howard Grubbs, and Green Bay Packers quarterback Bart Starr, who was in town to receive the group's recognition as "the year's outstanding sports figure."<sup>101</sup> Tickets for the dinner were available to the public and the event demonstrated how race relations were changing in the city. Two young black athletes entered an exclusive enclave of city life and sat down to eat as equals in a social space where their race may have only appeared as servants just a few years earlier. However, while barriers had begun to fall, the white majority still dictated the terms of social engagement. It was not leading black

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<sup>99</sup> *Sports Illustrated*, 11 March 1968, pg. 57; *Dallas Morning News*, 2 March 1968, pg. C4.

<sup>100</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 2 March 1968, pg. C4.

<sup>101</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 3 March 1968, pg. B2.

intellectuals, businessmen, or scientists who they dined and socialized with, but instead it was an extremely small group of youthful athletes thrust into the elite social world by their physical prowess.

Both LeVias and SMU approached his senior season in the fall of 1968 with high hopes. LeVias set his goal on making All-American and the University launched a high profile marketing campaign called “Excitement ’68” in an attempt to increase season ticket sales and generate additional football dollars. Outside of sports, American society changed rapidly in 1968, as the hopes, dreams, and visions of those who saw a new age dawning crashed into the rising backlash of more traditional Americans. In an era when civil rights rapidly morphed into Black Power, black athletes around the country displayed a raised consciousness that was most apparent in the threatened Olympic boycott movement of that spring and summer.<sup>102</sup> In contrast, however, the racial pioneer of the Southwest Conference preferred to remain a committed integrationist—at least that is how he and his allies in the press portrayed it. In the radical late-1960s, LeVias served as a spokesperson for the value of interracial cooperation and the building of a colorblind public sphere, even as contemporaries on both sides of the political debate moved rapidly away from his centrist position.

Fresh from a summer internship with a Texas oil company, LeVias discussed campus unrest and student radicalism in an interview with Sam Blair of the *Dallas Morning News*. LeVias told Blair that he was not familiar enough with the racial

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<sup>102</sup> On the black athletic revolt and Olympic boycott movement see: Jack Olsen, “The Black Athlete—A Shameful Story,” *Sports Illustrated*, July 1-29, 1968; Harry Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete* (New York: Free Press, 1969); David K. Wiggins, “‘The Year of Awakening’: Black Athletes, Racial Unrest and the Civil Rights Movement of 1968,” *International Journal of the History of Sport* 9.2 (1992): 188-208; Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Douglass Hartmann, *Race, Culture, and the Revolt of the Black Athlete: The 1968 Olympic Protests and Their Aftermath* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Oriard, *Bowled Over*, 89-125.

climate on other campuses to comment seriously on the controversies engulfing the college sports world. What he knew best, LeVias said, was the situation at SMU and, as far as he was concerned, “all I’ve had on this campus was what I wanted: to be treated as an individual.” Comfortable with his fellow students and his teammates, LeVias even went so far as to “good-naturedly” wear a George Wallace campaign hat and button on campus during the fall election season, *Sports Illustrated* reported.<sup>103</sup> As black power advocates in and out of sports focused with increasing hostility on the structural and economic injustices of American society, LeVias reassured everyone that the American Dream was still alive and well and that he, for one, was still pursuing it. “The opportunity is out there for both races to get something if you go after it,” LeVias told Blair.<sup>104</sup>

On the field, LeVias produced another highlight-filled season in 1968 and accomplished his goal of becoming a consensus All-American. During his final year, he also continued to breakdown barriers while confronting the racism of those unwilling to embrace the changes he represented. The Mustangs’ opening game was in Alabama at Auburn University. Consequently, LeVias and Rufus Cormier, the second black player on the Mustang varsity, prepared to become the first African-American athletes to compete inside the campus’s War Eagle Memorial Stadium. Once again, racial antagonisms came to the fore and on this occasion Fry used the animosity to motivate

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<sup>103</sup> *Sports Illustrated*, 25 November 1968, pg. 60

<sup>104</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 25 August 1968, pg. B2. Two years later, during his second season as a pro, LeVias continued to promote himself as an upholder of integrationist ideals. “I’m a hungry black man, not a bitter one,” he told *Sports Illustrated*’s Morton Shirnick, as the two drove through Houston traffic in his new midnight blue Corvette Stingray. Now a member of the Houston Oilers and a full-time employee of Conoco Oil, LeVias adopted a worldview that embraced the optimism of the times and the individual benefits made available by desegregation while overlooking the structural problems that persisted. As he explained to Shirnick, “I can’t worry about what some white man did to my great-grandfather, that some whites made slaves of my people. Right now it’s In (sic) to be black and qualified...and that’s what I intend to be.” *Sports Illustrated*, 30 November 1970, pg. 28-35.

his youthful team. Before the game, Auburn assistant Paul Davis approached Fry and jokingly handed him a plaque crafted to commemorate the occasion of SMU's visit. Amidst platitudes to SMU and its football program, the inscription on the plaque pointed out that no black had ever played at Auburn and that, in fact, the law banned them from doing so. Stunned by their host's attempt at humor, Fry kept the plaque in his hand until he addressed the team in the locker room as they prepared to take the field. A supreme motivator during his long Hall-of-Fame head coaching career, Fry had all the material he needed to rally his young team against the favored home team. First, he recounted how he received the plaque then he read it aloud. "They were stunned," Fry later remembered, "with disbelief written on their faces."<sup>105</sup> By this point, LeVias was a respected team leader and a two-time all-conference performer. Moreover, Cormier, LeVias's former teammate at Beaumont Hebert, was emerging quickly as a force on the Pony defense. That was all the motivation the Mustangs needed. Fry tossed the plaque into a nearby trashcan for dramatic effect and then led his team onto the field for a convincing 37-28 victory over an Auburn team that finished the season 7-4 and ranked sixteenth in the final Associated Press poll.<sup>106</sup>

For their second game, the Mustangs travelled to Columbus, Ohio to meet Big Ten power Ohio State in their season opener. Led by Coach Woody Hayes, the eleventh-ranked Buckeyes would eventually post an undefeated record in 1968 and finish the season with a Rose Bowl victory over Southern California and the national championship. Facing the Ponies in late September, however, their pass defense looked decidedly vulnerable as sophomore quarterback Chuck Hixson and LeVias led the SMU

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<sup>105</sup> Fry, *Hayden Fry*, 79.

<sup>106</sup> Fry, *Hayden Fry*, 78-79.

offense to a record-setting day. The Mustangs outgained Ohio State by 115 yards before falling 35-14, in a game closer than the final score indicated. Hixson threw the ball 69 times and completed 37 passes for 417 yards—all SMU records at the time. LeVias set his own school record by catching fifteen passes on the day. Hixson's 69 pass attempts and the Mustangs' 75 passes on the day (backup quarterback Gary Carter threw six) set an all-time NCAA record as well. Unfortunately for the Ponies, five interceptions and a fumble, all inside the Ohio State 20-yard line, thwarted their chances to make the game more competitive. Still, in front of a hostile crowd of 73,855, their offensive success foreshadowed the potent passing attack that would highlight their season. In Hixson, LeVias finally had a healthy talented quarterback capable of consistently getting him the ball.<sup>107</sup> In their home opener against North Carolina State the following week, LeVias and the passing game continued to set records. Against the Wolfpack, LeVias caught nine passes (including three touchdowns) and set a school record by gaining 219 yards as SMU rolled to a 35-14 victory.<sup>108</sup>

One of the most famous plays of LeVias's collegiate career occurred during the next game, on October 12, 1968, when the Mustangs opened conference play by returning to Ft. Worth to take on rival TCU. While there were no threatened assassination attempts on this occasion, an opponent's racist insult did push LeVias to the brink. With the score tied 14-14 late in the third quarter, a TCU linebacker registered his opinion of desegregated college football by spitting in the face of SMU's black star and telling him to "go home, nigger."<sup>109</sup> After enduring more than three years of abuse, LeVias reached a breaking point. He stormed off the field, threw down

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<sup>107</sup> *New York Times*, 29 September 1968, pg. S4 and Fry, *Hayden Fry*, 79-80.

<sup>108</sup> Fry, *Hayden Fry*, 80.

<sup>109</sup> *TCU Daily Skiff*, 21 September 2007, pg. 4.

his helmet, and informed Fry that he had taken as much as he could stand and that he would not be returning to the game. While the Mustang defense stood firm against the Horned Frog offense, Fry consoled and tried to motivate an angry LeVias on the bench. “Are you going to let a guy like that help defeat us?” the coach asked.<sup>110</sup> As TCU prepared to punt, Fry asked LeVias to “go in one more time and run this punt back and you don’t have to play anymore.”<sup>111</sup> Channeling his anger, LeVias agreed to return to the field and, as he left the sideline, boldly said to Fry, “Coach, I’m going to run this punt back all the way.”<sup>112</sup>

What followed was the Southwest Conference’s version of Babe Ruth’s “called shot” home run in the third game of the 1932 World Series, a play Fry later called “the most inspirational football play I’ve ever seen.”<sup>113</sup> A helmetless LeVias walked onto the playing field and pointed to the scoreboard indicating to the TCU crowd his intention of making a dramatic change. Putting his headgear on, LeVias settled deep in the Mustang backfield and awaited the punt. Fielding the kick at his own 11-yard line, he started up field, cut sharply to the right, and sprinted toward the aggressive Horned Frog pursuit. Studying the game film later, the coaching staff determined that LeVias outmaneuvered 11 would-be tacklers, some of whom had more than one chance to bring him down. The play ended with him racing down the sideline to the Horned Frog end zone for the decisive touchdown in a 21-14 Mustang win. As he often did during his SMU career, LeVias used the hate of opponents to elevate his level of play. “You could almost count on it that any time there was a racial incident on the field, I scored a

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<sup>110</sup> *Washington Times*, 17 December 2008, pg. C1.

<sup>111</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 30 November 1995, pg. B6.

<sup>112</sup> *Washington Times*, 17 December 2008, pg. C1.

<sup>113</sup> Martin, *Benching Jim Crow*, 194.

touchdown,” LeVias later remembered. “I think the racism was motivation.”<sup>114</sup> While SMU partisans celebrated another dramatic victory procured by their African-American star, the man at the center of their admiration found the thrill of victory tainted by personal rage. “A lot of stuff had happened, and that was the first time I outwardly showed any real emotion, but sometimes you just get your fill,” LeVias said more than thirty-five years later.<sup>115</sup> “That was the worst touchdown because it broke me,” he later added. “I did it out of hate, not for the love of the game. And that kind of hate carried me...and changed my whole personality. That was the first time I ever really hated white people.”<sup>116</sup>

During the remainder of the fall campaign, LeVias kept his growing bitterness in check enough to complete the best season of his SMU career. At the end of the year, he ranked second in the nation in pass receiving with 80 receptions—a school record that stood for more than 25 years—for 1,131 yards (also an SMU record) and eight touchdowns; he also finished fifth in the voting for the Heisman Trophy. An explosive offense led by LeVias, Hixson (who led the nation in passing), and running back Mike Richardson (who became the first back in school history to post a 1,000-yard rushing season) propelled the Mustangs to an 8-3 record, matching 1966 best season between the Doak Walker-era of the late-1940s and the Pony Express teams of the early-1980s. Moreover, the team’s three losses came on the road against Ohio State, Texas, and Arkansas—teams that finished first, third, and sixth respectively, in the final Associated Press poll of the season. The Mustangs earned a spot in the Bluebonnet Bowl held at the Astrodome in Houston and finished the season with a dramatic, 28-27 win over

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<sup>114</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 30 November 1995, pg. B6.

<sup>115</sup> *Sports Illustrated*, 7 November 2005.

<sup>116</sup> *Washington Times*, 17 December 2008, pg. C1.



heavily-favored Oklahoma in front of 54,543 fans. Televised on New Year's Eve to a national audience, the game boasted the largest indoor crowd in football history to that point. LeVias scored the first of three fourth-quarter SMU touchdowns, while his black teammate Rufus Cormier disrupted the Sooner ground attack all night from his nose guard position and was named a Co-Most Valuable Player of the game. In the end, the Mustangs closed out the LeVias-era with yet another dramatic, come-from-behind win.<sup>117</sup> Veteran sportscaster Ray Scott, who also called four Super Bowls, seven NFL or NFC championships, and a World Series, told Fry later that this was the most exciting contest he covered during his broadcasting career.<sup>118</sup> For the Mustangs and LeVias, the game served as a fitting close to a brilliant three years on the field and to the first chapter in the desegregation of big-time college football in Texas and the Southwest Conference.

LeVias went on to win Most Valuable Player honors at the Senior Bowl that season and, at the end of January 1969, the Houston Oilers picked him in the second round of the pro football draft. For the next six seasons—two with the Oilers and four with the San Diego Chargers—he earned his living playing at the game's highest level. In addition to his on-field heroics at SMU, LeVias also excelled off the field just as Fry believed he would. In the classroom, he completed his degree graduating with honors and earning recognition as an Academic All-American. On campus, he became the most visible African-American student at SMU, a popular figure that helped advance desegregation. "I showed blacks could hang with the academics and play football," LeVias said later. "If I had been a failure as a student, a football player or a person, it

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<sup>117</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 1 January 1969, pg. B1 and B4.

<sup>118</sup> Fry, *Hayden Fry*, 81.

would have been difficult for the others because everyone was looking for excuses.”<sup>119</sup>

When his professional football career ended, LeVias transitioned to the business world and remains today a successful member of the Houston business community.

As a degree of racial integration became a reality of Southern life in the years that followed, the need for black sports figures to project a non-threatening image and silently endure the overt and implicit lingering prejudices declined. In this changing racial climate, the portrayal of LeVias as a “good Negro”—so prominent in 1968—gave way to a more honest narrative that highlighted the injustices he endured, the pain they inflicted during his time at SMU, and the scars left for a lifetime. “If I could look into the past, I wouldn’t do it again because it was so hurtful,” LeVias reflected almost three decades after his decision to attend SMU. “I still suffer from everything that happened. I wouldn’t want anyone...to suffer through what I did. Those are the kind of things that give people problems mentally for a lifetime,” LeVias told a reporter in 2003 as he and Fry were both, fittingly, inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame.<sup>120</sup> Although LeVias now views his SMU experience as a struggle that scarred him, he also believes that it proved important on both a social and a personal level. “The things I had to go through, I had to learn a lot about people and I learned a lot about myself. I fought a good fight, I finished the fight, but most importantly I kept my faith in people and God.”<sup>121</sup>

During his career at SMU, Jerry LeVias fundamentally changed the face of college football in Texas and the Southwest Conference. What had been an all-white endeavor at the heart of regional identity and definitions of manhood—through

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<sup>119</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 30 November 1995, pg. B6.

<sup>120</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 10 December 2003, pg. C5.

<sup>121</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 18 September 2003, pg. C1.

LeVias—took the first halting steps toward the acceptance of African Americans. Coaches, sportswriters, administrators, players, students, and the public at large (some willingly, and others with great reluctance) began confronting and adjusting to this new reality. When the Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* ordered the racial integration of public education a decade earlier, Southerners countered with “massive resistance,” a commitment to fight change by all possible means. In the case of football, although many in the public were upset, no organized opposition emerged. By 1966, the Southern fight against the desegregation of public spaces had collapsed. While racism and white resistance remained strong and shifted to new forms, the long battle to maintain Jim Crow was over. No longer could white prejudice exclude blacks from the college gridiron; in fact, the deep and largely untapped pool of black athletic talent ensured that major advances toward integrating the playing field would soon take place. If nothing more than from a competitive point-of-view, coaches and fans now had to accept the reality of African-American athletes on the gridiron. “Westbrook and LeVias caused a ripple effect within the league,” Longhorn coach Darrell Royal later remembered. “If UT and the other conference schools were going to stay competitive, they had to integrate.”<sup>122</sup>

At many points during his years at SMU, LeVias’s success on the field brought lingering tensions to a bitter boil; however, his tremendous talent ultimately played a key role in ensuring that the experiment in desegregation succeeded. No other pioneering black athlete who participated in the desegregation of southern college football accomplished as much on the field as Jerry LeVias. As the slow integration of

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<sup>122</sup> T. Perry, “For Thou Art With Me (Part Four),” The Official Site of Baylor Athletics, April 26, 2010, <http://www.baylorbears.com/sports/m-footbl/spec-rel/042610aab.html>.

African-American athletic talent on the national level gradually raised the level of the game in the mid- 1960s, it had yet to have any real impact on the old slave states of the former Confederacy. Then LeVias took the field at SMU. Spectacular touchdown catches, dramatic punt returns, and miraculous big plays followed as a small private school with a storied football tradition returned to glory after almost two decades of futility. Triumph on the field won LeVias support on campus and in the larger SMU community and made acceptance of the changes he represented more palatable to football fans throughout the region. The Mustangs' 1966 conference title was one of only two championships won by the conference's private schools (Rice, TCU, SMU, and Baylor) during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>123</sup> No doubt many rival fans looked at LeVias's role in transforming SMU's football fortunes and began to consider the potential impact of talented African Americans on their team—even when doing so conflicted with negative stereotypes they held regarding the black race. As one of LeVias's teammates—one of several who Fry said had real difficulty accepting the presence of a black man on their team—sarcastically told his coach: “You know what, Coach Fry? Every time Jerry scores a touchdown, he gets whiter.”<sup>124</sup>

Hayden Fry looked beyond attitudes like this and played a pivotal role in initiating the desegregation of major college football in Texas. As historian Charles Martin points out, “Overall, Fry provided more emotional support for LeVias than did any other southern coach during the process of athletic integration.”<sup>125</sup> From the biracial friendships of his youth in Odessa to his demand for desegregation as a

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<sup>123</sup> The other championship belonged to Baylor and head coach Grant Teaff. In 1974, the Bears, led by quarterback Neal Jeffery, pulled off the so-called “Miracle on the Brazos” to defeat the University of Texas for the first time in 17 years and win their first conference title since 1924.

<sup>124</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 18 September 2003, pg. C1.

<sup>125</sup> Martin, *Benching Jim Crow*, 193-194.

condition of his hiring at SMU, Fry led the way in making integrated college football a reality in Texas. He did so through his recruitment and mentoring of LeVias and his building of desegregated programs at SMU and at North Texas State University in the mid-1970s. A product of Depression- and World War II-era America, Fry embraced the powerful egalitarian creed that emerged from more than a decade and a half of crisis and conflict and did his small part to reshape the postwar decades in its image. He also, no doubt, calculated that tapping into the under-utilized pool of African-American athletic talent in the region might advance his career; and indeed, it did. However, this should not take away from his achievement. Many of his coaching contemporaries entertained similar ideas, yet it was Fry who orchestrated the breakthrough. By recruiting LeVias and wooing his family, providing support to the young man as he adjusted to life on the college campus, and leading the first desegregated team in Southwest Conference history to a championship, Fry exhibited the leadership skills and long-range vision required to make integration at SMU a success. Facing pressure from disgruntled alumni and boosters, the doubts and criticisms of his fellow coaches and Southwest Conference officials, the intense and constant scrutiny from the sporting press, and faced with a seemingly endless series of racially-motivated insults and attacks, Fry remained dedicated to the task-at-hand. In a football career that spanned six decades—and included a Texas schoolboy state championship in 1946, a Southwest Conference championship two decades later, and twenty years and three Big Ten championships at the University of Iowa—it was his finest moment.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Thirty years after recruiting LeVias, Fry said, “I’m more proud of that than any victory, any bowl game or any championship I ever won because it opened the door for all the other fine black athletes in the Southwest. If they desired to go to school down here they could, rather than have to go to the Big Ten or the Pac-10.” *Dallas Morning News*, 30 November 1995, pg. B6.

The attitudes and actions of key sportswriters in the regional press also played an important role in ushering in the desegregated era of college football. Starting with the recruiting war for his services as a high school student and throughout his playing career at SMU, the press followed the Jerry LeVias story closely. Sportswriters such as Bob St. John and Sam Blair of the *Dallas Morning News* portrayed LeVias in sympathetic terms; most importantly, they came to his defense when the insults and assaults of segregationists grew most intense. Moving beyond traditional stereotypes, they presented to the public a very human young man—a typical college student coping with campus life, classes, and the pressures of playing elite collegiate football. They also addressed his historic role in the great public drama of racial desegregation. They reassured their predominantly white mass audience that LeVias was a young man of fine character, a praiseworthy individual no matter what his race and an individual deserving of inclusion in the cultural mainstream. While the narrative they constructed ignored the still strong and deep-seated barriers faced by the majority of African Americans, it did help forge the path through which the growing black middle class achieved grudging inclusion in American society.

The largest portion of the credit for breaking down the color barrier in Southwest Conference football obviously belongs to Jerry LeVias. Only eighteen years old when he signed on to play the lead role in one of the region's most important desegregation stories, the Beaumont high-school student could not have fully anticipated the difficult road that lay ahead. Though he maintained that his top priority in choosing SMU lay in the education he would receive, LeVias gained much more than just a business degree during his years on campus. From the beginning, the historic

possibilities of his quest propelled him into the public eye and made him a central cultural figure as the region redefined the racial boundaries of its public sphere. LeVias bore a heavy burden as a racial trailblazer. Socially ostracized by many of his fellow students when he arrived on campus, he never fully adjusted to the mainstream of student life on the elite, overwhelmingly white, SMU campus. On the football field, LeVias gradually won the respect of his Mustang teammates, but never escaped the taunts and targeted violence of opponents looking for any advantage and upset with the changes he represented. Hateful mail and phone calls, random and specific threats of physical violence, and the constant scrutiny of the public placed LeVias under a level of pressure that only the most stern-willed and dedicated could withstand; at times, it almost broke him.

The weight of the times also added to the pressure LeVias faced. When he first enrolled at SMU in 1965 and during his breakout 1966 season, the peaceful black civil rights movement had reached its zenith. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 destroyed the legal foundation of Jim Crow segregation and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 ended the racially based disenfranchisement that had stripped black southerners of their political rights for nearly three-quarters of a century. It was a time of advancement and cautious optimism. During this period, the public expected pioneering black athletes to follow a well-defined script—one engrained into the country's consciousness by Jackie Robinson almost two decades earlier. According to this script, the ideal black athlete would face tremendous pressure, threats, and outbursts of violence, but he would endure it all through hard work, talent, and, most of all, character. He would then emerge triumphant making himself, his team, and the nation better in the process. As much as

any other African-American athlete since Robinson himself, LeVias personified this mid-twentieth century addition to the pantheon of American success stories. In the face of high expectations, LeVias adopted a non-threatening public persona that matched his easy-going personality while minimizing the potential for conflict and controversy. He endured the myriad of injustices, taunts, threats, and assaults, facing them mostly without comment. On occasion, when his anger burst through to the surface, he never accused his assailants by name and always managed to channel his rage, turning it into further motivation for more spectacular accomplishments on the meritocratic playing fields of college football. By assuming the role of the archetypical athletic pioneer, LeVias helped the region take its first halting steps toward adapting to the new realities of racial desegregation. “I think ultimately things would have changed,” Rufus Cormier, LeVias’s high school teammate and college roommate who went on to earn a Rhodes Scholarship and a law degree from Yale, judged, “but I think that change would have been much slower in coming if not for Jerry’s success, both on and off the field.”<sup>127</sup>

Then, the times changed. The mid-1960s burned and bled into 1968, especially in urban black communities across the nation. In August 1965, just as LeVias prepared to begin his SMU odyssey, the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles exploded with racial violence in the first clear sign that not all black Americans shared in the optimism of the era. Economic statistics reflected black America’s angst: 29.1% of blacks lived in poverty, while only 7.8% of whites did, and black unemployment almost doubled white unemployment 8.5% to 4.3%. Nearly one in four black teenagers in the labor market could not find a job, while only roughly one in ten of their white counterparts

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<sup>127</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 18 September 2003, pg. C1.



encountered the same situation.<sup>128</sup> Watts marked the first of four long hot summers of race riots in the inner cities of urban America. Deindustrialization, urban decay, white flight, police brutality, and lack of opportunity coalesced with the rising expectations—created by a triumphant civil rights movement and the federal war on poverty—to produce near revolutionary unrest.<sup>129</sup> During the summer of 1967, fifty-nine American cities exploded in violence. That July, twenty-five African Americans died during rioting in Newark, New Jersey. Less than two weeks later, Detroit witnessed the deadliest riot of a bloody year as African Americans battled police, the National Guard, and eventually U.S. Army troops. The end result was that forty-three black people lost their lives. Black America's anger and angst reached a crescendo in early April 1968 after the assassination of civil rights icon Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis, Tennessee. Riots erupted in more than 125 American cities following the assassination and, within a week, police had arrested more than 20,000 rioters. In total, forty-six people lost their lives and more than 35,000 people suffered injuries in the worst outbreak of urban violence in American history. The assassination of Democratic presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy two months later and the rioting and violence in the streets of Chicago during the Democratic National Convention later that summer, further confirmed that the nation was spiraling out of control.

The rush of events shifted the very fabric of American race relations. In the African-American community, civil rights morphed into black power and new leaders

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<sup>128</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, William C. Hine, and Stanley Harrold, *African Americans: A Concise History*, Third Edition (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2010), 556.

<sup>129</sup> On rioting and urban violence in this period see: Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995); Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanaugh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989).

and a new militancy emerged. At the same time, significant segments of the white mainstream backed away from their support of equal rights and began to see African Americans as a privileged group. The resentment of these whites coalesced around the “Silent Majority” that Republican presidential candidate Richard M. Nixon mobilized to win the White House in November 1968. In this polarizing racial landscape, Jerry LeVias, the pioneer athlete, became less relevant. During his final year at SMU, LeVias became less of a pathbreaking racial figure and more of a symbol of the limited terms on which white America was willing to accept a degree of integration. For the talented few—those with the intellectual ability to survive in higher education, the character and social skills to function in an overwhelmingly white world, and, most importantly in this case, the physical skills to impact major college football—doors had opened, but for many others they remained closed. In the spring of 1969, when black students at SMU formed the Black League of Afro-American and African College Students (or BLAACS for short, with Rufus Cormier as one of their leaders) to fight for a better campus racial environment and to open more doors for some of these “others,” LeVias refused to join. Some of his fellow African-American students called him an “Uncle Tom” for doing so, but could not pressure LeVias into joining.<sup>130</sup> Having served as the central figure in the great public drama of college football integration, LeVias turned away from politics, leaving it to the next generation of outstanding black athletes to push integration forward in the increasingly radical late-1960s.

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<sup>130</sup> Martin, *Benching Jim Crow*, 195.

## Chapter Five

### The Last Champions of White Football: Texas vs. Arkansas in the “Big Shootout”

By the second half of the 1960s, Jerry LeVias’s athleticism at SMU, as well as the growing accomplishments of African-American athletes throughout the sports world, combined with the advances toward integration achieved during the civil rights era to end segregation in the Southwest Conference.<sup>1</sup> Between 1967 and 1969, Texas A&M, Texas Christian, Rice, and Texas Tech all joined Baylor and SMU in adding the first black athletes to their varsity football rosters.<sup>2</sup> By 1969, only the conference’s two premier schools—the University of Texas and the University of Arkansas—had yet to take the decisive step toward football integration. Most representative of their states and the traditions that defined them, these two flagship universities were the last to embrace the emerging black athlete. As fate would have it, that same year also produced one of the most storied football seasons in the long, colorful history of Southwest Conference football. The all-white Longhorns and Razorbacks both rose to the top of the national rankings and marched undefeated toward a nationally televised

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<sup>1</sup> Sport often receives credit for playing a vanguard role in the fight against segregation. However, as football historian Michael Oriard points out, in the South, college football was one of the last institutions to achieve integration. Michael Oriard, *Bowled Over: Big-Time College Football from the Sixties to the BCS Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 59.

<sup>2</sup> In 1967, in the season opener against LeVias and SMU, J.T. Reynolds became the first African American to play varsity football for Texas A&M. That season Reynolds and fellow African American Sammy Williams played on the Aggie varsity. Although both practiced hard, they saw little time on the playing field and were mainly limited to special teams. Both eventually earned degrees at Texas A&M, but had left the Aggie football program by 1969. That year Hugh McElroy, a walk-on from Houston, joined the program and eventually became the team’s first black star. Aggie head coach Gene Stallings did not successfully recruit the school’s first black high school player until 1971, when he signed Jerry Honore of Louisiana. Brent Zwerneman, *Game of My Life: 25 Stories of Aggie Football* (Champaign, IL: Sports Publishing, 2003), 85-88. In 1968, Linzy Cole integrated varsity football at TCU. A year later, during the 1969 season, Danny Hardaway took the field with the varsity at Texas Tech and the Rice Owls featured three black starters in their lineup, Rodrigo Barnes, Stahle Vincent, and Mike Tyler. Vincent, who started at quarterback, became the first African American in conference history to play the most prestigious offensive position. Charles H. Martin, *Benching Jim Crow: The Rise and Fall of the Color Line in Southern College Sports, 1890-1980* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 198-204.

season-ending showdown hyped by ABC television and the press as a national championship game. Their epic clash determined the championship of the Southwest Conference and (after the winner defeated Notre Dame in the Cotton Bowl on January 1, 1970) of all of college football. What the college football establishment trumpeted as the game's one-hundredth-anniversary season also, unofficially at least, crowned the last all-white champions of college football.<sup>3</sup>

On game day, December 6, 1969, in Fayetteville, Arkansas, top-ranked Texas met second-ranked Arkansas in a contest partisans often remember as the “Game of the Century,” a gritty and hard-fought battle that turned on one of the most dramatic plays in college football history. More than simply an athletic contest, the game inspired such spectacle and intense passions that it emerged as an iconic cultural event symbolic of the larger era. Events unfolded in the lead-up to and on that late fall Saturday afternoon in northwestern Arkansas that transcended sport and spotlighted many of the changes and conflicts that defined this turbulent period in American history. What Texas coach Darrell K. Royal dubbed the “Big Shootout” took place on a campus radicalized by the cultural upheavals of the late-1960s. During the game, antiwar protesters staged a demonstration outside of the stadium, while an insurgent black student movement

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<sup>3</sup> During the 1969 season, the NCAA and college football celebrated the one-hundredth anniversary of the 1869 Rutgers-Princeton contest popularly recognized as the first intercollegiate football game. Like Abner Doubleday's mythical invention of baseball, the focus on this game obscures the more complex historical development of the sport even as it enshrines one particular version of events. Football's two most recognized early popular historians, Park H. Davis and Allison Danzig, demonstrated the inaccuracy of the Rutgers-Princeton myth, and chronicled early football-type contests played prior to 1869 in their early- and mid-twentieth century histories of the sport. Parke H. Davis, *Football: The American Intercollegiate Game* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), 34-43; Allison Danzig, *The History of American Football: Its Great Teams, Players, and Coaches* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1956), 3-7. The recent work of football researcher Melvin I. Smith provides a wealth of primary source information on the more complex and convoluted origins of the sport that became American football. Melvin I. Smith, *Evolvements of Early American Foot Ball: Through the 1890/91 Season* (Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse, 2008); Melvin I. Smith, *Early American and Canadian 'Football': Beginnings Through 1883/84* (Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse, 2003).

threatened to storm the field if the Arkansas band played its customary fight song, “Dixie”. Meanwhile, the two all-white teams played in front of an almost all-white crowd representative of middle-class America. The spectacle drew such intense interest that leading political figures found it important to attend. The crowd included the nation’s foremost Protestant evangelist, William Franklin “Billy” Graham, Jr., and also Congressman, and future President, George H.W. Bush from Texas. Both men would share the mantle of leadership in the resurgent conservative movement of the next three decades. Also in attendance and representing Arkansas were Governor Winthrop Rockefeller and Congressman John Paul Hammerschmidt. A few minutes into the first quarter, after Marine One and two other Marine helicopters landed just outside the stadium, the sitting President of the United States, Richard M. Nixon, joined the day’s crowd. The politician most associated with the growing backlash inspired by the protests held outside the stadium that day sought to strengthen his political position by associating himself with the game inside.

It was a day of contradictions, a day when the old traditions of Southern football, and in a larger sense the postwar American consensus, stood on proud display, but also a single day in a turbulent era, an era where one could see those same traditions rapidly torn asunder. While both teams were all white—not one African American suited up for either university that day—both schools had African Americans playing on their freshman squads. By the following September, both teams would field their first black varsity football players: Jon Richardson at Arkansas and Julius Whittier at Texas. The next several seasons would witness the gradual integration of both programs and, by the mid-1970s, African-American athletes would play a significant role throughout

the Southwest Conference.

The game also marked the high point in two coaching careers. Royal at Texas and his counterpart Frank Broyles of Arkansas led two of the most dominant programs of the 1960s. Each won a national championship (Royal in 1963 and Broyles in 1964) and their teams regularly competed for the national title as they did again in 1969. The 1970s, however, proved more difficult for both men. They found the new college athlete, sometimes socially and politically conscious and often imbibing a healthy dose of the individualism of the era, more difficult and less rewarding to manage. The rise of the black athlete changed the competitive balance of college football and required the creation and development of new recruiting networks, a challenging task for two coaches with little knowledge of, or affinity for, African-American culture. While the Longhorns and Razorbacks remained prominent and competitive teams, they soon dropped from the upper echelons of national competition and Royal and Broyles both retired from coaching following disappointing 5-5-1 seasons in 1976.

To understand the cultural context of the “Big Shootout,” it is important to step backward and examine events before the 1969 game. When considering broad historical forces it is problematic to attribute too much significance to a single year—that said, the events of 1968 proved a watershed moment in post-World War II U.S. history. In 1968, the postwar liberal consensus, with its roots firmly planted in the New Deal and the worldwide fight against fascism and communism, shattered. Unable to reconcile the changes inspired by the Civil Rights Movement, anti-war protestors, and the counterculture with its own commitment to Cold War militarism and imperialism, postwar American liberalism (and the Democratic Party the best represented it) rapidly

fell apart.<sup>4</sup> It was a year of momentous events. On the last day of January, the North Vietnamese Army and its allies in the South, the Viet Cong, launched dramatic assaults on the seats of the South Vietnamese government and the U.S. military presence in Vietnam, including the very grounds of the U.S. embassy in Saigon. While ultimately a military defeat for communist forces, the TET Offensive proved a major strategic victory for Vietnamese communists when it turned American public opinion decisively against the war.<sup>5</sup> At the end of March, President Lyndon B. Johnson shocked the nation when he announced he would not seek re-election, tacitly acknowledging that opposition to the war had destroyed his presidency.

At home, the very fabric of the nation seemed on the verge of unraveling in 1968. Antiwar, student, and minority groups openly discussed violent rebellion, and law enforcement agencies responded with equal resolve, as political violence reached its highest level since Reconstruction. On April 4, the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in Memphis, Tennessee sparked bloody race riots in more than one hundred American cities. White America looked on with fear and outrage as urban blacks reacted violently to the conditions of their lives and the death of a man who symbolized their greatest aspirations. Exactly two months later, the assassination of likely Democratic nominee and antiwar candidate Robert F. Kennedy in Los Angeles ushered in a summer of protests and violence that culminated in the chaos of the Democratic Convention in Chicago in late August.<sup>6</sup> With the nomination of Johnson's Vice

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<sup>4</sup> Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), xx.

<sup>5</sup> Don Oberdorfer, *Tet!: The Turning Point in the Vietnam War*, Reprint edition (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), xv-xvii.

<sup>6</sup> On the turbulence of the late-1960s generally, and 1968 specifically, see Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Joan Morrison and Robert K. Morrison, *From Camelot to Kent State: The Sixties Experience in the*

President, Hubert H. Humphrey, seemingly inevitable, antiwar protestors descended on the city intent on making their voices heard. Inside the convention hall, party delegates debated bitterly as they tried to reconcile hostile and incompatible positions, while outside protestors battled Democratic Mayor Richard J. Daley's police force in the streets in what a federal commission later called a "police riot." Network television broadcast images of the chaos throughout the nation and the world and, as viewers watched the Democratic Party crumble, many felt that the nation was, as one early historian of the period described it, "Coming Apart."<sup>7</sup>

In October, sport joined in the increasing radicalism of the year. At the Olympic Games in Mexico City, American sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos outraged both the conservative sports establishment and the mainstream American public by staging a political protest on the 200-meter victory podium.<sup>8</sup> First came a classic race, one of the all-time great Olympic sprint finals. Carlos exploded to the lead, but out of the turn and into the straightaway the powerful, elegant strides of Tommie Smith took over the race as he surged to a commanding lead. Smith lifted his arms in celebration during the final ten meters and still posted a winning time of 19.83 seconds, a world record that would stand for more than a decade. In the moments after the race, Smith and Carlos finalized their plan to make a political statement as they waited for the medal ceremony in a dressing room underneath Olympic Stadium. Smith produced a

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*Words of Those Who Lived It* (New York: Times Books, 1987); Ronald Fraser, *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> William L. O'Neill, *Coming Apart: An Informal History of America in the 1960s* (New York: Times Books, 1971).

<sup>8</sup> Excellent accounts of the protest and its lasting significance can be found in: Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle: The 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Douglas Hartman, *Race, Culture, and the Revolt of the Black Athlete: The 1968 Olympic Protests and Their Aftermath* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Simon Henderson, "'Nasty Demonstrations by Negroes': The Place of the Smith-Carlos Podium Salute in the Civil Rights Movement," *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 29 Supplement 1 (2010): 78-92.



pair of black leather gloves and gave one to Carlos. “The national anthem is a sacred song to me. This can’t be sloppy,” he told Carlos. “It has to be clean and abrupt.”<sup>9</sup> Moments later the duo re-entered the stadium wearing long black socks on their feet and carrying their black Puma track shoes to symbolize “black poverty in racist America.”<sup>10</sup> Smith wore one of the black gloves on his right hand and a black scarf around his neck representing “black pride.” Carlos wore beads to symbolize lynching victims and had the other glove on his left hand as they marched to the victory stand and accepted their gold and bronze medals from Britain’s Lord Burghley. When the band began playing the “Star-Spangled Banner,” both men bowed their heads and raised their gloved-fists into the air creating one of the most iconic images in the history of sport and making what they intended as a protest statement against the past and present conditions faced by black America. As Smith explained, “My raised right hand stood for the power in black America. Carlos’s raised left hand stood for the unity of black America. Together they formed an arch of unity and power.”<sup>11</sup> Their actions outraged many spectators, however, and a chorus of boos reigned down as the anthem played. The *Associated Press* described their protest pose as “a Nazi-like salute,” and the image of black power projected from the victory podium outraged many Americans watching at home who believed the realm of sport should remain beyond the reach of politics.

Speaking at a press conference minutes after the medal ceremony, Carlos, who the *AP* characterized as “a militant spokesman in the Negro athletes’ civil rights movement,” defended their actions while criticizing “the white social structure” and its

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<sup>9</sup> *Sports Illustrated*, August 5, 1991, 81

<sup>10</sup> Harry Edwards, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete* (New York: Free Press, 1969), 104.

<sup>11</sup> Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, 104. Smith’s explanation of the symbolism embedded in the protest appeared in Edwards’ book in 1969. Afterwards, he remained publically silent until the 1990s.

attitudes toward and treatment of African-American athletes. “They look upon us as nothing but animals. Low animals, roaches and rats,” he interjected. Born and raised in Harlem, Carlos used his world-class athletic talent to earn a scholarship at East Texas State University and then transferred to San Jose State College when he found the racial climate of East Texas unwelcoming. While competing for both schools and in international competition, he experienced firsthand the treatment black athletes often faced. “We are sort of show horses out there for the white people,” he told the press. “They give us peanuts, pat us on the back and say, ‘Boy, you did fine.’”<sup>12</sup> Smith did not discuss the protest in public for over two decades. When the introspective sprinter did break his silence in the 1990s, he described his act as a “cry for help by my fellow brothers and sisters in this country.” For Smith, the “medals represent(ed) all of black America,” and the act was not a “hate message” or “a third-world, propagandized military coop” as his critics characterized it, but “a prayer of solidarity” for his people.<sup>13</sup> The protest electrified the black community even as it further polarized the political climate.

The symbolism of two young, black radicals protesting American race relations during their country’s national anthem proved too much for mainstream America as well as the staunchly conservative Avery Brundage and the International Olympic Committee. The long-time head of the IOC, Brundage called the protest a “nasty demonstration against the American flag by negroes” and, amid a wave of public outrage, quickly orchestrated the expulsion of the duo from the Olympic Village and

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<sup>12</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 18 October 1968, pg. E1.

<sup>13</sup> Steven Stern, *Fields of Fire: Sport in the 60s* VHS. Produced by George Roy and Steven Stern, Home Box Office, 1995.

their removal from the U.S. Olympic team.<sup>14</sup> Writing in the *Chicago American*, sports columnist Brent Musburger captured conservative indignation with Smith and Carlos. Building on the Nazi analogy, Musburger claimed the duo looked “like a couple of black-skinned storm troopers,” and, according to him, their “unimaginative” and “juvenile” protest had accomplished little more than “insuring maximum embarrassment for the country.” Musburger spoke for many mainstream whites unaccustomed to the new militancy among blacks and young people, when he argued, “Perhaps it’s time that twenty-year-old athletes quit passing themselves off as social philosophers.”<sup>15</sup> Both sprinters saw their post-Olympic opportunities severely compromised by their controversial actions as the mainstream sports establishment shunned them for the next two decades. For conservatives, who ignored evidence to the contrary and clung to the idea that sports were apolitical, the black athletic rebellion created a yearning for simpler times and more clean-cut sports heroes.

The chaos of 1968 set the stage for a momentous political shift in November as what Republican presidential candidate Richard M. Nixon dubbed the “Silent Majority” pushed back against the radicalism of the era by asserting their collective electoral voice and shifting decisively away from the Democratic Party and toward the Republicans.<sup>16</sup> Promising “peace with honor” in Vietnam and a commitment to maintaining “law and order” at home, Nixon united corporate business interests, working-class white ethnics,

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<sup>14</sup> Allen Guttman, *The Games Must Go On: Avery Brundage and the Olympic Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 243-245.

<sup>15</sup> *The Nation*, 4 June 2012.

<sup>16</sup> On Nixon’s political career and his transformation of presidential politics see: Melvin Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1999); Steven E. Ambrose, *Nixon: The Education of a Politician, 1913-1962*, Volume One, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989); Steven E. Ambrose, *Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician, 1962-1972*, Volume Two (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989); Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008); David Greenberg, *Nixon’s Shadow: The History of An Image* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003).

Southern segregationists, and Western libertarians to win an Electoral College majority and usher in an era of Republican presidential supremacy.<sup>17</sup> The strong showing of third-party candidate and segregationist governor George Wallace and his running mate extremist Air Force General Curtis LeMay (who ran on the American Independent ticket and garnered 13.5% of the popular vote) helped the Democrat Humphrey keep the popular vote close. By capturing such a large portion of discontented voters, however, the Wallace campaign disguised the strength of the emerging backlash against the liberal advances of the previous decades as presidential politics took a decisive turn to the right.<sup>18</sup>

As 1968 passed into 1969, the conflicts and struggles of the previous years only seemed to escalate. In sports, they reached the college football gridiron in a major way. During that spring and fall, several major football programs in the Midwest and West experienced revolts by African-American athletes, as the black athletic revolution challenged the college football establishment and its ultimate personification—the head football coach. At Oregon State and Iowa during the spring semester, and then at Wyoming, Indiana, and Washington in the fall term, black athletes rebelled against what they saw as prejudicial and unfair treatment in the football program and, in a larger sense, against the institutionalized, de facto segregation they encountered on campus and in their local communities. With little sympathy for the players’ grievances, the coaches involved—Dee Andros at Oregon State, Ray Nagel at Indiana,

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<sup>17</sup> On the significance of the watershed 1968 election see: Lewis L. Gould, *1968: The Election That Changed America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993); Melvin Small, “The Election of 1968,” *Diplomatic History* 28.4 (2004): 513-528.

<sup>18</sup> On Nixon’s Southern Strategy, Wallace’s politics of resentment, and the transformational results of the 1968 election, see Dan Carter’s liminal chapter “Richard Nixon, George Wallace, and the Southernization of American Politics” in Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism and the Transformation of American Politics*, Second Edition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 324-370.

Lloyd Eaton at Wyoming, John Pont at Indiana, and Jim Owens at Washington—interpreted the players’ actions as an affront to their authority and an attack on team discipline.<sup>19</sup> During the controversies that ensued, the coaches sought to reaffirm and consolidate their command in an arena where it was not usually challenged. Among the sporting public—who generally supported the coaches—the incidents sparked debate over the relative merits of unlimited authority in an increasingly open, diverse society and highlighted changes reshaping the coaching profession. As American society in general proved more willing to question those in positions of authority, football coaches found themselves forced to consider the opinions of their players (and even fans) to a degree unheard of previously. Most fans, undoubtedly, just hoped for some sort of workable compromise to emerge, one where their team benefitted from the talent of black athletes and those athletes were happy with their role on campus. With the waves of black athletic talent just begin to transform the game, however, that would take at least another decade to work out.

In the short term, it was the African-American athletes involved who paid the highest price for their protests as many quit or made forced exits from the teams that had been the center of their campus experience.<sup>20</sup> For these and other black athletes in the 1960s, participation in protests and civil rights activities proved a difficult endeavor. Much of the public viewed athletics as an arena of relative openness and offered little sympathy or support to what they saw as a privileged group. At the same time, the athletic and academic establishments in charge of intercollegiate sport fought hard to protect their conservative positions and to prevent the linking of sport to issues of

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<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, both Andros and Owens were Darrell Royal’s teammates when all three played for Bud Wilkinson and the Oklahoma Sooners from 1946 to 1949.

<sup>20</sup> Oriard, *Bowled Over*, 91-115.

social, racial, economic, and political justice.<sup>21</sup> Ultimately, the coaches involved and the programs themselves also paid a price for their inability to adequately address the needs and desires of the “new” black athlete. By the mid-1970s, all five coaches, unable or unwilling to adapt to changing times, dropped significantly or fell out of the major college coaching ranks and both their programs and fans suffered a relative decline in their on-the-field fortunes.<sup>22</sup>

In the Southwest, Darrell Royal and Frank Broyles did not have to face the challenge of managing African-American athletes like their counterparts in the Midwest and West, but they did have to recognize the growing role of blacks in transforming the game on the field. During the 1960s, star black performers increasingly played key roles in the nation’s best programs. The decade began with Syracuse and African-American star Ernie Davis defeating Royal’s Texas team in the Cotton Bowl on January 1, 1960. A sophomore, Davis earned most valuable player honors in the game and the undefeated Orangemen claimed an undisputed national title. In 1961, Davis became the first African American to win the Heisman Trophy. In 1965 and 1966, Michigan State emerged as a national powerhouse as head coach Duffy Daugherty raided Texas and other southern states to stock his team with black stars such as Bubba Smith and George Webster. On the West Coast, John McKay tapped into the African-American talent pool to return USC to the top echelons of national competition. In 1965, Trojan Mike Garrett became the second black Heisman Trophy winner. Then, in 1967 and 1968,

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<sup>21</sup> Simon Henderson, “Crossing the Line: Sport and the Limits of Civil Rights Protest,” *International Journal of the History of Sport* 26.1 (2009): 101-121.

<sup>22</sup> Oriard, *Bowled Over*, 91-115. Of the five coaches, John Pont survived the longest in the upper echelon of the profession. Pont left Indiana after the 1972 season, but remained in the Big Ten coaching Northwestern between 1973 and 1977. At Northwestern, Pont managed only twelve wins against forty-three losses, including twenty-seven defeats in his final twenty-nine games.

O.J. Simpson led the nation in rushing and McKay's team to the top of the polls while becoming the third African American to win the award. As the evidence of black athletic talent continued to mount, one fact became unavoidably clear: to remain at the upper level of competition even southern schools would have to open their doors to black athletes. It was one of the changing realities of the profession that Broyles and Royal would eventually have to accept.

Ironically, the greatest coach in the history of the University of Texas was a native of Oklahoma. Born in Hollis, Oklahoma on July 6, 1924, Darrell K. Royal's Oklahoma roots ran deep and to some of the state's defining moments. The seat of Harmon County, Hollis sits in the far southwest corner of Oklahoma, a sleepy farming community surrounded by the silence of the southern plains. Just west of town Highway 62 crosses into Texas, the imaginary border dividing the two states serves as an apt metaphor for the life of a man who would play an important role in the athletic history of both. Shaped by the isolation of the Great Plains, the Dust Bowl, and the Great Depression, Royal's youth exemplified many of the "hard times" that defined depression-era America. When he joined the trek of Okies to California during the Great Depression, served in the military during the Second World War, and played a starring role on the first great Oklahoma football teams of the late-1940s, the youthful Royal connected to some of the biggest events shaping the history of his home state.

The defining moment of Royal's childhood occurred when his mother died when he was only four months old. Raised by his father and paternal grandparents, Royal grew up poor but with the stability of a large loving family. From an early age, he displayed a passion for sports and spent his days dreaming of athletic glory while

participating in both real and imagined competitions. “I used to go down to the highway ... and a car would be coming fairly soon,” he later remembered, “and I’d pick out a sign, and I’d try to get to that sign before the car did.”<sup>23</sup> Royal and his older brother Glenn initially played football with a Clabber Girl baking powder can and then the prized rubber football Darrell received for Christmas just before he started school. On fall Saturday afternoons in his youth, Royal and his friends played football outside listening to a radio broadcast of the home state Sooners as they scrimmaged on the front lawn. With the radio blaring “Boomer Sooner” from the front porch, Royal, dressed in overalls, dreamed of one day taking the field in Norman. Big dreams for a smallish kid from the middle of nowhere, but Royal would spend his life fulfilling big dreams, both his own and those of football fans in Oklahoma and Texas.

During the Great Depression, a youthful Royal joined the stream of Okies heading west down Route 66 to California in search of a better life. Unlike many, however, Royal made the trip back, returning to play football for Hollis High. After graduating in 1942, Royal joined the Army Air Corps during World War II and while playing military football caught the attention of the Oklahoma coaching staff. He returned home in 1946 and enrolled at the University of Oklahoma where he soon emerged as a star player on the first nationally competitive Sooner teams. Playing in the offensive and defensive backfields, Royal joined with teammates Jack Mitchell, Claude Arnold, Stan West, and Jim Owens in leading the team to 10-1 and 11-0 seasons in 1948 and 1949.

Asked years later to pinpoint a single play that was the most important during

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<sup>23</sup> Darrell Royal and John Wheat, *Coach Royal: Conversations with a Texas Football Legend* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 1.



his tenure at Oklahoma, Wilkinson identified three fourth-quarter punts Royal made against Missouri in 1947 as possibly the biggest plays of his coaching career. In his first year as head coach, Wilkinson's team stood at 4-2-1 as they prepared to face favored Missouri on the road. A win would keep the Sooners alive in the race for the Big 6 title, but a loss, Wilkinson feared, would convince Oklahoma fans that at thirty years old he "was not mature enough to handle the head coaching position at a major university." In what Wilkinson called a "tight and tough" contest, the sophomore Royal placed three consecutive fourth quarter punts out of bounds inside Missouri's four-yard line. A Missouri fumble following the final kick gave Oklahoma the ball on the one and the game-winning touchdown that followed provided a critical boost—one that Wilkinson felt provided an essential lift to the "team's morale and fan support."<sup>24</sup> The Sooners won their final two games to capture a share of the Big 6 title and Wilkinson and the program never looked back. After losing at Santa Clara 20-17 to open the 1948 season, Royal and his teammates won 21 straight games (the streak extended to 31 straight in 1950) including season-ending Sugar Bowl victories over North Carolina in 1948 and a 35-0 shellacking of Louisiana State in 1949 in Royal's final game as a Sooner. In an era more dedicated to ball control and the kicking game, Royal's accurate punting ability made him a critical weapon in the Sooners' overall strategy. His eighteen career interceptions—including three in a 1947 game against Oklahoma A&M—still stand as a school record. He also led the team in passing during both his junior and senior seasons.

Wilkinson worked closely with his quarterbacks and many, like Royal, followed

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<sup>24</sup> Letter, Charles B. "Bud" Wilkinson to Putt Powell, June 28, 1967, Darrell K. Royal Papers, Box 3J18, Folder: Correspondence, Notes, Clippings, Telegrams, 1958-1979, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

him into the coaching profession. After finishing at OU, Royal began his coaching career serving as an assistant at North Carolina State, the University of Tulsa, and Mississippi State from 1950 to 1952. His first opportunity as a head coach came in Canadian professional football where he led the Edmonton Eskimos in 1953. During his only season in central Alberta, Royal's fortunes united with a franchise on the rise and his Eskimos posted a Canadian football best 12-4 record. On the field, the team featured Royal's fellow OU graduate and 1952 Heisman Trophy winner, Billy Vessels, whose 1,072 rushing yards and seventeen touchdowns earned him the inaugural Schenley Award given to the Most Outstanding Player in Canadian professional football. Five other former Sooners played for Royal during his season in Canada, as did Jimmy Chambers and Roland Miles, two black athletes whose presence indicated Royal's willingness to adapt to the racial mores of his new locale. A "breakaway runner" and a "peerless safety man," Miles, who grew up in Washington D.C. and went to St. Augustine's College in North Carolina, had already starred for two seasons in Edmonton when Royal arrived.<sup>25</sup> In 1953, he produced another stellar season, starring on defense and proving just as much of an offensive threat as Vessels. In fact, controversy arose when Vessels received the Schenley Award instead of Miles who some found more deserving. Explaining the slight and summarizing race relations in Western Canada at the time, Eskimo fullback Norman Kwong, a native of Calgary and the first Chinese Canadian to play Canadian professional football, explained, "Conditions in the country then weren't conducive to a person of color winning awards."<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately for Royal and his talented Eskimo squad, they lost to the

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<sup>25</sup> *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 25 April 1953, pg. 18.

<sup>26</sup> Graham Kelly, *The Grey Cup: A History* (Red Deer, Alberta: Johnson Gorman, 1999), 22.

Winnipeg Blue Bombers two games to one in the finals of Canada's Western Interprovincial Football Union and did not advance to compete in Canada's professional football championship—the Grey Cup.<sup>27</sup>

Royal returned to the United States and the Deep South the following season. He accepted his first college head coaching position at Mississippi State University and proceeded to lead the Bulldogs to consecutive 6-4 seasons in 1954 and 1955. In 1956, he moved to the Pacific Northwest and the more-prestigious head job at the University of Washington. Taking over a team rocked by scandal, he led them to a 5-5 record and once again proved willing to adapt to the more open race relations of a new region. The Huskies varsity included five African Americans, including talented backfield man Luther Carr, and an Asian American, Peter Eng.<sup>28</sup> Royal and his staff demonstrated their willingness to employ a multi-racial squad, but nonetheless seemed to give preference to whites when it came to playing time. Carr led the team with 476 yards rushing, but after averaging only seven carries per game felt his talents had been underutilized because of his race. “They never tried to exploit my talents,” Carr said looking back years later. “I was aware black players were used differently than whites, and I didn't like it, but I wasn't going to change the world.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Two weeks later, the Blue Bombers themselves suffered defeat, 12-6, at the hands of the Hamilton Tiger-Cats in the 1953 Grey Cup. The Canadian Football League (CFL) did not begin play until the 1958 season when the Canadian Football Council withdrew from the Canadian Rugby Union (CRU), formed its own organization, and adopted the CFL moniker. In 1953, teams from the Western Interprovincial Football Union and the Interprovincial Rugby Football Union, both members of the CRU, competed for the Grey Cup. Following Royal's departure, the Eskimos won three straight Grey Cup championships from 1954 to 1956 under another Oklahoma alum, Frank “Pop” Ivy, who replaced Royal. Johnny Bright from Drake University joined Miles and Kwong on the Eskimos in 1954 and Canada's first professional football dynasty featured a thoroughly integrated backfield.

<sup>28</sup> University of Washington, *Tyee 1957 Yearbook* (Seattle: Associated Students of the University of Washington, 1957), 94-104.

<sup>29</sup> *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 22 May, 2007, <http://www.seattlepi.com/sports/article/Where-Are-They-Now-Luther-Carr-1238149.php#page-1>. Carr saw his role diminished further during his last two seasons

Following his first season at Washington, the seemingly vagabond-like Royal made his last professional move when he accepted a \$500 raise and relocated to Austin and the University of Texas. Aware of the reputation he was gaining for changing jobs frequently, Royal nonetheless felt the opportunity to lead the Texas program was too good to overlook. Coached by Dana X. Bible and Johnson “Blair” Cherry, the Longhorns emerged as a national power in the 1940s and early-1950s, winning four Southwest Conference championships and appearing in six prestigious New Year’s Day bowl games during the two coaches’ tenures. Former Longhorn star and long-time assistant coach under Bible and Cherry, Edwin Booth “Ed” Price, took over when Cherry resigned following the 1950 season and led the team to winning seasons (and one outright and one shared Southwest Conference championship) in his first three years. The mid-1950s, however, brought unwelcomed struggles on the gridiron and, in 1954, the Longhorns suffered their first losing record in a decade and a half. The following year brought another mediocre team and then, in 1956, the bottom fell out—a one-point win over Tulane in late September proved the only highlight in a disastrous 1-9 campaign that led to Price’s resignation. Bible remained the school’s Athletic Director and developed an extensive list of possible replacements for Price—a list that included some prominent head coaches, but not Royal. Two of those coaches, Duffy Daugherty of Michigan State and Bobby Dodd of Georgia Tech, rejected the job recommended Royal for the position. The up-and-coming young coach got an interview and then the job. Amid a great deal of fanfare and hype, the thirty-two year

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under Royal’s successor, Jim Owens, who seemed even less inclined to use him. In fact, more than half of Carr’s 841 career rushing yards came during his sophomore season with Royal as coach.

old Royal arrived on campus with a mandate to turn the program around.<sup>30</sup>

Once he started the job, Royal noted that the two things Texas needed most to return to the top levels of national competition were better facilities and a more engaged and professional style of management. The prestige of the Longhorn program gave him plenty of opportunities to tap into the ample talent pools of Texas high school football, but getting those players to commit and keeping them academically eligible were the most serious challenges he faced. As such, he embarked on the long-term program of constructing the physical infrastructure and assembling the personnel needed to manage an elite football program at the university. In a period when the State of Texas built its flagship university into a major research institution and one of the leading schools in the nation, Royal performed a similar service with the football program. After he became Athletic Director in 1962, the larger UT athletic program. As part of creating a professional staff and helping ensure his athletes' academic success, Royal hired Lan Hewlett, a high school science teacher and Texas alum with a master's degree in bacteriology, as an academic counselor for the team. Expediency pushed Royal toward this innovative step as higher academic standards implemented at the university threatened to leave fifteen members of his first squad academically ineligible. With the support of UT President Logan Wilson, Royal created a full-time position, the first of its kind in major college football, and then chose Hewlett to fill it. For the next two decades, Hewlett helped Texas athletes pursue their degrees and maintain their eligibility, as Royal and Texas became pioneers in developing the academic support programs that became a standard part of modern university athletic departments. Like its successors today, Hewlett's program walked a fine line between providing sound

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<sup>30</sup> Royal, *Coach Royal*, 15-20.

academic guidance and serving the interests of the athletic department by steering top athletes down the path of least resistance. Whatever the case, by his second year on the job, Hewlett reduced the number of ineligible varsity athletes to three.<sup>31</sup>

Price's final Texas squad possessed some youthful athletic talent and Royal capitalized on it to return the Longhorns to competitiveness right away. In 1957, his first team went 6-3-1 during the regular season and finished second in the conference before losing to Mississippi in the Sugar Bowl.<sup>32</sup> The following year their 7-3 record included a 15-14 victory over Oklahoma, their first win in the rivalry game after six straight defeats and the Sooners' only loss of the season. The game marked a significant shift in the balance of power in a contest that often defined both teams' seasons, and defeating his former mentor Bud Wilkinson proved so stressful and difficult that Royal left the victorious locker room and vomited after the game.<sup>33</sup> It proved the first of many wins for Royal against Wilkinson and the Sooners, as for the next five seasons, the pupil defeated the teacher and Wilkinson's long and distinguished tenure at Oklahoma ended with six straight losses to Texas. For Royal, the game began a thirteen-year run in which he defeated his alma mater and key rival twelve times. Success against Oklahoma symbolized a larger turn around for the Longhorn program. In 1959 the team earned its first of six straight bowl invitations, in 1962 they won the Southwest Conference championship and finished fourth in the polls, and, in 1963, Royal's team symbolically conquered the nation as the undefeated consensus national

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<sup>31</sup> *Sports Illustrated*, September 29, 1958, pg. 32-35; Royal, *Coach Royal*, 21-26.

<sup>32</sup> The turnaround in the Longhorn program inspired such confidence in Texas that on November 19, 1957, prior to the team's regular season-ending victory over Texas A&M in College Station, members of the Texas House of Representatives stood and sang the "Eyes of Texas" before adopting a resolution granting "Texan citizenship" to Royal and his family. H.S.R. No. 22, Darrell K. Royal Papers, Box 3J18, Folder: Certificates, Awards, Resolutions, Proclamations.

<sup>33</sup> George Lynn Cross, *Presidents Can't Punt: The OU Football Tradition* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977), 301-303.

champions after defeating Navy and their Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Roger Staubach in the Cotton Bowl. The next year, they came within a one-point loss to eventual national champion Arkansas of another undefeated title march. After three straight four-loss seasons between 1965 and 1967, the Longhorns re-emerged as a national contender in 1968, winning their last nine games and decisively defeating Tennessee in the Cotton Bowl to finish third in the final national rankings.

Beyond winning teams, Royal's managerial style and public relations skills also brought a positive image to the Texas football program. During both the early-1960s, as Americans struggled to adapt to the rapid changes of mid-twentieth century life, and the turbulent late-1960s, as a younger generation turned its back on traditional norms, Royal's players adhered to an updated, yet ultimately traditional style of manhood reassuring to their white middle-class fan base. For many, Royal's Longhorns represented a more traditional style of manhood that, according to historian E. Anthony Rotundo, became increasingly outmoded as the twentieth century progressed. Focused on "self-making" and concerned with "shaping the desires and talents of the inner self to fit the proper moral and social forms," this masculine ideal, dominant in the nineteenth century, slowly gave way to "a time of self-realization," where men "let their impulses and personal potentials flourish." According to Rotundo, in a little over a century the values of American middle class men shifted "from self-discipline to self-expression, from self-denial to self-enjoyment." In the new century, "several ideals of manhood emerged" and one of the most powerful was that of the corporate "team player" who took "competitive athletics as a model for fitting aggression and rivalry

into the new bureaucratic work settings of the twentieth century.”<sup>34</sup> At Texas, Royal inverted this relationship, applying the bureaucratic principles of corporate leadership to manage the aggression and rivalry at the elite level of competitive sport. He took talented young men, some of the best the state had to offer, and forged them into, not only a powerhouse football program, but also, impressive candidates for management positions ready to transfer their competitive skills to the corporate world.

In 1964, with the undefeated Longhorns in Dallas to take on Oklahoma, *Time Magazine* bureau chief Holland McCombs filed a report that captured the Longhorns’ *esprit de corps* and highlighted its appeal to middle America. Titled, “The Nice Boys,” the profile described the Longhorns disembarking the team bus at the State Fair of Texas as looking like “a group of trim and neatly dressed young salesmen ... smiling, friendly, easy – ready to please,” and positively contrasted them to “those big, beefy, rough and tough bruisers” on Oklahoma and most other college teams. McCombs portrayed the Longhorns as “modest, polite, and gentlemanly,” and reassured his readers that these college gridiron heroes were bright, up-and-coming young achievers in tune with and ready to succeed in the ethos of modern corporate America. Star linebacker Tommy Nobis, for instance, was not the “bruising brute” McCombs expected, but instead a dapper, clean-cut young man in “a smart brown tweed sport coat” with “a freckle-faced grin” who McCombs contrasted favorably to “the power-structured big brute (Dick) Butkus of the Illini.” In the past, popular stereotypes cast college football players as dull-witted, slovenly bullies, and in the present day that image had been amplified, McCombs felt, by the “brutish meanness” of some of the

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<sup>34</sup> E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 285-286.



best teams and players. The Longhorns, however, represented something different; young men who succeeded on the gridiron through discipline, character, intelligence, and composure, the same qualities that would help them thrive during adulthood in the complex, bureaucratic world of the mid-twentieth century. After the Longhorns' 28-7 victory over the Sooners, McCombs found it "refreshing to reveal that in a rough game, the nice boys are the best." In the anxiety-ridden, Cold War-dominated culture of the mid-1960s, Americans like McCombs found reassurance in knowing that the best performers in a beloved national game still adhered to the values of an earlier, more traditional era.<sup>35</sup>

With the youth rebellion of the decade only beginning to emerge in 1964, McCombs's portrayal of the Longhorns focused on alleviating older stereotypes of dumb jocks never achieving true manhood. By the late-1960s, however, massive changes rocked the American cultural landscape. The victories of the civil rights movement and the emergence of the black power and women's liberation movements challenged traditional cultural values from the outside as the antiwar and counterculture movements emerged in full bloom and challenged them from within. According to historian Michael S. Kimmel, the 1960s produced an unprecedented challenge to white male dominance in American society as "all the marginalized groups whose suppression had been thought to be necessary for men to build secure identities began to rebel." This was not the first stirrings of revolt among African Americans and other racial minorities, women, or youth "but it then became a permanent fixture in the national social and political agenda" and "irreversibly transformed the landscape" of American

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<sup>35</sup> Holland McCombs, Night Press Collect, Time, Inc., October 12, 1964, Darrell K. Royal Papers, Box 3J18, Folder: Correspondence, Notes, Clippings, Telegrams, 1958-1979.

manhood. Moreover, according to Kimmel, American involvement in Vietnam tarnished the image of one of the most traditional exemplars of American manhood, the soldier.<sup>36</sup> In this new era, Royal's football teams came to symbolize and exemplify for many the traditional values increasingly under siege.

In 1969, Cissy Lale, a long-time reporter, editor, and columnist for the Fort Worth Star Telegram who wrote under the penname Lloyd Stewart, praised Royal and his players for upholding the standards of traditional American manhood against the cultural barbarians at the gate. Characterizing Royal as a "model major general" and expert on public relations, Lale believed that he was winning the hearts of the Texas mothers she spoke for who "hardly could help but be impressed" with him and his team. Noting the traditional stereotype of football players as "rough, tough individuals who carried considerably more weight than academic standing," Lale pointed to the evolution of that image and said Royal's team was now "the best-looking, best-groomed, and best-tutored young men on the campus." More importantly, she argued, in difficult times these young men provided "balm to a troubled spirit" because they were "in no danger of becoming hippies as long as they are playing on the team." In fact, while others led "campus disturbances" and tried "to take over the offices of university presidents or destroy campus property" Royal's football players and others like them, Lale argued "provide us with an all-American image of a red-blooded American boy."<sup>37</sup> In the late-1960s, with traditional models of American manhood under assault on so many fronts, the successful clean-cut college football player,

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<sup>36</sup> Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, Second Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 174.

<sup>37</sup> Lloyd Stewart, "A Royal Recruiter," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 15 December 1969, Clipping in Darrell K. Royal Papers, Box 3J18, Folder: Correspondence, Notes, Clippings, Telegrams, 1958-1979.

especially at elite programs like Texas, provided Lale and her readers with a sense of assurance that all might yet be right in the world.

While McComb, Lale, and others found much to praise about Royal's Longhorns, one aspect of his leadership came under increasing scrutiny as the 1960s progressed—his inability, or unwillingness, to racially integrate the program. When the University's Board of Regents desegregated all campus activities including athletics in 1963, many observers felt Royal would take the lead in bringing integration to major college football in Texas. When two black track athletes began working out with the freshman track team that December, the school newspaper optimistically reported that “another step toward actual integration of intercollegiate athletics” had taken place.<sup>38</sup> Six years later, however, Royal still had not embraced the recruiting of Texas's talented black athletes and not a single African American had played on the Longhorn varsity. It was not that there was a lack of available, qualified candidates. In 1963, Bubba Smith of Beaumont, the son of prominent black high school coach Willie Ray Smith and one of the most talented players in the state, met Royal and told him “I just want to go to Texas.” Years later, Smith remembered Royal's reply, “Bubba I could probably get you a scholarship, but I don't know when the football program is going to integrate.”<sup>39</sup> In 1967, one year after Jerry LeVias electrified the Southwest Conference while leading SMU to the championship, Don Baylor emerged as a multi-sport star at Austin High School. Many hoped to see him break the color barrier at Texas and play for the Longhorns, and Royal made some effort to recruit him, but Baylor decided to pursue

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<sup>38</sup> *Daily Texan*, 4 December 1963, Clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A242, “E” File (Sports), 1963-1977, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>39</sup> William C. Rhoden, *Breaking the Huddle: The Integration of College Football* DVD. Produced by Joe Lavine, Home Box Office, 2008.

professional baseball instead.

Early in Royal's tenure at Texas, allegations of racist behavior on the field sparked controversy and helped build the team's image as defenders of Southern racial traditions. The tumult erupted during and after Royal's first Cotton Bowl, a January 1, 1960 contest against top-ranked, racially integrated Syracuse. During a hard-fought 23-14 Syracuse victory frustrations grew among the Longhorns. As tempers boiled, racial prejudices surfaced. Late in the second quarter, following a long Syracuse pass play that ended with receiver Ken Ericson fumbling out of bounds in the Texas end zone, the appropriately named John Brown, a tackle and one of three African Americans on the Orangeman squad, responded to a racial epithet by throwing a punch at Texas's Larry Stephens. What followed was a bench clearing near brawl with both coaches in the Texas end zone fighting to restrain their own players and keep the teams separated. According to the northern visitors, several Longhorns made racist remarks and spit at their black competitors during the game. Syracuse also charged Texas with engaging in unsportsmanlike tactics and dirty play. "They were really dirty," Syracuse tackle Al Gerlick told the press after the game. "This was the worst bunch we played against all season," Brown added. The Longhorns proved especially hostile toward Syracuse's star back, sophomore Ernie Davis who scored two touchdowns, caught two two-point conversions, and made a critical late-game interception to set up the game-clinching touchdown. After the critical interception, their anger turned palpably physical when a Texas defender "flopped Davis to the ground with a sound thud and then gave an extra twist" while making the tackle. Teammates reported that one Longhorn called Davis a "dirty nigger" and Davis, himself, characterized the Longhorns as the "worst team he

had ever played against.” The Orange, and their coach Ben Schwartzwalder, also charged umpire Julius Truelson, a resident of Ft. Worth, with bias in his calling of the game. “Eighty percent of that guy’s penalties were called against us,” Gerlick alleged.<sup>40</sup>

The racial slights directed at the black Orangemen continued after the game when they were asked to leave a postgame banquet at the Adolphus Hotel in Dallas. The entire Syracuse team attended the first part of the banquet, a semi-private awards celebration for members of the two teams, but as they prepared to open the event to the public, officials notified Syracuse that their three black players would have to leave. Incensed, Schwartzwalder, several university officials, including President William Pearson Tolley, and some players also left the banquet in protest. “I don’t want to be any place where my kids can’t be,” the coach told the press.<sup>41</sup> Three days after the game and back in the Northeast, Ernie Davis appeared on the “Today Show” and in an interview with Jack Lescoulie reiterated the allegations of mistreatment to a national audience. Schwartzwalder also continued to push the issue in the public sphere by complaining to the press about the segregation of Dallas nightspots.

Royal reacted quickly to defend his team and the racial mores of the state, although in the national press he came off more like just another southern apologist

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<sup>40</sup> *Washington Post*, 2 January 1960, pg. D8; *Chicago Defender*, 6 January 1960, pg. A24; *Chicago Defender*, 9 January 1960, pg. 24; *Chicago Defender*, 16 January 1960 pg. 23.

<sup>41</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 14 January 1960, pg. B7; *Chicago Defender*, 16 January 1960, pg. 23. A majority of the Syracuse team, however, chose to stay and enjoy the remainder of the banquet anyway. By doing so, they opened both the team and the University up to criticism, particularly in the black press. Wendell Smith of the *Pittsburgh Courier* called Syracuse to task and asked, “Why did the Syracuse authorities agree to participate in such an affair (the banquet) when they knew they had Negro players on the squad?” In Smith’s opinion, it had a lot to do with the \$100,000 the school earned by playing in the Cotton Bowl. *Pittsburgh Courier*, 23 January 1960, pg. 18. Lee D. Jenkins of the *Chicago Defender* pointed out the hypocrisy of “asking three Negroes to leave the premises honoring a promotion that said Negroes helped to boost to success,” and, indeed, without the presence of Davis and star fullback Art Baker, the team’s third African-American player, Syracuse would likely not have been celebrating a national championship that evening. Brad Pye, Jr. writing in the *Los Angeles Sentinel* summed up the emotions of many when he asked, “Why in the hell did Syracuse play in the Cotton Bowl in the first place?”

grasping to defend an older order increasingly out of sync with a changing national mood. Against the accusations of dirty play, Royal suggested studying the game film, which he had reviewed and felt confident would clear his team's reputation. He also called charges his players had spit on Ernie Davis "absurd." In fact, Royal asserted, Syracuse players engaged in racist behavior themselves by directing racial insults at the Longhorns' Mexican-American halfback Rene Ramirez. Here Royal saw a double-standard at work—"you have to be from the South I guess to be prejudiced," he quipped—and he claimed that there was "more concern in the East than in Texas" about the racial composition of the Syracuse team.<sup>42</sup> Royal seemed particularly irritated by the fact that Syracuse had accepted the trip to the Cotton Bowl knowing the racial status quo in Dallas and still protested the treatment they received. Regarding Schwartzwalder's complaints about the segregation of Dallas nightlife, Royal argued, "But he knew that before the game. If he felt that strongly about it, he should have just said, 'Syracuse declines the invitation to the Cotton Bowl.'" Forced to defend segregation, but trying not to come across as a racist in a national debate, Royal added, "I think he (Schwartzwalder) was right—but he shouldn't have come down here and then tried to make a big issue out of something he had agreed to do."<sup>43</sup> Given that Syracuse won the game, claimed the national championship, and secured coach of the year honors for Schwartzwalder, Royal found it particularly inhospitable for Syracuse to complain. "It looks like they ought to be satisfied," he told the press. "I don't know what else they want."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Chicago Defender*, 6 January 1960, pg. A24.

<sup>43</sup> John Maher and Kirk Bohls, *Long Live the Longhorns! 100 Years of Texas Football* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 140.

<sup>44</sup> *Chicago Defender*, 6 January 1960, pg. A24.

Outrage over the charges at Texas grew and on January 11 University president Logan Wilson asked for an official NCAA investigation into what he labeled “irresponsible, false and slanderous” accusations on the part of Syracuse. According to Wilson, the “charges were broadcast on a national television program (and) ... in influential newspapers and magazines” and had “damaged the reputation of this university, of a fine football team and of intercollegiate athletics generally.” He contended that an investigation would “reveal that Texas played hard and clean football ... against the nation’s top-ranked team.”<sup>45</sup> The NCAA considered, but declined to pursue an investigation, and ultimately Wilson’s protest only served to prolong discussion of the controversy. In the rapidly changing racial climate of 1960, Texas’s Cotton Bowl experience highlighted the difficulty and potential pitfalls of defending racism and racial segregation. At the same time, it also helped establish the Texas football program as a symbol of the old segregationist order.<sup>46</sup>

During the late-1950s and the 1960s, the University of Arkansas led by coach John Franklin Broyles emerged as a football power in the Southwest. Like the Longhorns, Broyles and his team came to symbolize a beloved, but passing, era for many in their state. Like Darrell Royal, Frank Broyles was born in 1924. The fifth child of an old Georgia family, young Frank entered the world on December 26 in

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<sup>45</sup> *New York Times*, 12 January 1960, pg. 24.

<sup>46</sup> On February 1, 1960, just as the Cotton Bowl controversy died down, four African-American college students in Greensboro, North Carolina began a sit-in protest at the lunch-counter of their local Woolworth’s store that re-energized the Civil Rights Movement. By the end of the year more than 70,000 protestors across the country had employed this tactic to take the fight against Jim Crow segregation into the public sphere. The founding of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) that September gave formal structure to this expression of grassroots, youthful political protest and trained organizers and leaders for the momentous years just ahead. During the Freedom Rides of 1961, the Albany Movement of 1961 and 1962, the Birmingham campaign in 1963, and the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in the late summer of 1963, SNCC organizers and members played critical roles and helped build the movement. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 signaled their triumph and the destruction of the Jim Crow system that had dominated Southern life since the late-1800s.

Decatur, a sleepy bedroom town on the outskirts of Atlanta. Like Royal, Broyles's early years consisted of a regimen dominated on a daily basis by athletics and, in a larger sense, by the Great Depression. A talented athlete and three-sport star, the youthful Broyles followed sports with an avid passion. Devouring the daily sports page, Frank could recite the starting lineups and batting averages of all the major league teams by the age of eight and read the *Sporting News* from cover-to-cover each week until he was nearly thirty. Broyles's paternal grandfather, R.A. Broyles, a former railroad executive, owned a large grocery store chain in the Atlanta area and his family worked hard but prospered. Frank's father, O.T. Broyles, went to work in the stores at eleven and took over three stores of his own when R.A. retired. The Great Depression, however, tested even the best business practices and O.T. found he lacked the heart to collect from his cash strapped customers. Soon he left the grocery business and began selling cars as the family struggled. Losing their home in 1935, the Broyles moved to a rent house formerly owned by Frank's grandfather. Frank's older brother, Bill, joined the workforce at thirteen to help the family survive, and a similar fate may have befallen the youngest Broyles had the family's financial fortunes not improved by his teen years.<sup>47</sup>

Big for his age, Frank Broyles excelled at athletics throughout his youth. During the seventh grade at Decatur's Oakhurst School, Broyles dominated the competition, averaging, by his own recollection, "seven or eight touchdowns a game" in an offense designed to maximize his talents; "They'd snap the ball to me, and I'd just

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<sup>47</sup> J. Frank Broyles and James Bailey, *Hog Wild: The Autobiography of Frank Broyles* (Memphis, TN: Memphis State Press, 1979), 5-9. Terry Frei, *Horns, Hogs, and Nixon Coming: Texas vs. Arkansas in Dixie's Last Stand* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 10.



run through everybody.”<sup>48</sup> A basketball, baseball, and football star at Decatur’s Boys’ High, Broyles drew the interest of the New York Yankees as a pitcher and first baseman during his senior year, but was more interested in pursuing a college degree. He also chafed at the suggestion of some that football was not his best sport and hoped to prove them wrong on the college gridiron. With scholarship offers from several major Southern schools including the powerful home state Georgia Bulldogs of Coach Wallace “Wally” Butts, Broyles had options, but he had always wanted to attend Georgia Tech in nearby Atlanta, and when that school offered a scholarship, he made his decision to stay close to home and play for legendary coach William A. “Bill” Alexander.<sup>49</sup>

Broyles enrolled at Georgia Tech in the spring of 1942, just months after the U.S. officially entered World War II, and his college experiences necessarily conformed to the realities of the American war effort. With freshmen declared eligible for varsity athletics because of the war, Broyles started for the baseball and basketball teams his first year at Tech, but in football never advanced past the practice squad. In 1943, Broyles made the football varsity and played in the backfield, and by 1944 he emerged as a star. In the Yellow Jackets’ biggest win of the season a late game interception by Broyles sealed their upset victory over an all-star laden Naval Academy team making its first ever appearance in the Deep South. In 1945, the Navy called Broyles to active duty as the U.S. prepared for a possible invasion of Japan in the Pacific War’s final stages. His unit only made it to Hawaii, however, before the Japanese surrendered on

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<sup>48</sup> Broyles, *Hog Wild*, 9.

<sup>49</sup> Broyles, *Hog Wild*, 13-16.

August 14<sup>th</sup> and he returned to the United States by early-1946.<sup>50</sup>

Back at Georgia Tech in the fall of 1946 for his final season, Broyles played for a new head coach, Robert Lee “Bobby” Dodd, Alexander’s long-time assistant and a man who played a large role in shaping his career and the future of the football coaching profession. Dodd played at Tennessee, where he won All-American honors and quarterbacked the Volunteers to a 24-1-1 record from 1928-1930. According to Broyles, he “was the first ‘modern’ head football coach, the only one of his time who could really delegate responsibility.”<sup>51</sup> As the popularity and budgets of college football programs expanded rapidly after the Second World War, head coaches hired increasingly large staffs of assistants in an effort to increase the specialization of their squads and gain a competitive advantage. What Dodd pioneered in the 1940s and 1950s, Broyles, Royal, and many members of their generation of coaches perfected during the 1960s and 1970s.

In 1946, Dodd introduced the T-formation and installed Broyles at quarterback. Dodd described Broyles as a “coach on the field” as he led the Yellow Jackets to a 9-2 season and the eleventh spot in the final Associated Press poll. Drafted by the Chicago Bears and, because of the war, with eligibility remaining at Georgia Tech, Broyles could have continued as a player, but when Tech assistant George Robert “Bob” Woodruff landed the head coaching job at Baylor, the twenty-two year old Broyles accepted a position as his assistant. At Baylor, Broyles played a key role in helping Woodruff rebuild the program into a Southwest Conference contender. After three seasons at Baylor, Woodruff moved up to the University of Florida and Broyles

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<sup>50</sup> Broyles, *Hog Wild*, 18-32.

<sup>51</sup> Broyles, *Hog Wild*, 58.

followed him there for one year, but then returned to Georgia Tech to join Dodd's staff for the 1951 season. For the next six years, Broyles and Dodd lead the Yellow Jackets to some of the storied program's greatest success going 59-7-3 and winning six straight postseason bowl contests. Their 1952 team won the Southeastern Conference championship, finished 12-0, and was ranked second in the final polls. In 1956, only a 6-0 loss to Tennessee in Atlanta marred a 10-1 season that saw Tech beat the University of Pittsburgh 21-14 in the Gator Bowl and end the season ranked fourth. This impressive stretch at a small engineering school with high academic standards secured Dodd's reputation as one of the game's great coaches. It also made Broyles a prime candidate for a head coaching position. After watching in frustration as other assistants his age received head coaching jobs, Broyles finally got his opportunity when Don Faurot, the long-time coach at the University of Missouri and the inventor of the split T formation, left coaching following the 1956 season. Missouri considered several serious candidates, but, with Faurot's support and Dodd's recommendation, finally settled on Broyles.<sup>52</sup>

When Missouri hired Broyles in January 1957, a critical part of their decision-making process included his agreement to abide by Faurot's Missouri Plan, an idealistic recruiting strategy that sought to curb potential abuses by requiring the school to recruit only in-state prospects. The plan represented Faurot's contribution to the long-standing efforts of reformers aimed at limiting the increasing commercialization of college football. By limiting the number of schools pursuing a particular recruit, Faurot hoped to reduce the potential for abuse, especially in smaller states. He also hoped that other schools would follow his example; unfortunately, none ever did. Broyles, himself,

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<sup>52</sup> Broyles, *Hog Wild*, 37-70.

disliked the idea, but his desire to strike out on his own and get out from under Dodd's wing overwhelmed any idea of raising objections at this point.<sup>53</sup>

Perhaps it was the Missouri Plan that pushed him, but whatever the case, when Broyles arrived in Columbia, he quickly took the bold and unprecedented step of integrating football at the University of Missouri. In a state with a long history of racial intolerance and in a political climate characterized by "massive resistance" to desegregation this was not a small step, but Broyles arrived at Missouri feeling that integration was both inevitable and just. He asked Faurot for permission to recruit black players and, when the athletic director gave his approval, began aggressively pursuing two of the state's top African-American high school athletes, Norris Stevenson and Mel West. Stevenson, from St. Louis, had planned on attending Indiana University, but after visiting with Broyles quickly committed to Missouri. West, a native of Jefferson City also agreed to play for the Tigers. The two joined the freshman team in 1957, Broyles only year at Missouri, and became the first African Americans to play on the varsity and letter in football at the University in 1958.<sup>54</sup> A decade later, Broyles faced criticism for the slow pace of integration at the University of Arkansas, but in 1957 at least, he stood at the forefront of progressive change.

Broyles' 1957 Missouri team started fast, going 5-1-1 and winning their first three conference games, but then dropped their final three league contests to finish third in the newly- rechristened Big 8 Conference. Despite the difficult finish, it was a good

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<sup>53</sup> *Washington Post*, 10 January 1957, pg. A20; Broyles, *Hog Wild*, 70; Frei, *Horns, Hogs, and Nixon Coming*, 11.

<sup>54</sup> Frei, *Horns, Hogs, and Nixon Coming*, 87. West led the Tigers in rushing during each of his three varsity seasons and shared the backfield with Stevenson, a bruising blocker. The two played a critical role in helping the 1960 Tigers win the Big Eight championship and finish the season ranked fifth in the Associated Press poll. The 10-1 Tigers, coached by Dan Devine, closed the season with a 21-14 Orange Bowl victory over Navy and Heisman Trophy winner Joe Bellino.

season and both the school and fans were happy with their new coach, but then a job Broyles had long coveted, the head position at the University of Arkansas opened. Three seasons earlier, when the position was last vacated, Broyles expressed his interest to Arkansas athletic director John Barnhill, but did not get an interview. The job eventually went to former Oklahoma star and Bud Wilkinson protégé Jack Mitchell, but now Mitchell was leaving the Razorbacks to go to the University of Kansas. Arkansas spent two weeks considering other candidates, Minnesota's Murray Warmath in particular, but on December 7, 1957 announced Broyles as their new headman.<sup>55</sup>

Prior to Broyles arrival at Arkansas, and despite strong in-state fan support, the program never had pierced the elite ranks of college football. Following Fred Thomson's departure in 1941 after thirteen mediocre seasons, seven different coaches led the Razorbacks, none for more than four years. In 1954, Bowden Wyatt's team captured the Southwest Conference championship before losing to Georgia Tech in the Cotton Bowl, but then Wyatt left for a better job at his alma mater Tennessee. After Mitchell similarly used the position as a springboard, some fans worried Broyles had similar goals and hoped to return to Georgia Tech soon.<sup>56</sup> Broyles rapidly erased those doubts, however, embarking on a nineteen-year career and transforming Arkansas into a national football power. In 1959, his second team went 9-2, tied for the conference championship, and defeated Georgia Tech in the Gator Bowl. In 1960 they won the conference title outright and in 1961 and 1962, they earned invitations to the Sugar Bowl. In 1964, a perfect 11-0 season completed their rise to the ranks of the game's

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<sup>55</sup> Broyles, *Hog Wild*, 72-76.

<sup>56</sup> Broyles, *Hog Wild*, 76.

elite and allowed them to claim the national championship.<sup>57</sup> The following year, they once again stormed through the regular season undefeated, extending their winning streak to twenty-two games, before bowing to LSU 14-7 in the Cotton Bowl and finishing the season ranked third in the first-ever *Associated Press* postseason poll. In 1968, the Razorbacks finished 10-1—their only loss coming against Texas in Austin—and defeated Georgia in the Sugar Bowl.

The success of the Arkansas program brought professional acclaim to Broyles and his staff, and notoriety to the University, but it meant even more to Razorback fans and the state as a whole. A small state without a robust economy, Arkansas lacked a source of pride that earned it distinction on the national stage. Originally known as the Cardinals, the University's football team offered a rallying point for many state residents. In 1908, Hugo Bezdek, a coaching disciple of Amos Alonzo Stagg at the University of Chicago, arrived to lead the team. At some point early in his tenure, he suggested changing the name to Razorbacks in reference to the legendarily tenacious wild hogs of the state's Ozark Mountain region and the name stuck. Soon fans adopted the Arkansas hillbilly's call for bringing the pigs home and shouts of "Whooo-ooooo-Pigs! Sooooie!" became a rallying cry for the team.<sup>58</sup>

On the football field, the Razorbacks years of mediocrity and their status as the only non-Texas team in the Southwest Conference relegated them to the fringes of the

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<sup>57</sup> In 1964, both the *Associated Press* and *United Press International* conducted their final polls at the end of the regular season. Both named undefeated, Southeastern Conference champion Alabama to their top spot and placed the Razorbacks in the number two position. On New Year's Day, Texas defeated Alabama in the Orange Bowl while the Razorbacks beat Nebraska in the Cotton Bowl to remain the nation's only undefeated team. Following the bowl games, the Football Writers Association of America conducted a final poll and awarded Arkansas the Grantland Rice Trophy as national champions.

<sup>58</sup> Hank Hancock, *A History of Arkansas Razorbacks* (Abilene, TX: The Author, 1976), Arkansas Collection LD236.2 .H36 1976, University of Arkansas Libraries Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas.

college football spotlight. This underdog position only amplified their connection to everyday Arkansans and, once Broyles's teams started winning, ever-larger numbers rallied to their cause. Only three booster clubs supported the program when Broyles arrived in 1958, by the middle of the 1960s there were twenty-three. During the same period, stadium expansions added 20,000 seats to the stadium on-campus in Fayetteville and 15,000 to the stadium in Little Rock where the Razorbacks played three or four home games each year. Arkansas songwriters like J. Paul Scott crafted popular dance songs and ballads paying homage to the Razorbacks and some merchants framed checks from Broyles and hung them on the wall rather than cashing them. "There is a special kind of hysteria in Arkansas now," Dan Jenkins wrote in a 1965 cover piece for *Sports Illustrated*, "... the kind that comes only with a winning college football team. ... And it spreads like measles." According to Jenkins, the appeal of the Razorbacks cut across class lines and Arkansans from all walks of life identified themselves and demonstrated their loyalty by wearing Razorback red, especially on game days.<sup>59</sup> The passion of the fans prompted Broyles to call Arkansas football "the greatest force for unity and common purpose" in the state's history.<sup>60</sup>

In addition to producing winning teams and providing a rallying point for the state, Broyles also assembled a talented and professional staff at Arkansas that built on the innovations introduced by Dodd and expanded them in the increasingly specialized college football world of the 1960s. At one time or another his staff included future head coaches Jim Mackenzie, Chuck Fairbanks, Hayden Fry, Barry Switzer, Doug Dickey, Johnny Majors, Joe Gibbs, Jackie Sherrill, and Jimmie Johnson. Like Royal at

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<sup>59</sup> *Sports Illustrated*, November 8, 1965, pg. 34-41. Jenkins' article did not address race or the strength of support for the team from within the African-American community.

<sup>60</sup> Broyles, *Hog Wild*, 95.

Texas, Broyles built a hierarchical, bureaucratic organizational structure modeled on the corporate world. As the leader, he served as the public face of the program and coordinated the myriad of activities required to run a high-level college football program. Below him, his talented staff managed daily operations and directed the on the field coaching during practices and games. In fact, Broyles often watched the team's workouts from a tower above the practice field, overseeing specialized offensive and defensive coaches guiding players in their areas of expertise.

Innovative on many fronts, Broyles and his program lagged behind in regard to one of the most profound changes in college football during the 1960s: the embrace of the African-American athlete. Having just desegregated the Missouri program, Broyles always claimed he arrived at Arkansas believing racial inclusion was both "inevitable" and "just," but that ingrained prejudices and the unspoken policy of the Board of Regents kept him from acting.<sup>61</sup> His record as the head of the university's football program and the experiences of early black athletes who tried to integrate his team, however, paint a different picture.

When Broyles arrived at Arkansas in 1958, southern traditions remained strong in a state in the midst of a bitter confrontation with the federal government over school desegregation. In the fall of 1957, Governor Orval Faubus sent the Arkansas National Guard to Little Rock, the state capital, to aid segregationist mobs blocking the integration of the city's Central High School. The intervention of the federal government and President Dwight Eisenhower forced the acceptance of nine black students into the school, but in the fall of 1958, as Broyles embarked on his first season, Faubus closed Little Rock's four high schools for the school year. Eventually, federal

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<sup>61</sup> Broyles, *Hog Wild*, 108.



power won out and the Little Rock schools began integrating, but the controversy aroused the passions of whites intent on exerting “massive resistance” against racial change.<sup>62</sup>

In this climate, the Board of Regents and Broyles faced little resistance to their policy against recruiting black athletes and the program remained lily-white for over a decade with Broyles at the helm. The dramatic success of the early- and mid-1960s forestalled any serious thoughts among white Razorbacks about employing African-American talent on the gridiron, but at the same time racial liberals on campus and African Americans began to press for integration. In 1965, Darrell Brown, a black freshman from Lockesburg, Arkansas, arrived in Fayetteville with the goal of becoming the school’s first black football player. Allowed to tryout for the team, Brown spent two years as a walk-on, trying unsuccessfully to impress the coaches and break into the Razorback lineup. On the practice field, Brown endured tremendous physical abuse as the coaching staff and players seemed intent on imposing a high physical price on the would-be black trailblazer. As a running back, Brown found his blockers often intentionally missed blocks and as a kick returner the coaches often put him on the field alone to face eleven defenders. “As a running back,” Brown later surmised, “I was simply a tackling dummy.” In addition to the physical abuse, Brown also withstood verbal harassment, including the almost constant use of racial epithets, and the social

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<sup>62</sup> On the Little Rock Crisis see: Karen Anderson, *Little Rock: Race and Resistance at Central High School* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Tony A. Freyer, “Politics and Law in the Little Rock Crisis, 1954-1957,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 40.3 (1981): 195-219. James A. Kirk, “The Little Rock Crisis and Postwar Black Activism In Arkansas,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 56.3 (1997): 273-293; Neil R. McMillen, “The White Citizens’ Council and Resistance to School Desegregation in Arkansas,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 30.2 (1971): 95-122; Sara Murphy, *Breaking the Silence: The Little Rock Women’s Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools, 1958-1963* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1997); Elizabeth Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son: Little Rock, the Crisis That Shocked the Nation* (New York: Free Press, 2007).

ostracism of his white teammates and coaches. At one point, according to Brown, as Broyles sat in the stands overseeing a kick coverage drill, the coach shouted at his defenders, “Why is it that you can’t catch that nigger?” Though he was never given a playbook or taught the offense, Brown did earn a small amount of playing time on the freshmen team in 1965, but a knee injury the following year put an end to his dream of playing for the Razorback varsity.<sup>63</sup>

After Brown’s departure, Broyles’ program remained all white for another two years even as outside pressure to integrate continued to increase. On campus, members of the faculty pushed to fully desegregate university life. Knowing the tremendous influence of Broyles, the Senate Council, the ruling body of the Faculty Senate, called the coach before it in an attempt to get him to agree to integration. Broyles, his power challenged, told the faculty board, “I’ll go home to Georgia before I’ll have any niggers on my team.”<sup>64</sup> Broyles later admitted that the program “fell behind” both socially and competitively by ignoring African Americans and contended that the talent and success of Jerry LeVias at SMU helped change attitudes in Arkansas and open the way for the Razorbacks to begin recruiting blacks. In January 1969, Hiram McBeth III from Pine Bluff, Arkansas, joined the program as a walk-on and in April became the first black to compete in the annual spring intra-squad scrimmage, the Red-White Game. Years of discrimination and neglect, however, aroused bitter feelings in the state’s black community and early on Broyles found it difficult to entice black recruiting prospects to campus. Finally, in the spring of 1969, Jon Richardson of Little Rock became the first

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<sup>63</sup> Rus Bradburd, *Forty Minutes of Hell: The Extraordinary Life of Nolan Richardson* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 163-173.

<sup>64</sup> Bradburd, *Forty Minutes of Hell*, 159-160.

African American to accept a football scholarship at the university.<sup>65</sup>

During the 1960s, Arkansas and Texas dominated college football in the Southwest and their success allowed the area to stake its claim as one of the most powerful football regions in the nation. Propelled by two youthful coaches, Frank Broyles and Darrell Royal, each personifying aspects of the organization man ideal, the two schools dominated the Southwest Conference and competed for national honors throughout the decade. Their annual midseason contests turned into epic clashes that drew sellout crowds and often determined the fate of both teams' seasons. In 1959, a 13-12 Texas victory in Little Rock helped send the Longhorns to the Cotton Bowl while the Razorbacks settled for the Gator Bowl. The following year, Arkansas returned the favor, beating Texas 24-23 in Austin on their way to the conference championship and the Cotton Bowl and relegating the Longhorns to the Bluebonnet Bowl. A hard-fought 17-13 victory in Little Rock proved a critical part of Texas's 1963 national championship season. Then, in 1964, with the Longhorns riding a fifteen-game winning streak, the Razorbacks came to Austin and won 14-13 on their way to their own undefeated championship season. A 39-29 loss to Texas in Austin proved the only blemish on the 1968 record of the Sugar Bowl-champion Razorbacks.

As the 1969 season unfolded, the attention of the college football world once again focused in on the Southwest Conference. Arkansas and Texas had two of the best teams in the country again and, as a potential television ratings bonanza executives at ABC Sports contemplated rescheduling their traditional October contest as a season-ending December 6 clash. The idea originally came from publicist Carroll "Beano"

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<sup>65</sup> Charles F. Robinson II and Lonnie R. Williams, eds., *Remembrances in Black: Personal Perspectives of the African American Experience at the University of Arkansas* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2010), 98; Broyles, *Hog Wild*, 108-109.

Cook, and from there ABC Sports president Boone Arledge and ex-Oklahoma coach and color commentator Bud Wilkinson worked behind the scenes with the universities and successfully orchestrated the schedule change. The game would be the only one played that weekend and would be the last of college football's regular season. Cook predicted that it could very well end up a matchup between two top-ranked, undefeated teams and that the network might cash in with a ratings extravaganza on an otherwise slow sports weekend. With the game to be played in Fayetteville, Arledge contacted Broyles about making the schedule change. If Arkansas agreed, Arledge promised Broyles that ABC would nationally televise their season-opening game against Stanford in 1970 and that the NCAA had agreed to not count the game with Texas under rules that limited the number of television appearances by schools. Arledge also told Broyles that ABC would arrange for President Richard Nixon to attend the game. Wilkinson, a friend and political ally of President Nixon, hoped to get the nation's chief executive and self-proclaimed leading football fan to attend the game and add to the spectacle of the event. ABC did not have any guarantees from the White House when Arledge made the commitment to Broyles, but, especially if the game became a marquee matchup, it was hoped that Nixon could be persuaded to attend. Always one of the hardest working politicians, the new president played football during his days at Whittier College and throughout his political career associated himself with football's popularity to improve his often-controversial public image. Broyles helped work out the details with Royal and Texas and, by the time the teams held spring practices, the season-ending showdown was set.<sup>66</sup>

With strong squads, Arkansas and Texas started the season ranked second and

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<sup>66</sup> Frei, *Horns, Hogs, and Nixon Coming*, 13-15.

fourth respectively in the preseason Associated Press poll. The Longhorns opened impressively, winning their first three games easily and jumped from fourth to second after beating eighth-ranked Oklahoma 27-17 in Dallas on October 11<sup>th</sup>. They held that ranking for the next six weeks as they blew through four Southwest Conference opponents by a combined score of 201-35. The Razorbacks found it more difficult to impress the writers. They dropped from two to three in the writers' poll after the first week of the season (despite beating Oklahoma State 39-0) when Penn State beat Navy soundly, 45-22, and jumped over Arkansas in the writers' esteem. The Razorbacks lost another spot three weeks later when Southern Cal beat sixteenth-ranked Stanford to move ahead of them. Arkansas dropped to number four despite having won their first four games by a combined score of 139-14. USC tied Notre Dame the following week (their only blemish in a 10-0-1 season) and dropped in the polls and out of national championship contention for the remainder of the season. The writers, however, continued to snub the Razorbacks and vaulted Doug Dickey's Tennessee Volunteers into the number three spot after they posted a decisive 41-14 victory over twentieth-ranked Alabama in Birmingham. The Volunteers, a bowl team the previous four seasons, looked unstoppable when they dominated number-eleven Georgia 17-3 on November 1, but then, inexplicably, they stumbled badly, losing 38-0 against Mississippi and junior quarterback Archie Manning on November 15. Arkansas defeated Southern Methodist 28-15, the same day and the writers returned the Razorbacks to the number three spot in their next poll.

As the season entered its final weeks, Texas and Arkansas, both stood at 8-0 and it looked as if Beano Cook's idea of a marquee end of the season showdown would reach

fruition. However, it did not seem as if either team had a chance of winning the mythical national title. Defending champion, Ohio State, also undefeated with eight wins, occupied the top spot all season long as they plowed through opponents and dominated the Big Ten in route to a season-ending showdown with archrival Michigan. If the Buckeyes won, that would be it; the national title would be theirs. Having defeated Southern Cal and Heisman Trophy-winning running back O.J. Simpson in the Rose Bowl to secure their 1968 title, the Buckeyes could not return to the oldest bowl at the end of 1969 because of a conference rule barring repeat appearances. Since the Big Ten did not allow its members to play in any other bowl, this meant that the Buckeyes' season would end with their game in Ann Arbor against the Wolverines and their first-year coach, Glenn "Bo" Schembechler. Favored by fifteen points, the Buckeyes entered the game riding a twenty-two game winning streak and receiving the accolades of all experts, some of whom were calling them the greatest team ever.

On November 22th, a record crowd of 103,588 filled Michigan Stadium to watch as the resurgent 7-2 Wolverines tried to close their season with an upset win over an archrival. A victory would give them a share of the Big Ten title and a trip to the Rose Bowl. The Buckeyes took early leads of 6-0 and 12-7, but seven turnovers, including four interceptions by star quarterback Rex Kern and two by his backup Ron Maciejowski, crippled their offense and allowed the Michigan defense to dominate the second half. The Wolverines scored the game's final seventeen points to seal a 24-12 victory. As the crowd in Ann Arbor tore down the goal posts and a jubilant team carried Schembechler from the field on their shoulders, ABC executives and Southwest Conference fans rejoiced as well as the dream of a Texas-Arkansas championship

showdown became a very real possibility.<sup>67</sup> The following Thursday—Thanksgiving Day, November 27<sup>th</sup>—when the Razorbacks shutout Texas Tech 33-0 in Little Rock and Texas beat Texas A&M 49-12 on the road in College Station, it became a reality.

In the ten days between Thanksgiving and the clash in Fayetteville boosterism in Texas and Arkansas reached a fever pitch as supporters of the Razorbacks and Longhorns prepared for the climatic season finale. The passion both sides expressed provided evidence of the central importance of college football in defining partisans' personal, community, and statewide identities. From Arkansas, Governor Winthrop Rockefeller proclaimed the week leading up to the game, "Beat Texas Week On Wednesday December 3, Texas Governor Preston Smith issued a proclamation commissioning Royal "Texas Field General" for the upcoming "Battle of Fayetteville."<sup>68</sup> The same day he also signed a memorandum listing the reasons the Longhorns would prevail and ordering the state to "Hook 'em 'Horns!" on game day.<sup>69</sup> In Fayetteville, "Beat Texas" signs appeared "everywhere" and the phrase ran daily in bold red print on the front page of one local newspaper. A local television station ran the phrase "across the screen ... during its regular programming" and a Baptist church put "Attention, Darrell Royal: Do not cast your Steers before Swine" on its sign. The hysteria prompted one national reporter to quip, with only slight exaggeration, "the

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<sup>67</sup> *New York Times*, 23 November 1969, pg. S1.

<sup>68</sup> Proclamation by Preston Smith, Governor of Texas, December 3, 1969, Darrell K. Royal Papers, Box 3J18, Folder: Certificates, Awards, Resolutions, Proclamations.

<sup>69</sup> In the memo, Smith addressed Arkansas governor Winthrop Rockefeller and the people of Arkansas with a generous spirit, noting his "warm friendship and admiration," but could not resist one political jab that put the Razorbacks on the wrong side of the South's states' rights traditions. With it now announced that President Nixon would attend the game as a guest of Rockefeller, a fellow Republican, Smith proclaimed that his state would not "need federal aid on this project of beating Arkansas" but instead would "handle this job with Texas resources." Official Memorandum by Preston Smith, Governor of Texas, December 3, 1969, Darrell K. Royal Papers, Box 3J18, Folder: Certificates, Awards, Resolutions, Proclamations.

players and town folk view Saturday as Armageddon.”<sup>70</sup>

While fans in Texas and Arkansas prepared for an epic football clash, war protestors on campus in Fayetteville planned to use the spectacle generated by the game to voice their opposition to the Vietnam War. On game day, a sign reading “Stop the Vietnam war. Make war on poverty and racism.” hung inside the stadium for all to see, while outside protestors staged a symbolic demonstration against American brutality in Southeast Asia. On a hill outside one end zone, the protestors erected a billboard reading “Mylai” and below it created a giant peace symbol encircling 109 black wooden crosses to represent the, at that point, official death toll from the massacre. Some protestors held signs decrying a “Rich Man’s War” while others mocked the Arkansas rally cry by chanting, “50,000 dead—woo, pig soeey.”<sup>71</sup> The protests did little to dampen the spirit of the day, but for those who saw the game as a momentary chance to escape the turbulence of contemporary American political life, they offered a conspicuous reminder of how deeply divided the nation had become.

After all the hype and hyperbole preceding it, the game itself easily could have failed to live up to expectations. To the delight of executives at ABC and football fans in the stands or tuned in from across the country, that was not the case. “The Big Shootout” turned into a dramatic football contest for the ages, one that featured two big, strong, fast, athletic teams locked in a four-quarter long slugfest with several dramatic turning points and the outcome in doubt almost to the end. Broyles’s Razorbacks featured a high-powered, pro-style offense led by quarterback Bill Montgomery and wide receiver Chuck Dicus that clashed with a stout Longhorn defense that finished the

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<sup>70</sup> *Washington Post*, 4 December 1969, pg. H1.

<sup>71</sup> *Washington Post*, 7 December 1969, pg. A34; *Los Angeles Times*, 7 December 1969, pg. K1.



season ranked sixth nationally in both scoring and total defense. On the other side of the ball, the Longhorns' wishbone offense, led by quarterback James Street and All-American fullback Steve Worster, topped the nation in rushing yards and scored more points than every team except San Diego State. In Fayetteville, they faced an Arkansas defense that was the stingiest in the nation, allowing opponents only sixty-one points in its first nine games.

Texas mistakes and the Arkansas defense dominated the early part of the contest on a gray, overcast and rainy day. The Longhorns received the opening kickoff and turned the ball over with a fumble on their second play from scrimmage just as President Nixon and his entourage entered the stadium. It was the first of six Texas' turnovers that day as the Arkansas defense shutdown the Longhorns' high-powered wishbone for the first time all season. Montgomery led Arkansas on a second quarter touchdown drive and in the third quarter completed a 29-yard touchdown pass to Dicus that gave the Razorbacks a 14-0 lead going into the final quarter.

While segregation remained in force on the field that day, in the stands, one long-standing Southern tradition at the University of Arkansas did fall. With militant protests threatened by black students and a progressive director in charge of the Razorback band, for the first time in years the school's traditional fight song "Dixie" did not fill the stadium during the Big Shootout. Long seen as a symbol of Southern pride and bravado, "Dixie" and other symbols of the Confederacy gained increasing cultural currency and popularity in the 1950s and 1960s as Southerners met the dictates of federally mandated racial change with "massive resistance." Football games, particularly at the big state universities of the region, became focal points for

celebrating the traditions and imagery of Southern life and bands erupting in “Dixie” served as an integral part of the pageantry of Southern college football.<sup>72</sup> For African Americans and liberal whites on campus, however, the song also became increasingly emblematic of the racism and slavery at the heart of the Old South.

In the late-1960s, the politicization of African Americans on the Fayetteville campus led to the formation of Black Americans for Democracy, a black student group whose acronymic name, BAD, captured the increased militancy of the black power era. The impetus for founding the group came in the spring of 1966 when the *Arkansas Traveler*, the campus student newspaper, published a highly racist letter criticizing the African-American presence at the university. When a black student wrote a rebuttal and the newspaper refused to print it, blacks organized a protest in front of Hill Hall that won concessions from the newspaper and inspired the formation of a permanent organization.<sup>73</sup>

In 1969, BAD launched a campaign to eliminate “Dixie” from university life, a challenge that placed the group in direct opposition to the football program and some of the state’s proudest cultural traditions. Freshman BAD member Gene E. McKissic, Sr. later remembered their motivations, “I think ... a lot of it had to do with respect as individuals and collectively. We were no longer going to be invisible in Fayetteville. ... The University of Arkansas was no longer going to ignore the fact that blacks students

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<sup>72</sup> On Southern and Confederate traditions in college football see: Christopher C. Nehls, “Flag-Waving Wahoos: Confederate Symbols at the University of Virginia, 1941-1951,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 110.4 (2002): 461-488; Wes Buroki, “‘You’re Dixie’s Football Pride’: American College Football and the Resurgence of Southern Identity,” *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 10.4 (2003): 477-494; Andrew Doyle, “Causes Won, Not Lost: College Football and the Modernization of the American South,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 11.2 (1994): 231-251.

<sup>73</sup> Gordon D. Morgan and Izola Preston, *The Edge of Campus: A Journal of the Black Experience at the University of Arkansas* (Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 1990), 26.

were a reality and were going to be respected.”<sup>74</sup> Determined to end the playing of the song at football games, BAD members first met with the band and, while they found its young director Richard A. Worthington willing to compromise, a large majority of band members refused to consider dropping the song. Opting to take direct action, BAD decided to disrupt the pregame pep rally scheduled for Tuesday, November 25 at the Chi Omega Greek Theater in the center of campus. With the Razorbacks scheduled to play Texas Tech on Thanksgiving Day, supporters of perhaps the state’s most beloved cultural institution began gathering for a campus tradition. As the crowd filed into the amphitheater, BAD members moved to the stage and positioned themselves in seats reserved for the Razorback band. When the band entered the arena and prepared to march through the isles to the stage while playing “Dixie” as they typically did, BAD members blocked their path. BAD leader Eugene Hunt announced from the stage that they would let the rally precede if the band agreed to permanently retire the offensive song, but the indignant crowd shouted him down. Rally organizers quickly regrouped and changed venues, moving the event to an open area near the athletic dorm.<sup>75</sup>

Their protest thwarted, the following week BAD decided to go a step further and disrupt that weekend’s “Big Shootout” with Texas by staging a sit-in on the playing field if the band played the song. As rumors of the potential demonstration circulated on campus, BAD found critical allies in the Student Senate, which voted overwhelmingly to recommend that the band stop playing “Dixie.” This backing by student leaders convinced Band Director Worthington to take action and he ordered the band to cease playing the song. At that week’s pep rally, once again held in the Greek

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<sup>74</sup> Robinson ed., *Remembrances in Black*, 107.

<sup>75</sup> Robinson ed., *Remembrances in Black*, 107-108; Frei, *Horns, Hogs, and Nixon Coming*, 93-94.

Theater, the band complied with the director's order and "Dixie" disappeared from the festivities. The black students were not convinced that the director's ban would hold during the big game and they arrived at the stadium prepared to go forward with their plan to occupy the field. Much to their surprise, and relief, however, it did. In this case, the increasing size and militancy of the black student population joined with a larger sense of social justice among liberal whites at the university to end the tradition of playing "Dixie" at Arkansas football games.<sup>76</sup> The day's events marked an early victory for the forces of integration in what would be a decades-long battle to remove the sights and sounds of the Confederacy from twentieth-century Southern life.

Excitement reigned in the stadium at the end of the third period as with a two-touchdown lead the home crowd sensed an epic victory and a championship within reach—but the fourth quarter belonged to Texas. On the opening play, Street dropped back to pass before an onslaught of pressure from the Razorbacks forced him out of the pocket and sent him scrambling up the middle of the field. Entering the Arkansas secondary, he cut to his right, picked up key blocks and raced 42-yards for Texas's first score. A successful two-point conversion followed, and the Longhorns quickly cut the lead to 14-8. The Razorbacks responded by driving seventy-three yards on a series of successful Montgomery passes until, with under eleven minutes left, they faced a third-down and goal at the Texas seven yard-line. Many fans and members of the Arkansas coaching staff expected a running play to set up the Razorbacks' outstanding kicker Bill McClard for a short field goal that would put the Longhorns two scores down, but offensive coordinator Don Breaux called for a pass to Dicus in the corner of the end zone. Montgomery's pass arrived just short and Texas defender Danny Lester stepped

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<sup>76</sup> Frei, *Horns, Hogs, and Nixon Coming*, 174-176.

in front to intercepted it to keep Texas in the game. The Longhorns' sixth and final turnover gave the ball back to the Razorbacks, but then the Texas defense held and got the ball back at their own 36 with just over six minutes left. Three running plays netted seven yards and suddenly, with 4:47 on the clock, the Longhorns faced a critical fourth-down and three in their own territory with their eighteen-game winning streak on the line.

Street called timeout and went to the sideline to confer with the usually conservative, run-oriented Royal who shocked him by calling for "Right 53 Veer Pass," a risky deep pass to the tight end. After the game, the *Chicago Tribune's* Robert Markus called it "surely ... the most audacious call in college football history," but Royal felt like it was a chance they had to take.<sup>77</sup> "That was the time to put it all on the line," he said later. "If we had run for a first down, we'd have lost the game. We weren't moving the ball."<sup>78</sup> Street returned to the field and relayed the play call to his equally shocked teammates in the huddle. As the teams approached the line of scrimmage fans in the stands and the huge national television audience anxiously awaited an obviously critical play, but few might have guessed they were about to witness one of the most dramatic moments of college football history. Street took the snap and moved left, faking the triple-option handoff to his fullback Worster, then dropping diagonally back into the pocket before setting up and throwing a pass deep down the left sideline. Longhorn tight end Randy Peschel broke away from the line of scrimmage and sprinted into the Arkansas secondary veering to the outside with two Razorback defenders in close pursuit. Looking up and over his outside shoulder,

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<sup>77</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 7 December 1969, pg. B1.

<sup>78</sup> Frei, *Horns, Hogs, and Nixon Coming*, 240-241.

Peschel made a spectacular catch of a near perfect pass as it dropped just between the outstretched hands of the two defenders. Peschel stayed on his feet for another five yards before being dragged down at the Arkansas 13 for a gain of 43 yards. As pandemonium reigned on the Texas sideline, the stunned Arkansas crowd watched as Texas running back Ted Koy burst over left tackle for eleven yards, and then Jim Bertelsen took a handoff to the left the final two yards into the end zone to tie the game. Placekicker Happy Feller's successful extra point completed the comeback and gave the Longhorns a 15-14 lead with just under four minutes to play.

The Razorbacks high-powered passing offense and talented kicker gave them a real chance to stage a dramatic comeback and reclaim the lead. They started their final drive on their own 20 and on a series of short Montgomery passes quickly moved into Texas territory at the 39. On second down and three, needing about fifteen yards to get into field goal range, Montgomery rolled to his right and threw to receiver John Rees twenty yards down field. As the pass arrived, Texas defender Tom Campbell stepped in front to make the interception and seal the victory for the Longhorns.

Following the game, as the Texas locker room exploded with celebration and excitement, the nation's leading politician stopped in to offer his congratulations and to award Royal and the team a plaque naming them the nation's top team. With television cameras capturing the moment, Nixon told those in the locker and a national audience that they had just witnessed "one of the great games of all time."<sup>79</sup> Comparing the Longhorn's comeback to the comebacks of his own political career, the President said, "For a team to be behind 14 to 0, and then go on to win, not lose their cool, that shows

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<sup>79</sup> *New York Times*, 7 December 1969, pg.1.

that you deserve to be number one.”<sup>80</sup> Battling public discontent over the Vietnam War, rising tensions in the Middle East, the uncertainties of the Cold War, and a host of hot-button domestic issues, football gave Nixon a popular platform from which to bolster his public image. James Reston, writing in the *New York Times*, said the association with football made Nixon more “appealing to Middle America and its values of family, community, state, and region.”<sup>81</sup> In return, many fans supported a politician whose career mirrored a late-game comeback by an underdog quarterback. Three days after celebrating in the Texas locker room, the National Football Foundation honored Nixon at an event in New York City for, as the plaque they gave him put it, “Courage in the true tradition of our sport ....” In troubled times, Nixon reassured his audience that “The competitive spirit, the ability to lose and come back, to try again” remained strong and “essential” in the nation.<sup>82</sup>

“The Big Shootout” a game between Texas and Arkansas on December 6, 1969 in Fayetteville, Arkansas is remembered as one of college football’s most famous contests. It also stands as a powerful symbolic moment and turning point in the racial history of the game in the Southwest. In college football’s one-hundredth year, two storied programs both steeped in the traditions of Southern football met in a game that captured the attention of much of the nation and helped crown the national champion. As a cultural spectacle, the game put on proud display many long-standing American, and Southern, traditions—traditions that seemed increasingly under attack in the late-1960s. Both teams were completely white, preserving one of the most sacred cultural spaces—the college football gridiron—for the performance and glorification of white

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<sup>80</sup> *Washington Post*, 7 December 1969, pg. A34

<sup>81</sup> *New York Times*, 7 December 1969, pg. E10.

<sup>82</sup> Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 443.

masculinity. In addition to the teams, the coaching staffs, administrators, students, alumni, and other members of the crowd in attendance were all either predominantly or exclusively white. That day in Fayetteville, college football remained, as it had for most of its history, a white cultural endeavor.

Much more than just a football game, “The Big Shootout” brought together two other pillars of American culture: God and country. The nation’s most famous Protestant evangelist, Billy Graham, led the convocation before the game and a plethora of locally, regionally, and nationally prominent politicians found it important to attend. Arkansas’s Democratic Senator J. William Fulbright and Republican Governor Winthrop Rockefeller crossed partisan lines in their support of the Razorbacks, while Texas Governor Preston Smith, a Democrat in a state that had not elected a Republican to his office in almost one hundred years, involved himself in the pregame hype. More significantly, the nation’s leading politician, the President of the United States, Richard M. Nixon came to town for the game and inserted himself in the day’s drama, associating his Southern Strategy of winning conservative white Democrats over to the GOP with one of the South’s most beloved cultural institutions—college football.

While the game echoed many traditions of the past, it also symbolized how much college football, sports, and the nation itself was changing. The winning Longhorn team became the last segregated team to capture the national championship as the talent of black athletes transformed the game and made winning without them impossible. In fact, African Americans already participated in both programs and, though none had yet played on the varsity, the teams’ supporters and coaches were well into the process of slowly accepting desegregation. The following year, both programs



integrated their varsities, and by two seasons later every major college football team had achieved desegregation. The decades long fight against Jim Crow in college football was finally won, and the era of the African-American athlete had begun.

The arrival of the black athlete also brought the appearance of the black fan. While whites dominated the crowd gathered in the stadium that day in Fayetteville, a small group of black students and other interested African Americans joined in the spectacle. Razorback athletics, and especially the football team, long symbolized the heritage and traditions of Southern racism in Arkansas's black community, but with integration slowly becoming a reality, a small but growing number of blacks began to identify with the university's teams.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, despite their numbers, on this day the student members of BAD won a significant victory by successfully eliminating "Dixie" from the pageantry of Arkansas football. In the South, major college football had always been a white pastime, with black fans supporting the black colleges, but by the late-1960s, and increasingly in the 1970s, the region's most prominent programs played to a mixed-race audience.

ABC achieved its hoped for ratings bonanza, over half the television sets in the country tuned in to watch the game, as "The Big Shootout" reflected the growing influence of television on the sport, an influence that would expand exponentially over the next three decades. The influx of television money proved a key factor in getting the schools to agree to change the game's date and ABC's willingness to nationally televise Arkansas's 1970 season-opener with Stanford added to the financial

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<sup>83</sup> Morgan, *The Edge of Campus*, 155.

incentives.<sup>84</sup> Broyles used some of the windfall to install a trendy, new AstroTurf playing surface in Fayetteville. The artificial turf would ensure the quality of the field for a December game and also contribute to Broyles's long-term program of building the school's football physical plant and enhancing its status as a major college football power. This symbiotic relationship—between broadcast television networks seeking to expand and fulfill the public demand for football and universities pursuing television dollars and institutional recognition—well developed by 1969, has emerged as a central driving force in the history of the game in the decades since.

For Frank Broyles and Darrell Royal, “The Big Shootout” represented a high-water mark in both of their illustrious careers. Having both won national championships earlier in the decade, they once again led their programs to the top of the ultra-competitive college football world in the late-1960s. But the larger world around them was changing. The war protestors outside the stadium on game day, the longer hairstyles creeping into their locker rooms, and the black athletes they now had to pursue were all symbols of a fundamental cultural shift occurring around them. In this new cultural landscape, the once unchallenged authority of the coach increasingly came under assault. Neither man would do as well in the 1970s, but their difficulties adjusting in a new era opened the doors of opportunity for those who could. It was a situation Royal's alma mater, the University of Oklahoma, would be ideally positioned to capitalize on.

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<sup>84</sup> According to reports both Arkansas and Texas received \$180,000 each for the broadcasting rights to “The Big Shootout.” *New York Times* 2 December 1969, pg.75.

## Chapter Six

### **Black Power on the Football Field: Barry Switzer, Darrell Royal, and “The Greatest Team Nobody Saw”**

While the powerful football programs at the universities of Texas and Arkansas resisted the full implications of athletic integration in the late-1960s and early-1970s, the University of Oklahoma once again led the region toward racial change on the football field. Embracing expanded definitions of racial inclusion and masculine expression, the Sooners capitalized on their progressive outlook to build powerful teams and achieve college football glory for the school and state. At the same time, the influx of talented black athletes nationally raised the level of competition on the field and slow-adapting programs like the Longhorns and Razorbacks saw their performances suffer and their teams slip from the highest echelons of national competition.

The elevation of Barry Switzer to head coach in 1973 symbolized Oklahoma’s willingness to embrace a new style of masculine leadership at odds with the hegemonic, corporate masculinity dominant in football and the larger American culture during the post-World War II era.<sup>1</sup> Switzer’s anti-authoritarian, individualistic, hedonistic, and

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<sup>1</sup> Scholars of manhood employ the concepts of hegemonic and subordinate masculinities when analyzing the multi-faceted ways in which males act out their gender roles. John Beynon, defines hegemonic masculinity as the styles of manhood that are most successful “in particular places at a specific time.” Their success leaves other subordinate masculinities in an “inadequate and inferior” position. According to Beynon, hegemonic masculinity is historically based and constantly evolving through countless social negotiations and displays of “power and achievement.” The conflict over masculinity is often apparent in the workplace and within organizations. In many individuals, the values of hegemonic masculinity are deeply embedded and explicitly displayed. “Versions of culturally praised hegemonic masculinities become part of general consciousness” even though they sometimes contradict the reality of most men’s lives. John Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002), 16-17. R. W. Connell views gender as a hierarchy of social and power relations and as an ongoing discourse of identity influenced by race, sexuality, class, and nationality. In her view, masculinity is dynamic—it is created within a particular historical context and changes as the historical situation evolves. There is no single definition of what constitutes masculinity in a modern society, multi-cultural societies create multiple definitions of masculinity. However, all of these masculinities are not equal, some operate from a dominant position while others exist in subordinated or marginalized positions. Usually, Connell

racially-inclusive coaching style drew on new forms of masculine expression gaining currency in the late-1960s and early-1970s and helped introduce them to the culture of college football.<sup>2</sup> The Oklahoma coaching staff's embrace of African-American athletes (in his first year, Switzer removed all restrictions on the recruiting of black athletes) and their acceptance of black masculine expression allowed the team to access large, and previously underutilized pools of black athletic talent in Oklahoma and, especially, Texas. The influx of talent propelled the Sooners to the best record in college football in the 1970s. Beginning in 1973, Switzer's teams won twenty-eight straight games on their way to back-to-back national championships in 1974 and 1975. Utilizing black athletes earlier—and to a greater degree—than other schools from states with long histories of segregation, the Oklahoma coaches also proved accepting of their young athletes' new styles of masculine expression.<sup>3</sup> Silver football shoes, crimson

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argues, there is a single hegemonic form that is seen as most desirable, although the lives of individual men rarely encompass all of its components. "Masculinities are defined collectively in culture, and are sustained in institutions," Connell notes, and institutions play a powerful role in both creating a variety of masculinities and in shaping relations between them. R. W. Connell, *The Men and the Boys* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 5-14. Beynon's and Connell's assertions that institutions and organizations play key roles in defining and sustaining acceptable styles of masculinity holds particular relevance to the study of college football and its influence on American culture. As the work of Michael Oriard demonstrates, beginning in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century college football became a critical cultural focal point for articulating the complex ideals of American masculinity, debating the relative merits and limitations of competing ideal types, and ranking the results according to their perceived cultural worth. Michael Oriard, *Reading Football: How the Popular Press Created an American Spectacle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 189-200.

<sup>2</sup> According to cultural historian Michael Kimmel, the civil rights, women's liberation, and gay rights movements of this period all helped to expand accepted definitions of manhood while challenging traditional ideals of male behavior. Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 262-263.

<sup>3</sup> On masculinity and the black athletic experience see: Richard Majors, "Cool Pose: Black Masculinity and Sports" in Michael A. Messner and Donald F. Sabo, eds., *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives* (Champaign: Human Kinetics Books, 1990), 109-114. Majors adopts the term "cool pose" to describe the attitudes employed by black males to challenge racial constraints on their behavior. Because they faced strict limitations in so many other areas and because they found significant success on the playing field, African-American athletes embraced sport as an important arena for black masculine self-expression and the deployment of "cool pose."

bandanas, and long, natural, “Afro” hairstyles symbolized the Sooners as much as their flashy, high-speed offense and frequently dominant victories.

The team’s success, however, produced vocal critics, Texas coach Darrell Royal among them, who often adopted a more traditional view of masculinity when criticizing the Sooner football program and leveling accusations of impropriety. Just before Switzer’s first season as head coach, the NCAA imposed stiff sanctions, including a ban on bowl game and television appearances, after the coaching staff was found guilty of altering the high school transcripts of two star black recruits. In their willingness to circumvent rules and their win-at-all-costs mentality, Switzer and his staff embodied some of college football’s oldest traditions and reflected deeply traditional tropes of American masculinity. As a result of the penalties, the championship teams of 1974 and 1975 and their fast, flashy, black-influenced style of football did not appear on live television and soon earned the nickname “The Greatest Team Nobody Saw.”

In 1970, both Texas and Arkansas added the first black athlete to their varsity football teams as the decades long fight to desegregate Southwest Conference football was finally completed. Over the course of the next seven seasons, Royal and Arkansas coach Frank Broyles would oversee the gradual integration of their programs as the number of black players and their importance to their team’s success slowly but steadily increased. Unfamiliar with African-American culture, hesitant to embrace integration, and with well-earned reputations as defenders of the segregationist order, both coaches found it difficult to recruit blacks and their teams suffered as a result. Royal, who defeated his alma mater twelve of thirteen times between 1958 and 1970, never defeated the more thoroughly integrated Sooners again. After winning the national

championship in 1969 and sharing it in 1970, the Longhorns dropped from national title contention and finished the season in the top ten only twice in the following six years. Broyles' Razorbacks suffered an even sharper decline. After establishing themselves as a perennial national title contender in the 1960s, between 1970 and 1976 Arkansas finished the season ranked in the top ten only once.

Other cultural transformations linked to and unfolding alongside changing race relations put additional pressure on the two coaching legends. As the athletic directors at their respective schools, the growing assertiveness of the women's movement placed both squarely in the middle of the fight for gender equity in college athletics. Defending their football empires and concerned they would be forced to share significant revenues, the two developed reputations as champions of male privilege and exposed themselves to further criticism. At the same time, the youth revolt of the era and the newly individualistic college athlete forced them to adapt and grudgingly consent to longer hairstyles, facial hair, and other symbols of countercultural style they would have never tolerated on their teams a decade earlier. With wins growing more difficult to come by, and with controversy seemingly at every turn, both Royal and Broyles resigned their head coaching positions at the end of the 1976 season. Fittingly, they faced each other in their final game and, after Royal's team won, they finished their final seasons with identical 5-5-1 records. Their departures marked the end of an era in Southwestern college football and symbolized the beginning of a new one. The following season, with new coaches Fred Akers and Lou Holtz, the Longhorns and Razorbacks surged back to the top of the national rankings, their teams now full participants in the quickly integrating world of college football.

The resurging fortunes of the Oklahoma football program in the 1970s followed a decade of disappointment and frustration as the powerful teams of the 1950s declined into mediocrity in the 1960s. Sooner coach Bud Wilkinson's years of unparalleled success may have changed his priorities, diminished his drive and determination, and contributed to his team's slow decline.<sup>4</sup> In the mid-1950s, Wilkinson and Michigan State coach Duffy Daugherty began conducting annual coaching clinics for high school and college coaches around the country. The clinics provided a significant boost in income and added to Wilkinson's professional reputation, but they also required a great deal of time and travel taking him to twelve cities over the course of four weekends and demanding his attention at other times of the year. In addition, they took place in January and February during the height of recruiting season and sometimes when recruits came to the Norman campus the head coach was not there to meet them.<sup>5</sup> Following a disappointing 1959 season in which they lost their first conference game of the decade, the Sooners started the 1960s with the worst season of Wilkinson's OU career, a 3-6-1 campaign in 1960.

As his coaching fame grew, Wilkinson also became increasingly interested in

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<sup>4</sup> For many great college football coaches, coaching seems to be a young man's game. There are exceptions—Amos Alonzo Stagg, Bear Bryant, Joe Paterno, Bobby Bowden—to be sure, but for a surprisingly large number—including Royal, Broyles, and Switzer—retirement came at a relatively early age, an age when members of most professions reaped the greatest rewards from their years of experience and hard work. In the hyper-competitive world of major college football, it seems even the slightest loss of focus can knock a man from the top.

<sup>5</sup> Wilkinson and many other successful coaches supplemented their incomes by participating in off-season clinics where they taught the latest coaching techniques to junior members of the profession. At the height of his success, Wilkinson and Daugherty created the Coach of the Year Clinics, a profitable business venture that annually staged the most prominent of these clinics. Each clinic typically lasted three days and each weekend three clinics were staged concurrently. Wilkinson, Daugherty, and the American Football Coaches Association's current Coach of the Year each headlined one day at each clinic before travelling overnight to the next city and all three clinics over the course of the weekend. Jay Wilkinson and Gretchen Hirsch, *Bud Wilkinson: An Intimate Portrait of an American Legend* (Champaign, IL: Sagamore Publishing, 1994), 78, 187-192; Wann Smith, *Wishbone: Oklahoma Football, 1959-1985* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011), 10-11.

politics. In 1961, newly elected President John F. Kennedy asked Wilkinson to head the President's Council on Physical Fitness, a Cold War-inspired effort to encourage physical conditioning amongst what was perceived to be an increasingly sedentary American population. Wilkinson hesitated to take a job he wanted but knew would require a significant time commitment, but a conversation with Kennedy about the job's importance convinced him to try to find a way. Originally thinking he would have to give up coaching to take the position, Wilkinson instead worked out a compromise allowing him to take on both roles. He would spend summers in Washington working full-time on what was officially a part-time position, and then return to Norman for the academic year. In April, the University's Board of Regents gave their approval to his leaving campus for ten weeks during the summer of 1961.<sup>6</sup> Whether it was their coach's absence or a continuation of their decline the previous year, the Sooners' 1961 season started disastrously with five straight losses. At midseason, Wilkinson committed himself to turning things around and the team recovered to win their final five contests and finish the season with a 5-5 record. For the second year in a row, however, and the only two years during Wilkinson's tenure, their opponents outscored them. More importantly in the 1960 and 1961 showdowns with Texas, Wilkinson's Sooners lost by lopsided scores of 24-0 and 28-7.

Despite helping lead the Sooners and the State of Oklahoma on the path to desegregation in the mid-1950s, Wilkinson missed a possible opportunity to keep his team nationally competitive when he declined to push for a greater degree of racial integration within his program in the years that followed. After Prentice Gautt left

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<sup>6</sup> University of Oklahoma Board of Regents, "Minutes," April 13, 1961; Wilkinson and Hirsch, *Bud Wilkinson*, 112-117; Smith, *Wishbone*, 11-12.



campus following the 1959 season, Wilkinson's next three teams featured only one African American each and it was not until 1963 that the Sooner varsity contained two black athletes. By deciding to not further challenge racial norms, the coach faced less resistance, but also failed to take advantage of a potential competitive advantage. With the major football programs of Texas still strictly segregated, both the coach and the program he led declined to pursue the wealth of black football talent in their neighboring state.

In 1962, the Sooners returned to prominence defeating all of their Big Eight conference foes to win the league championship and earn their first trip to the Orange Bowl in four years. A 17-0, shutout loss to Alabama in Miami, however, ended the season and left their record against non-conference foes a disappointing 1-3. In 1963, Oklahoma went 8-2 with losses to Texas and Nebraska and at the end of the season Wilkinson walked away from college coaching, announcing his retirement at the age of forty-seven.<sup>7</sup> Many alumni and fans called on the University to hire the former OU star Royal whose Longhorns had just completed an undefeated national championship season. Wilkinson's influence (as well as that of many former players), however, proved critical in the search for his replacement, and long time line coach and top assistant Gomer Jones won the job. Replacing a legend, Jones struggled through two difficult seasons in Norman. His 1964 team started the season ranked second in the nation, but then went 6-3-1 during the regular season (although they did score an upset win over fourth-ranked Nebraska in Norman in November) and looked outclassed

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<sup>7</sup> Wilkinson continued his move toward politics when he ran for and won the Republican nomination for the U.S. Senate in 1964. The popularity of a legendary football coach, however, could not overcome the traditional strength of the Democratic Party in the state and Wilkinson lost the general election to Democrat Fred R. Harris by a vote of 51.2% to 48.8%.

against Florida State in a season-ending 36-19 Gator Bowl defeat. When Jones's 1965 squad posted the worst record in school history (3-7), the team's fans turned against him. In their October showdown with Texas, the Sooners managed only 114 yards of total offense in a 19-0 shutout defeat. Their meager thirty yards of passing prompted one Dallas sportswriter to quip, "O.U.'s quarterbacks threw the ball like your teenaged daughter" to his readers.<sup>8</sup> Soon a local radio station began airing a nightly "Gomer Must Go" program and influential alumni began writing to President Cross, demanding Jones's replacement.<sup>9</sup> In December 1965, in the face of great pressure, Jones resigned his head coaching position, though he remained on at the university as its Athletic Director.

A much-publicized search to find Jones' replacement focused first on Royal, a native of Hollis, Oklahoma and a man many were convinced could have and should have been hired two years before. Old Oklahoma friends hoped to lure Royal back to the most prestigious job in the state of his birth, but a higher salary and an even more prominent position in Texas led him to decline a job offer from Cross.<sup>10</sup> Eventually, the Sooners' search focused on James A. "Jim" Mackenzie, a heavy-set, hard-nosed former lineman for Bear Bryant's great Kentucky teams of the early 1950s and currently a top assistant on Broyles's staff at Arkansas. Mackenzie accepted OU's job offer and

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<sup>8</sup> Letter: Rea P. McKinney to Board of Regents, October 25, 1965, George Lynn Cross Presidential Papers, General Correspondence, 1965-1966, Box 334, Folder 18, Football, General, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman.

<sup>9</sup> Letters: Jack McKinney to Board of Regents, October 29, 1965; George Lynn Cross to Granville T. Norris, December 22, 1965; Eula J. Crachie to George Lynn Cross, December 7, 1965; George Lynn Cross Presidential Papers, General Correspondence, 1965-1966, Box 334, Folder 18, Football, General.

<sup>10</sup> Cross and the administration knew that Royal held a lucrative position in Texas and was unlikely to be interested in returning to Oklahoma. They also knew that many important alumni and fans would not be satisfied unless they attempted to hire him. In this regard, Cross telegraphed Royal "Am prepared to recommend to Regents that you be named Director of Football and Head Football Coach ... (for) \$35,000 a year. Please let me know at your earliest convenience whether you can accept." Telegram, George Lynn Cross to Darrell Royal, December 13, 1965; George Lynn Cross Presidential Papers, General Correspondence, 1965-1966, Box 334, Folder 18, Football, General.

quickly assembled a youthful and talented group of assistants, including future Sooner coaches Chuck Fairbanks and Switzer, to help in his efforts to revitalize the school's football program.

The search for Jones' replacement produced a massive outpouring of advice directed at Cross, the University's Board of Regents, and members of its Athletic Council. Self-appointed advisors from around the nation and across the socio-economic spectrum offered their critiques of past years' failures and their own blueprints for success in the future.<sup>11</sup> Significantly from a racial perspective, only two items suggested better utilizing the black athletes in the program, and not a single one touched on the idea that the program move toward greater racial integration and make a concerted effort to recruit black athletes.<sup>12</sup> Though Cross would later say Mackenzie and his staff's willingness to recruit and train talented African-American athletes played a crucial role in the administration's decision-making process, that fact did not make it into the historical record in late-1965.<sup>13</sup> In the middle of the 1960s, as black athletes transformed the face of collegiate sport—and seven years after Gautt emerged as a star at OU—the large majority of the Sooners' fan base still thought of football as a white sport and did not equate greater black participation with improved chances for success.

During the next ten years, that viewpoint would rapidly change. From the outset, the new coaching staff proved its willingness to utilize African-American

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<sup>11</sup> For a sampling of the deluge of advice that poured in see: George Lynn Cross Presidential Papers, General Correspondence, 1965-1966, Box 334, Folder 18, Football, General.

<sup>12</sup> The two pieces of correspondence addressing African-American athletes Cross received criticize the treatment of current and former black players on the team and suggest that if they were better utilized the program would benefit. Letter, Cecil Block to George Lynn Cross, November 6, 1965; Unidentified newspaper clipping, Letter to the Editor, A.L. Dow, November 5, 1965; George Lynn Cross Presidential Papers, General Correspondence, 1965-1966, Box 334, Folder 18, Football, General.

<sup>13</sup> Barry Switzer and Bud Shrake, *Bootlegger's Boy* (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1990), 241.

athletes already in the program while beginning to build a recruiting network among black high school coaches in Oklahoma and Texas that would give the Sooners an advantage in recruiting top black athletes during the 1970s and 1980s. Mackenzie's first season saw the team post an improved 6-4 record with important wins over Texas and Nebraska and optimism swelled for the future, but the following spring the new coach died of a massive heart attack at age thirty-seven. In the confusion that followed, Cross appointed thirty-three year-old Charles Leo "Chuck" Fairbanks, a former player for Duffy Daugherty at Michigan State, as head coach. Originally intended to be temporary, the appointment became permanent after the Sooners streaked to a 10-1 record in 1967, won the Big Eight Conference championship and ended the season with a dramatic 26-24 Orange Bowl victory over Tennessee on New Year's Day in 1968.<sup>14</sup> Fairbanks' first talented Oklahoma squad benefited greatly from the contributions of African Americans on both sides of the ball as speedy receiver Eddie Hinton from Lawton, Oklahoma led the Sooners in receiving for the first of two consecutive seasons and nose guard Granville Liggins, a Tulsa native, dominated opponents on defense and was named a consensus All-American.

The Sooners followed what seemed like a breakout season with three consecutive four-loss campaigns that saw an improving program make two Bluebonnet Bowl appearances, but which ultimately left fans disappointed. Soon "Chuck Chuck" signs and bumper stickers began appearing in Norman and the coach's tenure seemed threatened. In 1970, the last of the four loss seasons, with the Sooners struggling on offense and fresh off a home field loss to Oregon State, offensive coordinator Barry

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<sup>14</sup> George Lynn Cross, *Presidents Can't Punt: The OU Football Tradition* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977, 367-370.

Switzer introduced the wishbone offense as the team prepared to play Royal's Longhorns. Developed at Texas in 1968 by offensive coordinator and former high school coach Emory Bellard, the innovative running formation spread through college football after it propelled the Longhorns to thirty straight victories and two national championships in the first three seasons they employed it. The wishbone and its triple-option play created one-on-one matchups that forced defenders to remain committed to their assigned roles and to often make critical solo tackles. It offered particular opportunities to teams like Oklahoma with great speed. "Diagramed on the chalkboard, it appeared to be very easy to defend," explained Greg Pruitt, an African American from Houston and the team's first wishbone backfield star, but "when the ... (offensive player) runs a 4.3 and the ... (defender) runs a 4.7, it isn't quite so easy."<sup>15</sup> The Sooners lost to Texas and Kansas State after the switch, but, as they mastered the new offense, rallied to win four of their last five, including a decisive 66-6 rout of Oklahoma State, before tying Alabama 24-24 in the Bluebonnet Bowl.

In 1971, six seasons after the hiring of Jim Mackenzie, the pieces fell into place for Fairbanks, his staff, and passionate Sooner fans. The maturation of recruiting networks, an influx of African-American talent, and the mastery of the wishbone, propelled the Sooners on a ten-year run that reestablished Oklahoma as a major college football power. During the next two seasons, the Sooners rolled to 11-1 records, finishing both campaigns with victories in the Sugar Bowl and ranked second in the polls. During both seasons the Oklahoma wishbone led the nation in rushing offense.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Smith, *Wishbone*, 124-125.

<sup>16</sup> Oklahoma's total of 5,196 yards rushing in 1971 still stands as the major college record for a single season. Their average of 472.4 rushing yards per game that year is the highest ever posted by a college team at any level.

The Sooners only two losses came in November 1971 against eventual national champion Nebraska in what is often considered the “Game of the Century,” and in October 1972 on the road in Boulder against a strong University of Colorado team. Importantly, the Sooners decisively defeated their archrivals from the University of Texas both years, including handing the Longhorns a lopsided, 27-0 shutout defeat that marred their otherwise perfect 1972 campaign.

Major steps toward racial integration accompanied the program’s surging success on the field. In 1971, senior defensive halfback Glenn King from Jacksboro, Texas became the team’s first black co-captain and Pruitt emerged as its star performer. A consensus All-American pick in both seasons, Pruitt finished third in the voting for the Heisman Trophy in 1971 and second in 1972. In the spring of 1972, Oklahoma took another stride toward integration by hiring their first African-American assistant coach, Wendell Mosley, from B.C. Elmore High School in Houston. At small, all-black Elmore, Mosley built a powerful football program where he coached Pruitt as well as Albert Qualls and Lionel Day who also came to Oklahoma.<sup>17</sup> Mosley’s arrival paid immediate dividends and that year’s recruiting class included some of the best African-American athletes in the nation. With freshmen eligible for varsity competition for the first time that fall, Joe Washington from Port Arthur, Texas, Kerry Jackson from Galveston, Texas, and LeRoy Selmon from Eufaula, Oklahoma made an immediate impact. “I’d have to say that Coach Mosley had a lot to do with me coming here,” Washington, whose father Joe Washington, Sr. was also a prominent black Texas high

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<sup>17</sup> Mosley accepted the position at Oklahoma after the process of school desegregation shutdown his program and converted Elmore into a middle school. Stephen H. Norwood, *Real Football: Conversations on America’s Game* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 388.

school coach, told the student newspaper. "I've known him for a long time."<sup>18</sup> In addition to landing high-profile recruits, the coaching staff's willingness to embrace talented African-American athletes also opened the program to less publicized black players. Also joining the varsity for the first time in 1972, sophomore linebacker Rod Shoate from Spiro, Oklahoma came to OU only after his high school coach made a concerted effort to bring him to the coaching staff's attention.<sup>19</sup> In his first season, Shoate became a force on defense and earned national recognition as a second team All-American selection.

The Sooner coaches also proved willing to move beyond past racial stereotypes and utilize blacks at all positions. In the early stages of desegregation, coaches and programs often adhered to the practice of stacking, limiting their few African-American players to specific positions thought best suited to their "natural" speed, strength, and jumping abilities. Positions perceived to require leadership skills and intelligence, such as middle linebacker, free safety, and, most of all, quarterback, were, according to the prejudices of the time, best reserved for whites. Lacking an experienced starter, Switzer ignored these racial proscriptions and inserted the talented freshman Jackson at quarterback during several games in 1972. Jackson impressed fans with his athleticism (he led the team in rushing during their opening game against Utah State) and his ability to lead the offense until a midseason ankle injury cut his playing time drastically. The young black quarterback later remembered being targeted by some fans angry about the changes he represented, but his performances on the field no doubt convinced others to

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<sup>18</sup> *Oklahoma Daily*, 5 October 1972, pg. 11.

<sup>19</sup> *Oklahoma Daily*, 14 September 1972, pg. 24.

reexamine old stereotypes.<sup>20</sup>

As OU prepared to field another powerful team in 1973, Fairbanks shocked college football by leaving Oklahoma in January to become head coach of the NFL's New England Patriots. A search committee formed by the Board of Regents quickly recommended Switzer, who was already seen as one of the top young assistants in the country and who had been a candidate for other head coaching positions, as his replacement. Officially hired in February at an annual salary of \$24,000 plus \$3,000 for yearly expenses, Switzer stepped into the head-coaching role and the Sooners began a three-season stretch of dominance that culminated in consecutive national championships in 1974 and 1975.<sup>21</sup> Significantly, early in his tenure, Switzer announced to his staff the removal of all restrictions on the recruiting of black athletes. Under Fairbanks, the program took significant steps toward integration but stopped short of recruiting blacks en masse. Now, with Switzer at the helm, Oklahoma would pursue the best athletes regardless of race. "At my first staff meeting I told all my coaches," Switzer later remembered, "that we were going to recruit the very best players at every position regardless of color and the best players would take the field on game day."<sup>22</sup> The implementation of this policy, along with the team's success on the field, made Switzer one of the key coaching figures in the integration of college football in the region. Switzer's background and upbringing uniquely prepared him for the role.

Barry Switzer was born on October 5, 1937 in Crossett, Arkansas, a company

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<sup>20</sup> *Oklahoma Daily*, 30 August 1972, pg. 14; *Oklahoma Daily*, 8 September 1972, pg. 23; *Oklahoma Daily*, 19 September 1972, pg. 11; *Daily Oklahoman*, 17 April 2013, pg. 1C.

<sup>21</sup> University of Oklahoma Board of Regents, "Minutes," February 8, 1973. After two 11-1 seasons concluded with high-profile bowl game wins, the Regents also approved "merit salary increases" of \$1,000 for eight members of the coaching staff. R. Warren Harper received a \$2,000 raise and Galen S. Hall, who took over Switzer's duties as offensive coordinator, received a \$3,000 increase, upping his salary to \$18,000 annually.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, *Wishbone*, 156.



town of more than three thousand in the south central part of the state. Dominated by the Crossett Paper-Mill Company, the town consisted of a series of small, company-built and -owned houses, all painted Crossett gray, which were rented to workers. Sugar cane and cotton farming, as well as timber extraction, dominated economic life in the rural countryside. Born toward the end of the Great Depression and raised largely in the prosperity of the war and postwar eras, Switzer came from a slightly younger but distinctly different generation than coaches like Royal and Broyles. As his aptly titled memoir, *Bootlegger's Boy*, suggests, he also came from a different social class. Switzer's roots stretched deep into rural Southern Arkansas. His great grandfather, Frederick Amos Switzer was born in South Carolina in 1828 and migrated to Arkansas in 1849 with his young bride, Julia Hammond Drummor. The couple purchased 2,000 acres of land near the Ouachita River where they raised a family that eventually included nine children.<sup>23</sup> Their seventh child and fifth son, Frederick Harvey Switzer, was born in 1871. F.H. Switzer owned large tracts of cotton land and pine forest and twice won election to the Arkansas state house before poor health and the Great Depression caused him to lose his wealth late in life. F.H.'s son, the handsome Frank Mays Switzer was born in 1907 and married Mary Louise Wood, the daughter of a local house painter and valedictorian of her class at Crossett High School. The young couple welcomed their oldest son Barry while living in a houseboat on the Ouachita. Switzer moved with his family to Long Beach, California at the age of four as his father and several other family members left job-starved Arkansas and travelled west with thousands of other Arkies, Okies, and Texans to the prosperity of wartime California. Frank Switzer found work as a ship painter in the Long Beach Naval Shipyard and

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<sup>23</sup> *Ashley County Ledger*, 14 February 2001.

Mary worked at a local café. Living within blocks of the beach, Switzer attended Horace Mann Elementary School and enjoyed what he felt was an idyllic early childhood. The family stayed in Long Beach until Barry completed the third grade, but with the end of the war and the loss of jobs, they soon returned to Arkansas.<sup>24</sup>

Back home, Frank Switzer struggled to find a steady means of supporting his family. After several unprofitable business ventures, he found one that produced a steady income and accommodated his fondness for the nightlife and strong drink, bootlegging. Described by his oldest son as “a man’s man” and “kind of a rogue,” Frank began driving south into Louisiana and buying whiskey and then returning home and selling it to the drinkers of dry Ashley County for a nice profit. Soon he developed a distribution network and through six or seven “agents” in Crossett’s large African-American community, “Mr. Frank,” as he was known, supplied the town’s demand for liquor. Though centered in the black community, his bootlegging enterprise also clandestinely served more respectable whites who sent their black servants to fill orders at Mr. Frank’s. In addition to bootlegging, Frank Switzer began loan sharking and with the unofficial sanction of the local authorities built a profitable vice business. Always armed and carrying cash, the elder Switzer regularly drank and gambled with the local elite who accepted him in the masculine setting of the poker game or the pool hall, but who, because of his profession, never considered him a social equal. The stigma of being a “bootlegger’s boy” and the powerful personality of his father shaped the young Barry Switzer. “(His Beliefs) had a tremendous influence on me early on,” Switzer later remembered. The family, which now included Barry’s younger brother Donald

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<sup>24</sup> Barry Switzer and Bud Shrake, *Bootlegger’s Boy* (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1990), 22-24; Interview of Barry Switzer by John Erling, August 17, 2009, Voices of Oklahoma, [http://www.voicesofoklahoma.com/barry\\_switzer.html](http://www.voicesofoklahoma.com/barry_switzer.html).

Kent Switzer, settled into a small shotgun-style house without water or electricity in a swamp bottom southwest of town near the Louisiana state line.<sup>25</sup>

Like the rest of the Jim Crow South, Crossett existed as two communities, one black and one white, both connected in numerous ways and yet, at the insistence of the whites, both rigidly segregated in terms of housing and social relations. In Crossett, the west side of town was black, while whites lived on the east side. “In those days, Switzer recalled, “everything in Crossett was segregated except my daddy’s house.”<sup>26</sup> More than just a bootlegger, Frank Switzer played an important role in the black community. Like an urban machine politician, he provided services that an underrepresented and discriminated against population badly lacked. When tragedy struck families, Frank provided money for those in need. He helped finance the educations of promising black students from struggling families, and, in the days before payday loans and check-cashing businesses, he provided access to short-term credit that the poor community badly needed. Also mirroring the machine politician, his efforts earned him political clout. According to Barry, his father controlled the black vote and had the power to swing local elections. “He got the county sheriff elected ... (and) all the local politicians knew they had to have daddy’s support and friendship,” he later remembered, “...they played poker together, they drank together.”<sup>27</sup>

Frank Switzer’s decision to make his home on the west side of Crossett, near his customer base, exposed his oldest son to the African-American community in a multitude of ways most of his white peers never experienced. A youthful Barry went

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<sup>25</sup> Interview of Barry Switzer by John Erling, August 17, 2009; Switzer and Shrake, *Bootlegger’s Boy*, 24-30

<sup>26</sup> Switzer and Shrake, *Bootlegger’s Boy*, 20.

<sup>27</sup> Interview of Barry Switzer by John Erling, August 17, 2009.

swimming and flirted with black girls in the creeks near his house. On weekend nights, he listened to African-American rhythms from his home as they spilled out of Sam Lawson's Café in a nearby rural black community. On school days, he waited at the same bus stop with his black friends, albeit for separate buses. Outside of school, he competed against them in sports and engaged in thousands of daily interactions that the mandates of segregation usually prevented. "Other than my big collie dog, Major," Switzer later wrote, "black kids were my best friends."<sup>28</sup> Years later, when he went into African-American homes and talked to parents about sending their sons to play for him, Switzer did so with a cultural familiarity that many coaches, including competitors such as Royal and Broyles, could never hope to duplicate.

Switzer's upbringing also led him to what he felt was a critical insight, one that helped him become, in his own words, "one of the leaders of integration in intercollegiate athletics." By the eighth grade, he claimed, he knew "that, *in general*, blacks were better athletes than whites, particularly in certain areas." "I found out at a young age," he explained, "that there was a basic difference between me and most of them (his black friends)—they could run faster and jump higher and stay in the air longer than most of the white kids."<sup>29</sup> Ironically, the basic assumption underlying Switzer's integrationist achievements, black athletic superiority—with its links to biological determinism and disregard for black agency—earns the condemnation of many as an institutionalized form of racism that trivializes black athletic success and

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<sup>28</sup> Switzer and Shrake, *Bootlegger's Boy*, 26-28; Interview of Barry Switzer by John Erling, August 17, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Switzer and Shrake, *Bootlegger's Boy*, 28, 35.

marginalizes the individual black athlete.<sup>30</sup> It was a view that over thirty years of coaching college football only reinforced for Switzer. “There is no question,” he wrote at the end of his tenure at Oklahoma, “but that the black athlete has superior physical skills in all games that involve running and jumping and catching.” He offered the history of intercollegiate football since 1960 as evidence to support his claim.<sup>31</sup>

Life in a bootlegger’s household proved unstable throughout Switzer’s youth. The family of four soon added Irma Reynolds, an older black woman who had helped raise Frank Switzer and who now assisted him with his expanding business interests. During Barry’s fifth grade year, Mary grew disillusioned and left Frank, moving with her two sons to the nearby town of El Dorado for two years. The family reunited, but Frank continued drinking and carousing while Mary slipped into an isolated life of drug and alcohol abuse. During Barry’s senior year in high school, his father ran afoul of state liquor authorities and was arrested and sentenced to the Cummins State Prison Farm for his bootlegging activities. After serving two years in one the state’s most notorious correctional facilities and then having his sentence overturned on a technicality, an unrepentant Frank Switzer returned home to Crossett and resumed his

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<sup>30</sup> On this point see: David K. Wiggins, “‘Great Speed but Little Stamina’: The Historical Debate Over Black Athletic Superiority,” *Journal of Sport History* 16.2 (1989): 158-185 and Patrick B. Miller, “The Anatomy of Scientific Racism: Racialist Responses to Black Athletic Achievement,” *Journal of Sport History* 25.1 (1998): 119-151. Switzer’s upbringing on the egalitarian fringe of the Southern caste system, his life-long relationships and friendships in the African-American community, and his genuine contributions to achieving football integration, all insulate him from charges of overt racism. Still, to characterize this transformation as the inevitable result of natural selection overlooks the countless hours of hard work, the intelligence, and the dedication required of all elite athletes, regardless of their race. Switzer was well aware of this line of thinking and knew that his views would be criticized. His assertion that black athletes fundamentally transformed American sports during the second half of the twentieth century is certainly indisputable.

<sup>31</sup> “The black athlete,” Switzer said, “is usually a much more efficient machine physiologically than his white competition.” In fact, Switzer speculated, the arrival and success of African Americans pushed whites toward weight training and, eventually, steroid use. Switzer and Shrake, *Bootlegger’s Boy*, 34-35.

criminal profession.<sup>32</sup>

While the elder Switzer's temperament and line of work made family life dysfunctional, he did impart one key value to his oldest son, a value that would serve Barry well—a willingness to challenge accepted standards of behavior and forge new styles of living. “A devout atheist,” Frank railed against the hypocrisy of supposedly pious churchgoers who clandestinely drank liquor, but who refused to even sit on the same bench as a black person. “The black maids and the butlers that were coming out to buy whiskey ... he knew that wasn't for them,” Barry remembered. Frank Switzer's fondness for strong drink and high-stakes gambling allowed him to witness first hand the hypocrisy of some members of Crossett's pious white establishment. “He saw the deacons of the church, he knew who they were. He gambled with them and drank with them.”<sup>33</sup> In the late-1960s and early-1970s, when Barry Switzer contemplated challenging the last vestiges of segregated college football and the social world it represented, he did so from the perspective of an outsider—the bootlegger's son raised on a rejection of mainstream white Southern values and the forging of new identities—identities that recognized the potentialities of a more inclusive racial order.

Along with great success, Switzer's integrated Sooner teams generated equal amounts of controversy and soon developed an outlaw image that would follow them throughout his tenure. Scandal rocked the program in the spring following Switzer's appointment as head coach, when an NCAA investigation concluded that the previous year Oklahoma assistant Bill Michael and Galveston Ball High School coach Joe Woolley had altered the transcripts of quarterback Kerry Jackson and defensive lineman

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<sup>32</sup> Switzer and Shrake, *Bootlegger's Boy*, 26-32; Interview of Barry Switzer by John Erling, August 17, 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Interview of Barry Switzer by John Erling, August 17, 2009.

Mike Phillips so that Jackson would qualify to attend Oklahoma. Both Michael and Woolley lost their jobs as a result, and the Sooner program was hit with stiff NCAA sanctions for the infractions. The Sooners were placed on probation and forced, retroactively, to forfeit the eight games Jackson played in the previous season and to relinquish the 1972 Big Eight championship in favor of second-place Nebraska. The punishment also banned Oklahoma from bowl games following the 1973 and 1974 seasons and from television appearances in 1974 and 1975.<sup>34</sup> While the investigation did not directly connect Switzer to the allegations of wrongdoing, he had long personal ties to both Michael, who he played and coached with at the University of Arkansas, and Woolley, who was his age and he had known since they attended school together in El Dorado, Arkansas. Switzer later admitted to knowing that tampering with grades was common in this period, but placed the blame on overzealous high school officials. “It was the black coaches and principals in the black high schools who, out of the most sincere and compassionate of motives, wanted to help some of their kids have a chance to get out of the ghetto and better themselves,” he explained. College coaches like him, Switzer maintained, knew it happened, but “learned not to ask any questions.”<sup>35</sup> This was the first of many accusations and violations that would plague the Oklahoma program in the Switzer years. Progressive on racial issues, the coach and his staff proved deeply traditional in their willingness to bend and break the rules to gain a competitive advantage.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> With the television schedule for the 1973 season already set, and with Oklahoma scheduled to play Texas and Nebraska for national audiences, the NCAA decided not to unsettle its highly profitable partnership with ABC television and waited until the following year to impose the ban on television appearances.

<sup>35</sup> Switzer and Shrake, *Bootlegger's Boy*, 84-86.

<sup>36</sup> The history of academic violations and inappropriate financial compensation in college football stretches back to the earliest days of the sport's rise as a commercialized spectacle. As early as 1883,

Despite the probation, with Switzer as head coach and the program fully committed to recruiting the best players regardless of race, the Sooners emerged as a dominant team for the next three seasons. After opening 1973 with a convincing win over Baylor, they travelled to Los Angeles for a showdown with the top-ranked team in the nation, the University of Southern California. Surprising many, the Sooners outplayed the Trojans and shutdown their high-powered offense but managed only a 7-7 tie. Returning home, the Sooners started what became a twenty-eight game winning streak with a hard-fought 24-20 victory over the University of Miami. Sweeping through their remaining schedule (they demolished Texas 52-13, shutout Nebraska 27-0, and beat Oklahoma State convincingly on the road, 45-18), they finished the season ranked third in the final Associated Press poll. In 1974, the Sooners picked up where they left off the previous year. They started the season as the top team in the country, but, after a closer than expected 28-11 opening victory over Baylor, dropped to third. After winning their next seven, they regained the number one spot in November when Michigan State beat Ohio State leaving them the last undefeated major college team. With a decimating defense that shutout three opponents and an explosive offense that led the nation in rushing, total offense, and scoring and that scored more than sixty points three times, the Sooners won tough games against Texas (16-13) and at Nebraska (28-14) to finish the season undefeated national champions.

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faculty members at Harvard criticized the use of academically ineligible players and, by the 1890s, “tramp” athletes migrated from school to school offering their services to the highest bidder and often not even bothering to enroll in courses. In 1906, the University of Chicago unceremoniously dismissed star player Walter Eckersall for financial misconduct and poor academic performance just days after honoring him at halftime during his final game. John Sayle Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 23-24, 46-47; Robin Lester, *Stagg's University: The Rise, Decline, and Fall of Big-Time Football at Chicago* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 55-65.



The following year, Switzer's Sooners once again began the season as the top-ranked team. They won their first eight contests, including a 24-17 victory over Texas, their fifth straight against Royal's Longhorns, before stumbling badly and losing 23-3 to Kansas in Norman. With their hopes for a second straight championship apparently dashed, the Sooners rallied to narrowly defeat Missouri and then finished the regular season by upsetting undefeated, second-ranked Nebraska in Norman to earn a birth in the Orange Bowl. Oklahoma entered the bowl season ranked third, but when Southern California beat number two Texas A&M in the Liberty Bowl on December 22, and then, UCLA upset top-ranked Ohio State in the Rose Bowl on New Year's Day, the Sooners suddenly had the opportunity to reclaim the top spot. A hard fought 14-6 victory over Michigan in the Orange Bowl that evening (their first live television appearance in over two years) gave the Sooners their second straight national championship when the final polls were released two days later. In three stunning seasons, Switzer and his integrated program had returned the University of Oklahoma to the pinnacle of college football and matched the greatest accomplishment of the Wilkinson era two decades earlier.

Among the great players on the national championship teams of the mid-1970s, Joe Washington stood out. With daring moves, great speed, and a flashy pair of silver football shoes, he personified the growing African-American influence on the Sooner football team and in college football nationally. Beyond the playing field, Washington's life and success also represented the multi-generational struggle of blacks to achieve equality in intercollegiate football. His father, Joe Washington Sr., began the family odyssey to football stardom. Joe Sr. grew-up in rigidly segregated East Texas, in

the small town of Rosenberg, twenty-four miles southwest of Houston and fifty-six miles from the Gulf of Mexico. Rosenberg's black citizens worked in the rice fields southwest of town or in the domestic and service trades while their children attend segregated schools. Born in 1929, Joe Sr. came from the first generation of rural African Americans to be exposed to the game of football. While many of his peers focused on baseball or basketball, he chose football and began recruiting and organizing local black sandlot teams. Because his segregated school lacked a football program, most of what he learned about the game came from watching Rosenberg's white high school team while perched in a tree outside of their whites-only stadium. He received his first formal coaching when he played desegregated military football in Hawaii in the aftermath of World War II. Barely out of high school, he won a starting spot in the backfield of the Wheeler Field team during the golden era of military football when many older players with college experience played for the strongest base teams. After two years in the service, Washington returned to Texas to attend college with the help of the G.I. Bill and became a gridiron star at all-black Prairie View A&M in Hempstead. At Prairie View, Washington learned the game from two of the most influential black college coaches in Texas, Fred "Pop" Long and Jimmie Stevens. With professional football not a possibility for an undersized African-American back from an unheralded Texas school, Washington focused on his education and once he graduated pursued the career path most open to young black college graduates, teaching in the segregated public schools.<sup>37</sup>

For the next forty-five years, Joe Sr. taught and coached high school football, beginning first at Hilliard High School in Bay City, Texas in 1951, and then at Abraham

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<sup>37</sup> Norwood, *Real Football*, 118-152.

Lincoln High School in Port Arthur, Texas after 1965. Washington's career began in an era of staunch segregation, but then witnessed the gradual desegregation of high school football and public education in Texas. In the mid-1950s, Washington helped push the process forward when he applied for and was accepted to attend Jess Nealy's coaching clinic at Rice University. He stayed in a segregated hotel, but attended the clinic with all of the white coaches and the experience allowed him to study the latest coaching techniques and expand his professional connections in the region. Washington left Hilliard and Bay City in the mid-1960s "in part because the desegregation of schools was imminent," which usually meant a demotion for the black head coach when his school closed. Port Arthur's size gave Washington more job security at all-black Lincoln, a school that remained open, and well over 90% African-American, after desegregation. Washington led Lincoln into a desegregated league in 1967 and increasingly sent his best players to integrated major college programs and the very best on to professional football.

Port Arthur's location in the "Golden Triangle,"—a small section of Texas east of Houston near the Louisiana line framed by the towns of Beaumont, Port Arthur, and Orange, and legendary for producing football talent—put Joe Sr. at the center of emerging recruiting networks as white coaches began to recognize and tap into the potential talent of Texas's best black high school athletes. Coaches like Washington and Wendell Mosley, as well as contemporaries like Clifton Ozen and Willie Ray Smith in Beaumont, played important roles in helping white coaching staffs connect with talented black athletes. According to Washington, Northern schools began recruiting in Texas in the late-1950s and early-1960s. Early arrivals such as the University of

Minnesota and Michigan State University were rewarded when they signed black high school stars such as Aaron Brown and Charles “Bubba” Smith who both left Texas and earned All-American honors in the Big Ten. In the second-half of the 1960s, the major schools in the region slowly began recruiting Texas blacks, but still Washington saw coaches under pressure to resist desegregation as well as “a great deal of prejudices on coaching staffs” as the pace of racial change proved grudgingly slow. Finally, in the first half of the 1970s, in Washington’s words, “the whole shooting alley came to Port Arthur” and the coach began sending his best players, including his two sons, to major integrated programs in the region and across the nation.<sup>38</sup>

Joe Washington Jr. grew to maturity in a world constructed by the hard work and success of his parents. Joe Sr., who learned well the proscriptions of racial etiquette in a world where segregation starkly demarcated the boundaries of the black experience, shielded his children from the harshest realities of Jim Crow in what he found to be the improving racial climate of the decades following World War II. Joe Jr. graduated from Lincoln High in the spring of 1972 at a time when college football had finally completely desegregated with even the schools of the Deep South now recruiting African Americans. Recognized as one of the best high school players in the country, Washington had his choice of attending any of the major football schools. He was aware of racial issues during the recruiting process, but they did not play a large role in his decision. Confident in his athletic ability, he felt he had the talent to succeed wherever he attended, whatever the racial climate. Washington considered the nearby, University of Houston where coach Bill Yeoman began recruiting black athletes in 1964 and was a family friend who years earlier worked with his maternal grandfather at the

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<sup>38</sup> Norwood, *Real Football*, 118-152.

black high school in Lufkin, Texas.<sup>39</sup> When he visited the Houston campus, however, the school's urban setting did not appeal to him and he eliminated the Cougars from consideration. A lifelong Texas Longhorn fan, he also visited the Austin campus and met with Darrell Royal. While greatly impressed with the facilities and football program, Washington's first meeting with Royal, someone he later considered a big supporter, proved underwhelming. "I just didn't get real good vibes from him that day," Washington later remembered. Louisiana State University and Oklahoma emerged as his top choices and style played as big a part in his decision-making process as anything. Washington liked the purple and gold uniforms of LSU and the fact that the Sooners "wore white shoes before everybody else." Ultimately, his relationship with Mosley and his sense that the Sooner coaches sanctioned individual self-expression led Washington to choose Norman. "If you wore white shoes, you were real flashy," Washington later reflected. "Here was this white school, and they had their whole team, including linemen, wearing white shoes."<sup>40</sup> Switzer and his staff's willingness to accept and even encourage styles of youthful, black masculine expression—styles under attack in many quarters—played a critical role in attracting top black talent and their program's overall success.

In addition to allowing greater freedom of expression, Switzer created a diverse racial climate at Oklahoma that encouraged his players to bond. Their closeness added to the team's esprit de corps and made them an even more formidable opponent on the field. "We had Native American players, Hispanic players, African American players,

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<sup>39</sup> On the integration of the basketball and football programs at the University of Houston see: Katherine Lopez, *Cougars of Any Color: The Integration of University of Houston Athletics, 1964-1968* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2008).

<sup>40</sup> Norwood, *Real Football*, 140-175.

and white players, and everyone was the same,” star running back Elvis Peacock, who came to Norman from Miami, Florida in 1974, later remembered. “We hung out together, mingled in one another’s dorm rooms, and developed friendships based on personalities, not on color. It was just the way it should have been. Race was never an issue at the University of Oklahoma.”<sup>41</sup> It was a sentiment that resonated with many young black athletes in Texas. “When I left Texas there were two things I was looking for,” Kenny King, who arrived from Clarendon, Texas in 1975, said, “I wanted a chance to play football, and I wanted to find a non-prejudiced environment. When I went to Oklahoma on my visit ... I saw Jaime Melendez, Zac Henderson, and Elvis Peacock partying together. I knew that if they partied together, they were going to play together.”<sup>42</sup>

While the 1970s brought a return to glory for the Oklahoma football program, in Austin and Fayetteville, the Texas Longhorns and Arkansas Razorbacks struggled to remain at the top-level of national competition. Moreover, off the field, critics began identifying Darrell Royal and Frank Broyles and their programs with many of the worst aspects of big-time college football. More and more the two coaches became symbols of the old segregationist South and the entrenched, institutionalized racism that was holding out against integration to the bitter end. Increasingly, their programs also exemplified the impersonal bureaucratic structure and militaristic organization that, critics charged, dehumanized the players they purported to benefit in the name of winning and providing glory and profits to universities. With the emergence of the women’s movement and the female fight for equal standing in college athletics, football

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<sup>41</sup> Smith, *Wishbone*, 174.

<sup>42</sup> Smith, *Wishbone*, 207.

programs increasingly came to be seen as bastions of male privilege. Athletic Directors like Royal and Broyles soon found themselves defending their turf against a female insurgency backed by the mandates of federal law. Forced to add a female component to their athletic bureaucracies, they feared the women might take over of a significant portion of their budgets. After the glory years of the 1960s, the new decade proved markedly more difficult.

Royal began 1970 by stumbling into a national racial controversy at the January meeting of the American Football Coaches Association. Prior to the meeting's official opening, he reportedly told a group of black coaches, upset that they were never selected to coach in postseason all-star games, that "You have not been publicized by your public relations people and the black coach has not reached the point where his coaching is as scientific as it is in the major college." The statement came during a private, unofficial meeting between five white coaches and several of their black peers, but was quickly reported to the Associated Press by Tom Caldwell, coach at Elizabeth State College Teachers College in North Carolina. Sent out by the wire service, the story spread rapidly across the country. Caldwell emerged as the leading spokesperson for black coaches attending the annual meeting and when they met with Royal and the other white coaches the group demanded to know why their players were regularly invited to participate in all-star games while they were never asked to join the all-star coaching staffs. In the racial tender box of the time, Royal's comment quickly sparked national controversy. As reaction spread, Royal denounced the statement as "a vicious invention" and assured everyone that "such thoughts are not in my heart" and that he would not have said such a thing. Others reportedly in attendance were quick to claim

that Royal had been misquoted or to deny that he ever made the statement. Some, perhaps under pressure to protect the good name of a friend or powerful colleague, even contended that the meeting never actually took place. They pointed out that Royal attended a banquet in Austin the night before the coaching conference started, the night of the alleged meeting. Royal consulted with an attorney and threatened to sue the Associated Press over the story and the wire service eventually retracted their report and issued the Longhorn coach an apology.<sup>43</sup>

Whether he made the comments or not, however, the ensuing controversy only further enhanced Royal's reputation as a staunch apologist for segregation who often blamed the inadequacies of the victim for the injustices of the system. In the black press, Marion Jackson of the *Atlanta Daily World* criticized Royal for his dismissive attitude toward black coaching talent and categorized him with the "resistants and interpositionists" who espoused a "hold-the line segregationist message." After implying that prominent black coaches, such as Grambling's Eddie Robinson, had been pressured to change their stories and provide Royal cover, Jackson condemned Royal and "the status quo, leave it alone, we-take-care of it clique" for conducting an annual meeting he characterized as the "100 Per Cent Wrong Club Jamboree." Jackson also reported the sentiments of Henry Holbert, coach at Alabama State University and another spokesperson for the black coaches at the meeting. Holbert challenged Royal's assertion that African-American coaches were less talented and interpreted the Texas

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<sup>43</sup> *Atlanta Daily World*, 1 February 1970, pg. 6; *Atlanta Daily World*, 5 February 1970, pg. 7; *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 14 February 1970, pg. 12; *Dallas Times Herald*, 25 January 1970, clipping in Darrell K. Royal Papers, Box 3J15, Folder 1, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin; *Daily Texan*, 12 March 1970, clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A242, "E" File (Sports), 1963-1977, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin. After pressing the issue, the black coaches left the annual meetings with assurances that African-American coaches would be added to the all-star coaching staffs following the next two seasons. *Washington Post*, 16 January 1970, pg. D3.



coach's comment as a put down to the entire race. According to Holbert, black coaches as a group were highly educated and active students of the game and the real differences between them and their white peers came down to resources. Moreover, Holbert contended, Royal's alleged comments sent a clear message to the African-American community. "Blacks look upon this assertion as not only an indictment against black athletics," Holbert argued, "but also an (sic) another attempt to belittle the Negro."<sup>44</sup>

Beyond the black community, the incident also damaged Royal's reputation among white moderates and liberals nationally. When ABC named Royal "coach of the decade" later in 1970, John Hall of the *Los Angeles Times* captured this group's sentiments when he argued that Royal did not deserve the honor because of his "absolute failure to do even the minimum toward alleviating the No. 1 problem facing this country today—our failure to allow our black citizens to participate fully in the mainstream of American life." According to Hall, Royal's neglect in this area seemed particularly egregious because he had done so little while he was in a position to do so much. Royal "could have been a better man and a better American," Hall argued, "if he had used his position of respect and prestige to LEAD the way toward solving this problem." In 1963, when the Texas Board of Regents cleared the way for the desegregation of athletics at the University, Royal had the opportunity to lead the region toward more inclusive playing fields. By 1970, critics no longer asked if he would lead the way, instead they asked why he had not.<sup>45</sup>

While cultural conservatives embraced college football as a bastion of traditional values, many on the other side of the cultural divide emerged to criticize the

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<sup>44</sup> *Atlanta Daily World*, 1 February 1970, pg. 6; *Atlanta Daily World*, 5 February 1970, pg. 7.

<sup>45</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 31 July 1970, pg. C3.

sport.<sup>46</sup> One of the most publicized detractors was Gary Shaw, a former Longhorn player whose book, *Meat on the Hoof*, provided a highly critical look at life inside the Texas football program. An outstanding high school lineman from Denton, Texas, Shaw won a scholarship to Texas and played on the football team from 1963 until he quit with three games left in the 1966 season. Injuries, a lack of size, and the tremendous talent level of the Longhorn program relegated Shaw to the lower rungs of the depth chart and exposed him to some of the harshest realities of big-time college football. Released in 1972, his book offered a damning indictment of the sport in general and Royal's program in particular. Shaw described his life as a major college football player, driven by authoritarian, and at times sadistic, coaches to forget his individuality and prove his manhood by risking his physical well being for the glory of the team. Shaw recounted witnessing what the coaching staff aptly called "shit drills," intensely exhausting and violent contact drills ostensibly designed to improve fundamentals, but in reality meant to convince marginal players to willingly give up their scholarships. When that was not enough, Shaw claimed, the coaches withheld medical treatment or steered the unwanted toward difficult classes in an effort to get them to quit. In fact, Royal's much trumpeted academic counseling program led by Lan Hewlett served, according to Shaw, as nothing more than a cynical smokescreen designed more to keep star athletes eligible than to aid the entire team in achieving a quality education. In this impersonal and often hostile environment, Royal emerged as

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<sup>46</sup> A distinct critique of sports and their role in American society emerged within the counterculture movement of the late-1960s and early-1970s. Inspired by the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, and by the black athletic revolt of the late-1960s, several current and former elite athletes developed and popularized scathing critiques of sport and its role in sustaining existing power structures and methods of exploitation. See for example: Dave Meggyesy, *Out of Their League* (Berkeley: Ramparts Books, 1970); Jake Scott, *The Athletic Revolution* (New York: Free Press, 1971); and Chip Oliver, *High for the Game* (New York: William Morrow, 1971).

a distant figure more concerned with victories and maintaining his image than the welfare of his players.<sup>47</sup>

Shaw knew that his book would stir controversy. “To attack football is to attack the major exhibit of the masculine view of the world,” he wrote. “... It would be much more strongly resisted than an attack on the church or most other American institutions ... because the football code is much more their (Americans) lifeblood, and their lifeblood in its purest, most elemental form.”<sup>48</sup> And indeed, numerous former players, assistant coaches, university officials, prominent alumni, and average fans stepped forward to defend Royal after the book appeared. Shaw’s descent into mental illness, drug abuse, and homelessness in the decades that followed strengthened their case against him, but it was hard to refute any of his specific charges.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, as the country’s view of the abuses of big-time college sports evolved, it came to reflect, in a general sense, many of the same criticisms Shaw had leveled at Royal and Texas specifically. For Royal, the book served as another sign that times were changing. Just as his program had symbolized so many positive aspects of the American character for its supporters in the 1960s, now it provided equally powerful symbols for its detractors. And unfortunately for Royal, by the early-1970s, those detractors were gaining an ever-louder voice.

In addition to dealing with the changing college athlete and the implications of a new racial order, by the mid-1970s, Royal found himself under assault on yet another

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<sup>47</sup> Gary Shaw, *Meat on the Hoof: The Hidden World of Texas Football* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1972), 58-60, 119-134.

<sup>48</sup> Shaw, *Meat on the Hoof*, 231.

<sup>49</sup> Shaw spent almost ten years as a homeless drifter in and around Dallas before being diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and helped to move off the streets in the early-1990s. He died of a heart attack on June 21, 1999. *Austin Chronicle*, 9 July 1999.

front—the fight for gender equality. As the athletic director at Texas, Royal was charged with overseeing the expansion of women’s athletics mandated by the passage of Title IX of the Education Adjustments Act of 1972. Beginning in 1974, the Department of Health Education and Welfare (HEW) circulated draft regulations for the law’s implementation and controversy erupted regarding its application to college athletics. Proponents of women’s equality pointed to the historic disparities in athletic participation and funding based on gender and called for redress. Traditionalists disparaged the idea that large numbers of women wanted to compete and were outraged at the possibility that female sports might syphon money away from revenue producing men’s teams. The conservatives expressed particular concern that football, which dominated athletic department budgets, would suffer.<sup>50</sup>

In Austin, Royal emerged as the spokesperson for those opposed to change. Appearing on a local political talk show, “Capital Eye” in August 1975, he explained that a strict interpretation of the new guidelines would irrevocably harm college football. “So if ... the sum total comes out equal dollars,” he told the audience. “If it’s interpreted that way, we would be completely out of business.”<sup>51</sup> With comments like these, Royal quickly drew the injunctions of those on the other side of the debate. An editorial in the student newspaper criticized Royal’s “paranoia of the new HEW guidelines,” and accused him of using “end of football” threats to try to keep women shut out of the athletic department budget. With a total budget of \$2.4 million, the male editorialist contended, Royal could well afford to increase funding to women’s athletics. “(W)hat should remain clear,” the newspaper wrote, “is that women have the same right

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<sup>50</sup> Susan Ware, *Title IX: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford St. Martin’s, 2007), 3-5.

<sup>51</sup> *Daily Texan*, 13 November 1975. Clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A242, “E” File (Sports), 1963-1977.

to improve their athletic ability as men, yet Royal won't give them half a chance."<sup>52</sup> That same month, the Austin branch of the National Organization for Women, commemorating "the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment," announced Royal as the winner of their first ever "Barefoot & Pregnant Award," a distinction "given ... to the person or organization which did the most, directly or indirectly, to hinder the rights of women in the past year." According to chapter president Donna Walker-Ashworth, Royal was the only nominee for the award and had been selected because of "his opposition to equal funding for women's athletics." The times were changing; and as the women's movement surged—the group announced their award on the same day Austin mayor Jeff Friedman proclaimed Women's Equality Day in Austin—Royal found himself caught in the wake.<sup>53</sup> From the late-1950s to the mid-1960s, his status as the leader of one of the most important masculine institutions in the state had earned him respect and love at almost every turn. By the mid-1970s, however, that position left him increasingly open to attack. Already challenged by the newly assertive and individualistic college athlete, an often-hostile press, and the rapid integration of college athletics, Royal now found himself on the front lines of the gender wars as well.

In 1970, the long struggle to place an African American on the varsity football team at the University of Texas finally succeeded when sophomore offensive lineman Julius Whittier from San Antonio made the squad and earned a letter. Between 1970 and 1973, Royal and the program took their first halting steps into the era of

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<sup>52</sup> *Daily Texan*, 13 November 1975. Clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A242, "E" File (Sports), 1963-1977.

<sup>53</sup> Certificate from the National Organization for Women in Darrell K. Royal Papers, Box 3J18, Folder: Certificates, Awards, Resolutions, Proclamations; Unidentified, undated newspaper clipping in Darrell K. Royal Papers, Box 3J15, Folder 2.

desegregation. It proved a period of adjustment for both. Unaccustomed to recruiting blacks, Royal struggled to attract significant numbers and to overcome his image as a racist and champion of segregation. The young African Americans who did sign with Texas encountered a largely white athletic program and an overwhelmingly white university community that made for a difficult, often isolated, transition to life on campus. Those who succeeded and earned distinction on the football field became the first African-American football stars and celebrities in the University's history. They also became significant figures in the racial history of their state.

Born into a successful and politically active middle-class family, Julius Whittier proved an ideal candidate to break the color barrier within one of Texas's most beloved cultural institutions. His father, Oncy, a dark-skinned African-American physician, worked hard and achieved professional success. His mother Loraine, who was half African-American and could pass as white, taught school and was an activist in San Antonio's black community. Together the Whittiers earned a middle-class living and sent all four of their children to college. Throughout his youth, Whittier's family addressed racial issues directly and embraced their African-American identity. "That kind of helped us get an even temperament on race," he reflected during his second year at Texas. Whittier attended all-black schools in his early years, but then followed his older brother and enrolled at integrated Highlands High School, a middle-class, majority white school on San Antonio's south side. The school was far from the Whittier home, but under a "freedom of choice" plan designed to advance school desegregation the brothers were able to attend. At Highlands, interacting with the white majority prepared Whittier socially for the challenge of entering an almost exclusively

white environment in college. Athletics offered him the opportunity to compete for a scholarship that would help his family (all four of the Whittier children would be enrolled in college at the same time) and make it financially possible for him to enroll in a top school.<sup>54</sup>

During his senior year both SMU and North Texas State, two schools with impressive records of racial integration, recruited Whittier, but he hoped to attend a larger, higher-profile institution. As a recruit, he was aware of racial issues in the state and Royal's reputation regarding African Americans. "I noticed all the all-state black players from San Antonio were going out of state," Whittier remembered while a student at the UT law school in 1977. "One rumor floating around was that he (Royal) said in a newspaper article he would never let a black play for him." Racial issues, however, were only one factor weighing in Whittier's thought process and ultimately the prestige of the University of Texas and his relationship with Texas recruiter and assistant coach Mike Campbell swayed his decision. Whittier visited the Austin campus and loved it, but before he committed he and his mother engaged Campbell in what he described as "really meaningful conversations" about the reception he might expect on campus and the program's motivations for signing him. He wanted to make sure that he would not "be just a token" for the Longhorns. Campbell stressed that Whittier would be treated like any other player and that he would be judged strictly on the merit of his football talent. "Coach Campbell was very straightforward, almost

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<sup>54</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 18 April 1971, clipping in Darrell K. Royal Papers, Box 3J15, Folder 1; *Daily Texan*, 12 March 1970, clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A242, "E" File (Sports), 1963-1977; Unidentified newspaper, 9 December 1977, clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A242, "E" File (Sports), 1963-1977.

cold-blooded, about it ... (he) just sold me on the football program,” Whittier remembered.<sup>55</sup>

Whittier developed into a solid, if not spectacular, college football player during his athletic career at Texas. As a member of the freshman team in 1969, he watched on television from Austin as the all-white Longhorn varsity defeated Arkansas in the Big Shootout and received the national championship trophy from President Richard Nixon in the locker room afterwards. As a sophomore in 1970, Whittier integrated the Texas varsity as a backup offensive lineman and played enough to earn a letter. During his junior and senior seasons, his playing time increased and the coaches began using him as a tight end where he caught a ten-yard touchdown pass in his final regular season game, a 38-3 rout of Texas A&M in Austin. On campus, Whittier encountered racist attitudes and experienced social isolation, but found the overall racial climate generally tolerable. “There was never any outward animosity,” Whittier remembered. “You could tell some of them called blacks ‘niggers’ when they were among themselves, but there was nothing malicious.” Like other early black students on largely white campuses, Whittier faced the challenge of overcoming social isolation. Most of the roughly one hundred African Americans enrolled at the university lived off-campus while Whittier resided in the athletic dorm and did not own a car. In the spring of 1970, fellow black student Abram Emerson reported to the *Daily Texan* that “the black community on campus hasn’t really taken Julius in.” Finding acceptance in the athletic dorm also proved challenging. Whittier noticed that his white teammates never invited

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<sup>55</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 18 April 1971, clipping in Darrell K. Royal Papers, Box 3J15, Folder 1; *Daily Texan*, 12 March 1970, clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A242, “E” File (Sports), 1963-1977; Unidentified newspaper, 9 December 1977, clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A242, “E” File (Sports), 1963-1977.



him to social events and when he made the varsity in the fall of 1970, the coaching staff could not find another player willing to room with him. Royal talked to some of the team's leaders and senior running back Billy Dale volunteered to take Whittier in. "I believed it would add that much more dimension to me as a person," Dale recalled. Despite his standing on team, Dale, who scored the winning touchdown in the 1970 Cotton Bowl against Notre Dame, suddenly felt the bite of social ostracism. "I lost all my friends," he later remembered.<sup>56</sup>

In 1971, the year after Whittier integrated the Longhorn varsity, Royal and his staff continued expanding on their efforts to recruit black athletes, but the reputation of the coach and school made progress difficult. That spring student sportswriter Craig Bird contemplated the "racist image" of the university and its athletic program in the *Daily Texan*. Bird reported on a conversation between himself, another reporter, and a "talented and perceptive" black recruit who had committed to Texas but who was having second thoughts as he contemplated the school's racist image. "Is it true," the unidentified potential recruit asked the two white writers, "that Darrell Royal told somebody that he could win without 'niggers'?" The writers told the athlete that they did not believe that someone as sophisticated as Royal would say such a thing. "Yet the mere fact that that quite (sic) is widely circulated (and believed)," Bird told his reading audience, "is a blight on the University athletic program." According to Bird, several factors contributed to the negative image of Royal and his program. First, the lack of blacks on the team in the late-1960s, and the program's ability to remain "pure and

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<sup>56</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 18 April 1971, clipping in Darrell K. Royal Papers, Box 3J15, Folder 1; *Daily Texan*, 12 March 1970, clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A242, "E" File (Sports), 1963-1977; Unidentified newspaper, 9 December 1977, clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A242, "E" File (Sports), 1963-1977; *New York Times*, 23 December 2005, pg. D1.

powerful” without them, allowed recruiting rivals to “harp on the isolation that will be the lot of the black who casts his future with the Steers.” Another factor, Bird said, was the well-known racism of the “Burnt Orange sugar daddies that aid University recruiting drives” and their insistence that “their money” not be used to pursue African-American athletes. Finally, rumors on campus of continuing discrimination on the team also helped sustain the image. Bird reported that some coaches still used “racial slurs” and that “many students complained to the *Texan*” when Whittier emerged from spring practices in 1970 as the team’s “No. 1 rover,” but then “was relegated to obscurity” as a backup offensive lineman during the fall campaign. Ultimately, Bird felt the situation was improving, but could not “deny” that “definite friends of bigotry” remained a part of Texas football.<sup>57</sup>

Unhappy with Bird’s assessment, *Austin Statesman* sports editor Lou Maysel felt compelled to rebut it in a lengthy column that articulated many of the Longhorn program’s long-standing justifications for moving so slowly toward integration. Echoing Royal and others, Maysel placed most of the blame on the black athletes themselves and the all-black schools that, until recently, all most all had been forced to attend. According to the editor, there were “two main reasons” the Longhorns became associated with racism and they were not much talked about because “neither is flattering to black people.” The first emerged following the Board of Regents’ decision to desegregate campus activities in 1963 when, Maysel argued, the Longhorns failed to recruit blacks because very few could meet the school’s rigorous admission requirements. This reality, he contended, “narrowed the odds of recruiting blacks

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<sup>57</sup> *Daily Texan*, 29 April 1971, clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A242, “E” File (Sports), 1963-1977.

mightily” and laid the foundation for the program’s negative image. Now, in 1971, Maysel told his audience, “an even uglier factor” enhanced that image—the black athlete’s “susceptibility to illegal inducement.” While the Longhorns and Royal played by the rules and recruited honestly, some of their rivals were capitalizing on the “impoverished economic circumstances” of black recruits to lure them to their school. In the process, Maysel contended, they were reinforcing the image of Texas as a racist program and all-white team. The honesty of the Longhorns also hurt them, the editor argued, because the average “poor black” recruit “may even look upon himself as a chump if he passes up the first chance he’s had to beat the system he feels has impoverished (sic) him.” The “easy way” to overcome the school’s “racist image” then, Maysel said, “would be to offer a little extra inducement here and there.” If Royal and his staff did, the editor maintained, that reputation “would disappear like an April frost.”<sup>58</sup>

Maysel’s defense of the Longhorns captured the deeply engrained racial prejudices that gave rise to and sustained the Jim Crow system on the football field and throughout regional life. At the same time, they also demonstrated how those prejudices began to evolve during the early period of desegregation. When he blamed the victims of segregation for their own exclusion, Maysel drew on long-cherished white ideas of black inferiority, particularly the idea that blacks possessed less intelligence. His critique extended beyond the individual black athlete to condemn the entire race as well as the African-American system of segregated public education, which, in his view, and despite evidence to the contrary, had not produced a single high-

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<sup>58</sup> *Austin Statesman*, 2 May 1971, clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A242, “E” File (Sports), 1963-1977.

quality football player capable of qualifying at Texas until the late-1960s. Once the desegregation of the public schools began to produce more qualified candidates (at least as Maysel saw it), another black character flaw came to the fore—dishonesty. Among the black athletes now being sought out by the region’s major football schools, the editor saw a Sambo-like willingness to game the system for personal advantage. In condemning the black athlete, Maysel overlooked the hypocrisy of the hundreds of thousands of dollars flowing to universities like Texas (from the “Burnt Orange sugar daddies” Bird said financed recruiting, among other sources), the lush salaries and benefits received by coaches like Royal, and the good livings made by assistant coaches and sports writers like himself. And yet, if an athlete benefitted financially in anyway beyond their scholarship, Maysel stood ready to condemn the dishonesty and criticize the rule breakers for their transgressions of the amateur ideal. As his attitudes suggest, in the newly integrated world of college football, those concerned with keeping the game pure would keep a close watch on the emerging black athlete. The walls of segregation came down, but deeply held prejudices remained and manifest themselves in an escalating concern with the honesty of the recruiting process and the behavior of the individual black athlete.

More than anything else, Maysel’s assessment obscured and masked the role racism—in the State of Texas, the University community, and the Longhorn football program—played in keeping the team segregated for so long. While high academic standards may have narrowed the pool of potential black recruits somewhat in the mid-1960s, in that decade and previous ones, any number of talented black players in the state must have at least matched the academic potential of several of the Longhorns’

lowest-achieving white recruits. The large numbers of blacks playing for the Longhorns and other major teams in the region by the mid-1970s demonstrated that, once the racial bar was lowered, plenty of academically eligible African-American recruits could be found. Their exclusion prior to that rested primarily on two factors. First, the Longhorns' continued ability to compete on a national level without blacks until 1970, and second—and most importantly—the deeply engrained racism reflected in the viewpoints of white Texans like Maysel and shared by influential alumni, members of the Board of Regents, important politicians, and a broad cross-section of the state's white population.

By the start of the 1971 season the Longhorn varsity featured four African-American players as the program took another step into the era of integrated football. Two Austin natives and junior college transfers, Donald Ealey and Howard Shaw, who helped Reagan High School win back-to-back Texas state championships in 1967 and 1968, and Lonnie Bennett, a sophomore from Bonham, joined Whittier on the team. Ealey made the biggest impact early on after emerging as a starter at defensive end, but the injury-riddled Longhorns struggled to an 8-3 record, their worst since 1967 and Ealey's playing time decreased as the season progressed. Royal's team managed to win their third straight outright conference championship, but lost decisively to Oklahoma, Arkansas, and, in the season-ending Cotton Bowl, to Penn State.

Asked by the student newspaper early in the season about his program's racist reputation and its slow progress in attracting African-American athletes, Royal responded by pointing to he and his staff's efforts to change the situation. "We have a long list of black athletes we've tried to recruit. We've brought them in here, paid their

expenses, we have gone to their homes and talked with them,” Royal said. “We’ve recruited them just exactly like we have the whites.” Asked why this effort did not produce a larger number of black signees, Royal told the student reporter, “I don’t know. I know I’m sincere, and I make a sincere offer and we make a sincere effort to encourage them to come.” With his recruiting efforts failing to vindicate him from charges of racism, Royal pointed to his successful personal relationships with individual African Americans as proof of his egalitarian position on racial issues—“all I say is check the people (African Americans) I deal with.” Ultimately, the coach concluded, the failure to attract blacks was about more than the attitudes of the coaching staff and came down to racism in the University as a whole. “If blame is to be put it shouldn’t be put just on athletics,” Royal contended, “it should be put on our whole campus because blacks feel they’re not wanted on campus, period.”<sup>59</sup>

As it did at the other major state schools of the South, the introduction of black players generated increased interest in Longhorn football in the state’s African-American community. By 1971, Austin’s black *Capital City Argus* covered the hometown team on the front page. After watching the Longhorns rout the Oregon Ducks 35-7 in the third game of the season, an unidentified writer from the paper praised Ealey’s defensive performance while wondering why Royal “waited so long” before he “finally saw the light and recruited black players.” The author qualified his paper’s attentiveness by noting that it was “not that interested in the ... Longhorns as such, but ... (was) interested in the four black football players ... breaking a racists (sic) pattern of having a lily-white football team.” But while a sense of history may have drawn the newspaper to the event, once there they soon cheered on (and reported on)

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<sup>59</sup> *Daily Texan*, 25 September 1971, clipping in Darrell K. Royal Papers, Box 3J15, Folder 2.

the black Longhorns and, by extension, the entire Texas team. On this day, the writer thrilled at the exploits of Ealey, who he reported “was responsible for many single tackles ... numerous assists ... (and) a few turnovers,” and reported that Shaw also “played in several key plays.”<sup>60</sup>

By 1972, the Longhorn team included six African-American players when two sophomores, running back Roosevelt Leaks of Brenham and linebacker Fred Perry from Corpus Christi, joined Ealey, Shaw, Whittier, and Bennett on the varsity. A dismal recruiting season, however, marred what otherwise could have been characterized as another step forward. With freshmen eligible to play on varsity teams for the first time that year, not a single black high school star chose to sign with Texas. A number of factors no doubt went into each individual recruit’s decision, but the fact remained, that given the opportunity to earn immediate playing time these black athletes felt they had better options with other teams and coaches. On the field, the Longhorns rebounded from their disappointing 1971 campaign and led by Leaks, who emerged as their first black superstar, streaked to a 10-1 record and the conference championship. They finished the season with a Cotton Bowl victory over Bear Bryant and Alabama and ranked third in the final *Associated Press* poll. The only blemish on their record came in a 27-0 shutout to the most integrated opponent on their schedule, archrival Oklahoma, who ended the year ranked second.

Late in the season, racial controversy once again rocked the program when two *Associated Press* reporters, Jack Keever and Robert Heard, published a five-part series titled “The Longhorns and the Black Athlete.” Royal gave Keever and Heard broad

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<sup>60</sup> *Capital City Argus*, 8 October 1971, pg. 1, clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A242, “E” File (Sports), 1963-1977.

access to the team, including all six black Longhorns, and believed a relatively positive story was in the works. He was broadsided when the series delivered a scathing report that once again portrayed the Longhorns as exemplars of the old segregationist order. While the reporters chronicled many of the missteps of the past, most damning were the accusations of continuing racism on the coaching staff leveled by all the current black Longhorns. It was nothing the players could point to directly, sophomore linebacker Perry explained. “Just their (the coaches) over-all attitude.” “Yes. It’s here...” Leaks added. “What more can you expect?” Asked if Royal himself was prejudiced, Whittier told the reporters, “Yeah, I think he is,” though he quickly blunted his criticism by blaming it on the coach’s upbringing in lily-white western Oklahoma.<sup>61</sup>

Sensing racist attitudes on the coaching staff, the black Longhorns mistrusted their coaches handling of the black athlete. They worried that race affected their opportunities to earn playing time and feared that any mistake on the field might relegate them to the bench. All six felt that the Longhorns’ best wishbone backfield should feature Leaks at fullback and Ealey and Bennett as the halfbacks. Royal and his coaches, however, preferred Leaks, Ealey, and white halfback Don Burrisk, with Bennett stacked behind Ealey as his backup. Even as Burrisk battled injuries, the coaches continually returned him to the starting halfback slot, a move that aroused the suspicions of his black teammates. “It seems as though ... Burrisk can’t lose his position,” Whittier said. “He can’t lose. That’s his position.”<sup>62</sup>

Particularly troubling, from the black players’ perspective, was Ealey’s experience in the Longhorn program. When he arrived on campus in 1971, the

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<sup>61</sup> *Daily Texan*, 14 November 1972, pg. 5; *Daily Texan*, 15 November 1972, pg. 8; *Daily Texan*, 16 November 1972, pg. 7; *Daily Texan*, 17 November 1972, pg. 5; *Daily Texan*, 21 November 1972, pg. 8.

<sup>62</sup> *Daily Texan*, 15 November 1972, pg. 8; *Daily Texan*, 17 November 1972, pg. 5.



Longhorn coaches moved the former star high school and junior college running back to defense. Ealey's athleticism helped him win a starting position early in his first season and he played well, but was benched in the middle of the year and then moved back to offense as a backfield reserve. The following fall, he emerged as a starting halfback early in practices, but was then demoted to the second team by Royal "after he repeatedly fumbled pitchouts." On the outs with the coaching staff, Ealey became the target of their abuse, but to his black teammates the ill treatment seemed excessive. "They were down on him. Coach Royal especially. I really felt they were down on him too much, you know? They kinda broke his spirit ...," Bennett, the junior from Bonham, judged. As he approached the end of his senior season, Ealey was unhappy with his experience at Texas. "I haven't really enjoyed being here since I came here," he told Keever and Heard. "If I had it to do over ... I'd go to Japan," he added sarcastically. Ultimately, Ealey felt cultural differences drove a wedge between the white Longhorn coaches and their black players. "Could be that ... they can't quite understand the black," Ealey said, "you know, what really makes them tick, and how can you get the most out of them."<sup>63</sup>

The series also demonstrated just how disconnected the black players were from the university's broad community and its rich history. While their white teammates grew to maturity in a culture that celebrated Southwest Conference football and the Texas Longhorns, and was deeply connected to the history and pageantry of both, they shared little of the sentiment. Segregation worked. Barred from participation in mainstream higher education from the beginning, Texas blacks focused on their own segregated institutions and their athletic programs. Young African-American athletes in

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<sup>63</sup> *Daily Texan*, 15 November 1972, pg. 8; *Daily Texan*, 17 November 1972, pg. 5.

Texas did not have fathers, brothers, cousins, or family friends who played for the Longhorns. The black press did not cover white college football extensively and on Saturday afternoons in the fall few black families gathered around the radio or television to watch or listen to the Longhorns or other Southwest Conference teams play. Feeling little connection to the University, Bennett remained seated at a Texas basketball game while the crowd stood and the Longhorn band played “The Star Spangled Banner” and “The Eyes of Texas.” “I don’t know why,” Bennett told Keever and Heard, “I guess I was in a rebellious mood or something.” Several white Longhorn football players also failed to stand during the songs, but the next day only Bennett was targeted by two coaches outraged by his defiance. Rumors spread that Bennett was a member of the Students for a Democratic Society and that a contingent of Black Panthers had visited him. His reputation caused his coaches, usually keen to employ their black athletes in efforts to attract additional talented African Americans, to grow weary of the halfback and the opinions he might express to potential recruits. Asked to comment on Bennett’s failure to stand for the national and school songs, Whittier defended his teammate with reference to history. “Since when have we seen orange ... (and) red, white and blue doing us a favor?” the senior, and most outspoken, black Longhorn asked.<sup>64</sup>

Many within the Longhorn program and its fan base reacted to the series with shock and outrage at both the reporters and the black players. Dan Cook, sports editor of the *San Antonio Express*, typified the feelings of many when he called the series “one

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<sup>64</sup> *Daily Texan*, 15 November 1972, pg. 8 and *Daily Texan*, 17 November 1972, pg. 5.

of the most factless character assassinations in modern journalism history.”<sup>65</sup> Some Royal supporters even went as far as sending death threats against the two reporters to the *Austin-American Statesman*.<sup>66</sup> The frank discussion of race, however, prompted some to reflect on the racial climate within the program and what might be done to improve it. Knox Nunnally, a member of Royal’s 1963 undefeated national championship team and by 1972 an attorney at one of Houston’s most prestigious firms, wrote a personal letter to Whittier hoping to promote racial reconciliation. To aid in this effort, he sent copies to the other five black Longhorns and Royal as well. In the letter, Nunnally expressed his admiration for Royal who he told the players he had “grown to know ... much better now than when I played for him.” He also noted his pleasure with the steps the Longhorns had already taken toward integration, which, in his opinion, were “long overdue and therefore welcomed by the great majority of the people of Texas as well as Coach Royal.” Nunnally wanted to improve race relations within the Longhorn program and his purpose in writing, he told Whittier, was to “ask this of you – please help us to understand what we are doing wrong, (and) assist us in making your education and experience at the University ... meaningful.” Initially, Nunnally admitted, he was upset with the articles because he felt they would further

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<sup>65</sup> *San Antonio Express and News*, 19 November 1972, pg. D1. Many others also rose to defend Royal. After Cook’s defense of Royal appeared, three Longhorn supporters from Mission, Texas sent him a letter expressing their agreement. Royal was “a just and fair man,” the trio told Cook, “and ... any criticism to the contrary is certainly untrue and without any basis in fact.” Letter V. F. “Doc” Neuhaus, Garland M. Harrison, and Cecil D. Robinson to Dan Cook, November 27, 1972, Darrell K. Royal Papers, Box 3J18, Folder: Correspondence, Notes, Clippings, Telegrams, 1958-1979. African-American Mary Louise Embers, who identified herself as “Mr. Jack Perry’s House Keeper,” wrote Royal to express her support. Having known the coach for “eleven years,” Embers told him he was a “fair and wonderful person” and “doing a wonderful job” in regard to race relations. Letter Mary Louise Embers to Darrell Royal, November 16, 1972, Darrell K. Royal Papers, Box 3J18, Folder: Correspondence, Notes, Clippings, Telegrams, 1958-1979.

<sup>66</sup> Darren David Kelly, “Paying the Price for ‘Slow Integration’: A History of Race and Football at the University of Texas at Austin from 1954-1972,” (Master’s Thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 2009), 74.

hamper the program's "recruiting of black athletes," but then he realized that "this was a selfish thought" and "equally as important is the fact that some of you ... are not as happy with Texas as you could be." The problems, in his view, stemmed from cultural differences that produced differing perspectives. "We come from different backgrounds," Nunnally told Whittier, "and it is undeniable that I as a white cannot truly and fully comprehend all the problems that a young black must face when he leaves home and goes off to college at a predominantly white school."<sup>67</sup>

Anticipating the backlash that would come from the series, Nunnally asked Whittier and his black peers to "Please disregard the crackpots, the vocal racists, and those who may have misunderstood what you were trying to tell us" and "to please help our University to overcome the deserved or undeserved reputation of being a racial school." Texas had much to offer the young black athlete, Nunnally said, "a chance to play for a winner ... ; extensive exposure to professional scouts; a good education; an open-minded student body; a beautiful place to go to school, and a large alumni to assist in job hunting after your degree is received." Now he called on Whittier and his black teammates to help the program in two specific ways. First "by discussing with us what is wrong and what we can do to make matters right." And second, "Help us sign more of the talented, black athletes of Texas to scholarships." While this last request may have been the primary motivation behind many white Texans' increasing acceptance of black athletes, Nunnally's views also reflected newly emerging conceptions of what an integrated intercollegiate athletic world would look like among that same group. "Crackpots" and "vocal racists" would be increasingly marginalized by mainstream

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<sup>67</sup> Letter: Knox Nunnally to Julius Whittier, November 16, 1972 in Darrell K. Royal Papers, Box 3J18, Folder: Correspondence, Notes, Clippings, Telegrams, 1958-1979.

whites who accepted the end of rigid segregation and were now more interested in defining the ground rules and reaping the rewards of black participation in college football. These racially moderate whites preferred not to look too closely at the sins of the past—Nunnally avoided the debate regarding Texas’s “deserved or undeserved reputation of being a racial school”—and focused instead on the rewards that might accrue to young blacks who successfully transitioned into this piece of the newly integrated public sphere. Ultimately, they hoped that with open communication the “cultural differences” Nunnally pointed to could be bridged and the Longhorns could finally transition peacefully to the new integrated era.<sup>68</sup>

The emergence of star black athletes was one important step in bridging those differences and successfully marking the transition. Roosevelt Leaks, who came to Austin in 1971 from Brenham, Texas, became the Longhorns’ first black star. Recruited nationally, Leaks had the opportunity to attend many schools with better racial reputations, but chose Texas because as a running back he felt the Longhorns’ run-dominated offense gave him the best chance to showcase his talent. Criticized by some African Americans in his hometown for choosing a school with a “‘racist’ image,” Leaks responded by noting that he was likely to face challenges wherever he went. “Anywhere I go it’s going to be the same situation. It just might be a little more at Texas than anywhere else,” he explained.<sup>69</sup> After a season on the freshman squad, Leaks joined the varsity in 1972. Gaining 1,099 yards from his fullback position in the wishbone, he emerged as the team’s most powerful offensive weapon as the Longhorns

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<sup>68</sup> Letter: Knox Nunnally to Julius Whittier, November 16, 1972 in Darrell K. Royal Papers, Box 3J18, Folder: Correspondence, Notes, Clippings, Telegrams, 1958-1979.

<sup>69</sup> *Dave Campbell’s Texas Football*, 1974, pg. 106. Clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A242, “E” File (Sports), 1963-1977.

rolled to a 10-1 record. In 1973, during his junior season, Leaks became a national star. His 1,415 rushing yards set Texas and Southwest Conference single-season records, while he earned consensus All-American honors and finished third in the voting for the Heisman Trophy. His 342 yards against SMU that year set a single-game record at Texas that stood for more than twenty years. Tragically, a serious knee injury suffered in spring practice in 1974 limited Leaks' effectiveness as a runner during his senior season and his nine-year professional career. Still, by then "Rosey" was a much loved, if at times perplexing, member of the Longhorn community and the acceptance of African-American athletes had taken a step forward at Texas.

Before he could win the admiration of tens of thousands of white Longhorn fans, Leaks made the difficult transition to life on campus as a freshman. "I had to adjust from living with my parents in a black society to living in a predominantly white society," Leaks later told the student newspaper. He only knew "three or four blacks" during his "first years" on campus and his shyness made the transition even more difficult. "You could consider me ... one of the shyest persons around when I first got here," he later told a reporter. Fellow running back Lonnie Bennett became his closest friend and Leaks slowly gained self-confidence while his performances on the field increasingly pushed him into the limelight. As the university's first black superstar, Leaks received more scrutiny from a white press and fans seeking to understand and adapt to the emerging black athlete. At times, Leaks thought about the larger implications of his role as a racial pioneer. Ultimately, he felt it was "no big issue" for him personally, but that it was critical for Texas football. "It was gonna be done," he told the student newspaper. "It had to be done for Texas to survive as a team." In

addition to recognizing the transformative role of the black athlete, Leaks also understood something of the privileges and limitations of his own situation. Asked by the newspaper how he felt about the fact that the school's alumni and fans only loved him because of his athletic talent, Leaks said, "I sometimes feel used, but it's a two-way street" and pointed to the "job opportunities and a chance to play pro ball" he received in return for his contributions to the team.<sup>70</sup>

For Leaks learning how to interact with the press and all of the attention that came with his pioneering role and celebrity status proved, at times, a difficult task. He sparked a controversy before his sophomore season when, unhappy to find himself third on the depth chart, he contacted a Stanford assistant coach about the possibility of transferring to that school.<sup>71</sup> Leaks stayed at Texas and completed his breakout 1972 season, but then stumbled into a similar hullabaloo the following summer. It started when a reporter from the *Austin American-Statesman* contacted Leaks by phone at his summer job in Houston about the upcoming season. At the end of their conversation, Leaks mentioned some "personal problems" and suggested to the reporter that he might not be returning to school. By the next day, the newspaper was ready to break the story before Royal intervened in an attempt to block it, but in a small, football-mad city the newspaper soon published it anyway. Contacted for comment, Leaks quickly reassured everyone that he was not serious about leaving, but when a reporter from the *Daily Texan* followed up on the story, he encountered Royal's ire. The coach dismissed any discontent on the part of his star running back saying that Leaks was just "bad in the

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<sup>70</sup> *Daily Texan*, 12 November 1975. Clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A242, "E" File (Sports), 1963-1977; *Dave Campbell's Texas Football*, 1974, pg. 25. Clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A242, "E" File (Sports), 1963-1977.

<sup>71</sup> John Maher and Kirk Bohls, *Long Live the Longhorns! 100 Years of Texas Football* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 182.

morning” and that he “might be reading too many Duane Thomas articles.”<sup>72</sup> Instead, he seemed frustrated by the press coverage and warned the student journalist that if he pursued the story further he would “be doing a disservice to the University and college football.”<sup>73</sup>

In addition to fielding an emerging black superstar, by 1972 Royal and the Longhorn athletic program were taking other significant steps toward desegregation by hiring African Americans to low-level positions on coaching staffs and in the athletic department administration. That year Alvin Matthews, a defensive back for the Green Bay Packers, joined the staff as an assistant coach, though his NFL obligations limited him to a part-time position. In 1973, Rodney Page became the university’s first African-American head coach when the University of Houston graduate was hired to teach physical education and lead the women’s basketball team. Page, who had been an assistant women’s coach at Houston and who had refereed a Longhorn game the previous season, accepted a job with a very low salary and even less prestige. During three seasons, he successfully led the team as it completed the transition from club sport to full-fledged intercollegiate program.<sup>74</sup> In 1974, racial change advanced in the

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<sup>72</sup> In 1970, Duane Thomas emerged as one of the best running backs in the NFL, helping lead the Dallas Cowboys to two straight Super Bowls and the NFL title in Super Bowl VI against the Miami Dolphins. Thomas’ talent carried the Cowboy offense for long stretches during both seasons, but contract disputes and personality clashes with Cowboys management, as well as his unusual personal behavior soon derailed his career in Dallas. An abortive trade to New England in 1971 preceded Thomas’s eventual trade to the San Diego the following year, but he never played a down for the Chargers and missed all of 1972. After two mediocre seasons with the Washington Redskins in 1973 and 1974, Thomas left the league for good. At different points during their careers at Texas, both Leaks and Earl Campbell mentioned Thomas as a running back whose play they hoped to emulate.

<sup>73</sup> *Daily Texan*, undated. Clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A242, “E” File (Sports), 1963-1977.

<sup>74</sup> Despite posting a 45-28 record, Page lost his job after the 1975-1976 season. New women’s Athletic Director Donna Lopiano believed that Page was not up to the task of advancing the program further and replaced him with Jody Conradt who was hired away from the University of Texas at Arlington. *Daily Texan*, 7 March 1975, clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A242, “E” File (Sports), 1963-



football program when Prentis Williams joined the coaching staff on a full-time basis and law student Bill Lyons became an assistant to Royal in his role as Athletic Director. Lyons would work with the team on the practice field and provide academic counseling for athletes. He would also work on public relations for the Athletic Department, and, perhaps most importantly in the eyes of some, help with recruiting. That fall, Royal hit the recruiting trail with Lyons in tow and capitalized on the opportunity to try to improve his image on racial issues. When the two attended the John Tyler-Lufkin game in October the local press published a picture of the duo with broad smiles, their right hands embraced in what the newspaper called a “soul shake.”<sup>75</sup>

After many delays and a painful first few years, between 1973 and 1976, Royal did finally lead the Longhorn program into the era of racial desegregation. During his last four seasons, the team featured a growing number of African Americans who played an increasingly important role in the team’s success. Raymond Clayborn, Alfred Jackson, Ivey Suber, Johnny “Lam” Jones, Lionell Johnson and others believed in Royal and his staff enough to commit to Texas. It was not full-scale integration and the new black players were overrepresented at the skill positions, but it still represented a significant step forward for the program. More importantly, as the number of black students on campus and in the athletic program grew, the racial environment at the university improved. African-American students and athletes began reporting positive experiences and the image of Royal and the school as supporters of an older, racist order began to diminish.

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1977; Richard Pennington, *Longhorn Hoops: The History of Texas Basketball* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 277-282.

<sup>75</sup> Daily Texan, 7 March 1975, clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A242, “E” File (Sports), 1963-1977; Unidentified, undated newspaper clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A242, “E” File (Sports), 1963-1977.

By the mid-1970s, black players increasingly found that racism and social isolation were no longer the norm in the program and at school. Gralyn Wyatt arrived on campus in 1974 and found the atmosphere generally hospitable. “Maybe racial prejudice existed here a few years ago, but not anymore,” he told the *Daily Texan* in 1975. Wyatt did admit to feeling isolated on the mostly white campus as a freshman, and called fellow new arrival Earl Campbell his only “close buddy” his first year, but he felt things improved after that. The appearance of more black recruits and an increase in “unity” among whites and blacks on the team made things “more open and friendly” by his second year.<sup>76</sup> Ivey Suber from Ft. Worth, who played at Texas from 1974 to 1976, knew that there had been problems in the past, but reported that he “never encountered” racism during his time on campus. “I am sure there was a lot,” he told the student newspaper in 1977 after a torn Achilles tendon had ended his playing career. “But it has really disappeared ... since more blacks have come (to Texas) and people have gotten to understand the blacks.”<sup>77</sup>

The relationship between Royal and his staff and their African-American players also improved after 1973. Wyatt developed a positive relationship with Royal, who, he told the student newspaper, was “always honest” and “never gave me any jive” and the other coaches who provided him “a fair deal and an opportunity to play.”<sup>78</sup> Campbell, the team’s second black superstar, also established a personal bond with Royal. “I had heard a whole lot about him before, that he didn’t like blacks ...,” Campbell said. “We sat down and talked ... he told me ... I would have an equal chance,” Campbell told the

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<sup>76</sup> *Daily Texan*, 25 September 1975. Clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A242, “E” File (Sports), 1963-1977.

<sup>77</sup> *Daily Texan*, 13 July 1977. Clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A249, Folder: Football Team, 1968-1979.

<sup>78</sup> *Daily Texan*, 25 September 1975.

school newspaper during his freshman year. “I said then ‘I want to play for this man.’”<sup>79</sup> Leaks admired Royal enough to make him the subject of a paper he submitted for a junior-level speech class titled “An Advocate.” In it, Leaks praised Royal’s ability to communicate (“He is a very versatile speaker, with the ability to convince anybody that he may want to,” he wrote.) and his crusade against illegal recruiting (According to Leaks, he was “the main force behind” efforts “to clamp down” on those breaking the rules).<sup>80</sup> Lionell Johnson who played for Royal during the coach’s last four seasons also developed a positive image of the coach and, more importantly, felt that Royal treated him fairly. “I enjoy playing for Coach ... Royal,” Johnson, Texas’s first out-of-state African-American signee, told his hometown Louisiana newspaper. “He treats all of the players the same and like young men.”<sup>81</sup>

Despite the progress, challenges remained for Royal and his program as they slowly added African Americans. It was a period of transition, an era when, according to rival Barry Switzer, “schools started recruiting black athletes but they were on a quota system” and coaches “felt pressured.” Royal himself “was doing it under a quota system,” Switzer alleged, one that had him “recruiting only skilled athletes.”<sup>82</sup> Criticized publicly for not integrating quickly enough, behind closed doors Royal risked the wrath of powerful University constituencies if he moved too rapidly. The Longhorns’ tainted reputation in the black community also continued to be a powerful tool for their rivals to use against them. Wyatt, a prep star from the Arkansas side of

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<sup>79</sup> *Daily Texan*, 24 October 1974. Clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A242, “E” File (Sports), 1963-1977.

<sup>80</sup> “An Advocate” by Roosevelt Leaks for Speech 331K in Darrell K. Royal Papers, Box 3J14, Folder: Poems and Works of Players, Undated.

<sup>81</sup> Unidentified, undated newspaper clipping in Darrell K. Royal Papers, Box 3J15, Folder 2.

<sup>82</sup> Interview of Barry Switzer by John Erling, August 17, 2009.

Texarkana who signed with Texas in 1974, reported that coaches from Broyles' Razorback program gave him a copy of Shaw's *Meat on the Hoof* while he was deciding on a school.<sup>83</sup> Royal's most prized African-American recruit, Earl Campbell said that same year that other schools told him racial attitudes at Texas would make it difficult for him to crack the starting lineup.<sup>84</sup> Weighing their options, both Wyatt and Campbell chose to attend Texas anyway, but even in 1974 with the number of African Americans in the program steadily increasing, Royal's image as a former segregationist continued to haunt him.

Like the University of Texas, the University of Arkansas and coach Frank Broyles finally added African Americans to their varsity in 1970, and like at Texas, the historic first marked just one small step in the decades long transition from segregated regional institution to integrated modern university. Intentionally built in the northwestern part of Arkansas, away from the state's black population, and strictly segregated until the end of the Second World War, the University of Arkansas nonetheless became the first Southern university to voluntarily desegregate in 1948. Feeling that desegregation was inevitable and that resistance could be costly and embarrassing, the University admitted African-American war veteran Silas Hunt from Texarkana, Arkansas to the law school that year. Hunt gained admission, but was forced to function in a strictly segregated environment that prevented him from living in campus housing or participating in campus activities. Hunt attended most of his classes alone in a basement of the law school. White students were allowed to sit-in on his

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<sup>83</sup> *Daily Texan*, 25 September 1975, clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A242, "E" File (Sports), 1963-1977.

<sup>84</sup> *Daily Texan*, 24 October 1974, clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A242, "E" File (Sports), 1963-1977.

lectures, and some occasionally did, but he was barred from joining their classes. In the late-1940s and early-1950s, the University continued to admit a select few blacks at the graduate and professional level and very slowly opened other parts of campus life to them. In 1950, they began allowing black male graduate and law students to live in the all-male graduate student dormitory. The following year they desegregated on-campus activities. In 1953, the University purchased a residence hall for black female students and finally allowed all black students full access to the campus when they desegregated all facilities. The University resisted enrolling undergraduates until after the second *Brown* decision in 1955, but then once again seeing the inevitability of change, began to admit select black undergraduates. By 1956 six African-American underclassmen were attending classes on the Fayetteville campus. The number of black students slowly increased afterwards, still, throughout the 1960s, many reported feeling isolated on campus and largely unwelcome off of it in overwhelmingly white Fayetteville.<sup>85</sup> As at other Southern universities, racial change came late in the revered Razorback football program, but by 1970 the varsity featured two African Americans: Jon Richardson a running back from Little Rock, Arkansas and Hiram McBeth III a defensive back from Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

On September 12, 1970, Richardson became the first African American to suit up and play for the Razorbacks in the team's nationally televised opening game against Stanford. The day was a significant one in the history of race and southern college football generally. That evening the University of Southern California Trojans, a fully integrated national power led by a contingent of African-American stars, went to

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<sup>85</sup> Charles F. Robinson II and Lonnie R. Williams, eds., *Remembrances in Black: Personal Perspectives of the African American Experience at the University of Arkansas* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2010), xv-xviii, 1-3, 15-18, and 46-48.

Birmingham, Alabama and demolished Bear Bryant's all-white Alabama Crimson Tide in a game often looked back on as a watershed moment in dismantling Southern resistance to integrated college football.<sup>86</sup> "... the Trojans demonstrated to Alabama in the heart of Dixie," black sports editor Brad Pye, Jr. of the *Los Angeles Sentinel* said at the time, "what black and integrated power is all about." According to Pye, however, that was not the only thing that made it "really a big day and night for blacks in collegiate football in Dixie Saturday."<sup>87</sup> In Atlanta, Eddie McAshan became the first African-American starting quarterback at a Southern school when he led Georgia Tech to an upset victory over all-white South Carolina, the reigning Atlantic Coast Conference champions. In Tallahassee, Florida, James (J.T.) Thomas, the first African American to play at Florida State, blocked two field goals in his first game, the last one in the final seconds to save a 9-7 victory over Louisville.

Late that afternoon in Little Rock, Arkansas, Richardson made his debut, and, just as significantly, television viewers throughout the South and the nation watched as a thoroughly integrated Stanford squad, in Fry's words, "shocked Arkansas 34-28 with a fleet of blacks including ex-L.A. High star Hillary Shockley" who scored three touchdowns. In defeat, Richardson made his presence felt and demonstrated to Arkansas fans the game changing potential of his talents. After Stanford jumped to a 27-0 lead in the second quarter, Richardson returned the ensuing kickoff 55 yards to help launch a Razorback comeback. He scored his first touchdown on a 37-yard, fourth-down pass late in the first half, bringing the score to 27-14 at intermission.

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<sup>86</sup> Dan Yeager, Sam Cunningham, and John Papadakis, *Turning of the Tide: How One Game Changed the South* (New York: Center Street, 2006); Allen Barra, *The Last Coach: A Life of Paul "Bear" Bryant* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005); Keith Dunnavant, *Coach: The Life of Paul "Bear" Bryant* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

<sup>87</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 17 September 1970, pg. B1.

Stanford went up 34-14 in the third quarter on Shockley's third touchdown, but Arkansas responded with two late scoring drives—the second one featuring a critical first-down reception by Richardson—to make it 34-28. A late Stanford fumble gave the Razorbacks a chance to complete the miraculous comeback and they drove deep into Indian territory, but with Richardson on the bench, the Stanford defense stopped them inside the 5-yard line to preserve the win. While it is easy to inflate the importance of a single game, or of a single day's games, September 12, 1970, the first weekend of a new season, provided ample proof of how rapidly black athletes were changing the competitive balance of college football. White Southern athletes had, in the words of *Los Angeles Times* sports columnist Jim Murray, “struggled fairly without the aid of their formidable ally, Jim Crow” and been found deeply wanting.<sup>88</sup>

Richardson continued to demonstrate his talents during his first season emerging as one of the team's top rushers and pass receivers and scoring nine more touchdowns. He started 1971 strong gaining 325 rushing yards in the first three games—including a 154-yard, two-touchdown performance against Oklahoma State—before a broken leg forced him out of the lineup. He returned late in the season, but the injury hampered him throughout the rest of his Arkansas football career. During his senior season in 1972, Richardson served as a kick returner and backup running back and even though his productivity as a rusher slipped he still led the team with seven touchdowns and set a school record for kickoff return yardage. Although Richardson spent three productive seasons on the Razorback varsity and scored twenty offensive touchdowns, some questioned whether his talents were fully utilized. Vernon Murphy, one of the first

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<sup>88</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 13 September 1970, pg. C1; *Washington Post*, 13 September 1970, pg. C3; *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 17 September 1970, pg. B1.

black basketball players on scholarship at Arkansas, remembers the black community noticing that the coaches tried to save the glory of scoring touchdowns for their white players. “Jon Richardson would run the ball down to the five-yard line,” Murphy remembered. “(Then) They would let the white player continue on and get glory for finishing the touchdown. ... People (whites) were happy with that.”<sup>89</sup>

McBeth, a walk-on and the other African American on the 1970 varsity, experienced less success in the program than Richardson and felt that the coaches’ attitudes toward him were at least partially responsible. He suited up but never played in 1970 before appearing as a reserve and special teams player in several 1971 games. “I was incensed and insulted that I was bigger, stronger, faster, and smarter than my counterparts (and they knew that by direct competition with me on the field), yet I wasn’t getting a fair opportunity to play,” McBeth later wrote. “On the 1971 team,” he contended, “I was ... good enough to have started at defensive halfback.” McBeth felt the coaching staff intentionally limited his role in order to blunt criticisms of their failure to recruit talented African Americans. “The question would then have been asked, ‘If this guy can walk-on and out-perform our scholarship white players, why wasn’t he and others like him recruited in the first place?’” With one year of eligibility left, and increasing numbers of black players entering the program, McBeth left the team in 1972 to focus on academics.<sup>90</sup>

After the arrival of Richardson and McBeth, the number of black players in the program slowly increased and by the mid-1970s racial integration was a reality. In 1973, Broyles hired his first black assistant coach, Frank Falks, to coach defensive ends

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<sup>89</sup> Robinson and Williams, eds., *Remembrances in Black*, 121.

<sup>90</sup> He earned a juris doctor degree from the University of Arkansas in 1977. Robinson, *Remembrances in Black*, 97-100.



and help with the recruiting of black athletes.<sup>91</sup> By 1974, the campus black student newspaper pictured fifteen black players in its article previewing the upcoming season. More significantly the newspaper noted, “For the first time, Black students at the University are getting excited at the thought of the upcoming football season.” According to the newspaper, in previous years few black students attended Razorback games. Those who did faced the scorn of both whites (“rednecks” as the paper described them) and their fellow black students, who, the newspaper reported, “were well aware of the racist history of this university, especially in regards to their athletic teams.” With times changing, however, the newspaper felt that perhaps it was time for blacks on campus to re-evaluate their position too. After all, the paper editorialized, “if Frank Broyles can change, then maybe we should.” In the past some African American students viewed black athletes as Uncle “Toms,” but now the black student organ said “we should rally around them with our greatest support.”<sup>92</sup>

That same year, junior Mellonee Carrigan and sophomore Jo Lynn Dennis broke another barrier on campus when they became the first African-American “homecoming maids” after a vote by the Razorback football team.<sup>93</sup> In 1975, efforts to recruit more black athletes continued to pay off. By that year, African Americans comprised more than half of the incoming class of recruits and sophomore running back Jerry Eckwood from Brinkley, Arkansas emerged as a major star.<sup>94</sup> In 1976, Broyles forced the Razorback cheerleading squad to accept their first African-American members after his black players threatened to boycott over their exclusion. Three blacks (two female and

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<sup>91</sup> *Black Americans For Democracy News*, 18 November 1975, pg. 3. Falks, a native of Florida, served as Kansas State’s offensive line coach for three years before joining Broyles’ staff.

<sup>92</sup> *Black Americans For Democracy News*, 10 September 1974, pg. 4.

<sup>93</sup> *Black Americans For Democracy News*, 12 December 1974, pg. 1.

<sup>94</sup> *Black Americans For Democracy News*, 24 September 1975, pg. 3.

one male) joined the squad, but reported experiencing a great deal of animosity from their white peers during their first year.<sup>95</sup>

While desegregation slowly progressed in the athletic program, on the larger campus southern traditions remained strong and still often made their way into activities surrounding the football team. The annual “Beat Texas Week,” held yearly beginning in 1969, in particular, became an occasion when white students celebrated the Confederacy and the racial order of the antebellum era. During the week, students imagined themselves “confederate troopers” and “Confederate flags were dug out, dusted, cleaned and pressed to be hoisted on major streets for the world to see.” The school’s small but growing black student population did not enjoy the festivities, in fact they found themselves targets and victims as their white peers re-enacted the racial privilege of an idealized earlier age. According to the black student newspaper, in 1975, various groups of neo-Confederates “vamped down on a group of Black women ... fire(d) at a Black buck and ... savagely kicked an innocent Black freshman” while white students generally felt the license to direct “obscene language” toward blacks. From the viewpoint of the black student press, “Anything for the pursuit of happiness for the Confederates was granted and legalized” by a University administration that “whole-heartedly sanctioned” the entire affair. Even worse, according to the black newspaper, failure on the football field brought out the worst in the white crowd and often led to an increase in racial violence. “Due to the fact that beating Texas is such a rarity,” the student paper editorialized, “the tradition has been turned toward “Beat the Niggers.” The week’s events culminated in a huge pep rally led by, from the black perspective, “Colonel Frank Broyles,” and prompted calls from the black community

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<sup>95</sup> Robinson and Williams, eds., *Remembrances in Black*, 156-157.

for the University or state authorities to intervene to end the whole affair.<sup>96</sup> Even as athletic programs in the region achieved integration and black athletes began receiving something approaching equal treatment on the playing field, both they and their fellow black students still faced many challenges in a white-dominated campus environment. At the University of Arkansas, like many other Southern institutions of higher education, the playing fields of commercial spectator sport proved one of the few limited areas where whites accepted complete integration.

While the Texas-Arkansas rivalry of the late-1960s symbolized the region's last dogged efforts to resist athletic desegregation, the Texas-Oklahoma rivalry of the first-half of the 1970s cast the implications of racial integration and the transformative role of the black athlete in stark relief. In the late-1950s and the 1960s, Royal's Longhorns dominated the Sooners on the field winning twelve of thirteen times between 1958 and 1970. By 1971, however, with the influx of black players at Oklahoma, the competitive balance shifted and Royal never again defeated his alma mater. That October, Greg Pruitt rushed for 216 yards as the Sooners rolled to a 48-27 victory in Dallas. "Oklahoma just beat the dog out of us," Longhorn defensive lineman Ray Dowdy said. "We were in shock."<sup>97</sup> In 1972, the Sooners shutout the Longhorns 27-0 and the following year delivered a 52-13 shellacking to their archrival. In his final three seasons, Royal's team played the Sooners closer, but still could not get a win—losing 16-13 in 1974, 24-17 in 1975, and, after a late botched extra point attempt by Oklahoma, managing a 6-6 tie in 1976. The tie marked the last of Royal's twenty-four appearances in a rivalry game that he participated in for both sides and as both a player

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<sup>96</sup> *Black Americans For Democracy News*, 24 September 1975, pg. 2.

<sup>97</sup> Maher and Bohls, *Long Live the Longhorns*, 181.

and coach. It was also, he said, “the hardest game of my whole coaching career,” a fact emphasized when he vomited while leaving the field. “I thought we were outpersonneled (sic),” Royal said in a moment of candor about the relative talent levels of the two programs, “but we played a great defensive game.”<sup>98</sup>

Despite his candor on that occasion, Royal often explained Oklahoma’s success against his team with reference to more nefarious motives on the part of Switzer and his staff. According to Royal, the Sooners cheated and much of their success stemmed from their willingness to bend and break the rules. It was a refrain that the Texas coach turned to more and more often as the 1970s progressed, applying it not only to the Sooners but other rivals as well. After failing to sign any African-American recruits in 1972, a subpar recruiting season in 1973 sent Royal to the press to complain about illegal recruiting in the Southwest Conference. According to *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal* columnist Burle Pettit, “he had quite a mediocre recruiting haul due directly to the fact somebody bought a couple of the good ones he otherwise probably would have signed.”<sup>99</sup> By 1975, Royal felt that the dishonesty was reaching a crisis level that threatened to harm the game. “Cheating in college football is worse than I have ever seen it,” he said. Desperate times called for desperate measures and Royal called on his fellow coaches to “strap down with me,” by which he meant submit to a polygraph test that he hoped would separate the honest coaches from the cheaters. He also called for reforms that barred alumni from the recruiting process and that required faculty representatives to participate in recruiting for at least one season so they would

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<sup>98</sup> Maher and Bohls, *Long Live the Longhorns*, 191.

<sup>99</sup> *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*, 23 February 1973, clipping in Darrell K. Royal Papers, Box 3J15, Folder 2.

understand the situation coaches confronted.<sup>100</sup> Most sports writers did not question Royal's moral authority, but Jack Gallagher of the *Houston Post* did point out the hypocrisy of his self-appointed role as a reformer. According to a recent biography, Gallagher noted, Royal "was subsidized through Oklahoma during the freewheeling post-World War II days," where a wealthy alum paid his family's living expenses and he supplemented his income by scalping Oklahoma-Texas tickets. While he appreciated the candor of the biography, Gallagher found it ironic that he "now decries recruiting excesses in college football."<sup>101</sup>

Royal and many Texas fans focused on Oklahoma as one of the most dishonest programs. In 1976, the *Daily Texan* summed up their sentiments by headlining a story about Oklahoma's many players from the Lone Star state, "OU: best Texans money could buy" in reference to a popular bumper sticker of the period. The accompanying article detailed the long list of top prospects that left Texas to attend school in Norman, including Horace Ivory of Fort Worth and Billy Brooks of Austin, both of whom scored critical touchdowns against the Longhorns the previous two seasons. The student paper, however, did not follow its accusatory headline with any specific allegations and it also failed to consider the role race might have played in motivating many of the African-American players to leave their home state.<sup>102</sup>

That same year, a week before the OU-Texas game, Royal publically accused Switzer and his coaching staff of spying on the Longhorns. According to Royal, Texas oilman Lonnie Williams of Rockwall, a friend of Sooner assistant Larry Laceywell, had

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<sup>100</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 16 February 1975, clipping in Darrell K. Royal Papers, Box 3J15, Folder 1.

<sup>101</sup> *Houston Post*, 25 October 1973, pg. D3, clipping in Darrell K. Royal Papers, Box 3J15, Folder 2. The biography Gallagher referred to is: Jimmy Banks, *The Darrell Royal Story* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1973).

<sup>102</sup> *Daily Texan*, undated, clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A249, Folder: Football Team, 1968-1979.

clandestinely infiltrated Texas practices over the years and passed on critical information to the OU staff. Specifically, Royal pointed to the 1972 game where late in the third period and down 3-0 deep in their own territory, Texas tried its first quick kick in several seasons. Oklahoma seemed to know what was coming. They blocked the kick and recovered it in the end zone for a touchdown that gave them momentum and led to a 27-0 rout. That game raised Royal's suspicions and when a Texas alumnus came forward to confirm them in 1976, he took his charges to the press. Thinking he was speaking off the record afterwards, Royal referred to Switzer and his coaches as "those sorry bastards" and when the quote was published the controversy grew even more heated. Royal once again suggested that everyone involved take lie detector tests and even offered \$10,000 to the Sooner coaches if they could pass. Switzer and his staff denied allegations they knew were true and Switzer suggested Royal's discontent might have more to do with his team's competitive decline. When the two teams met on October 9 in Dallas, President Gerald Ford, in a tough re-election fight with Democrat Jimmy Carter, performed the coin toss while standing at midfield with two coaches too mad to look at one another.<sup>103</sup> In the aftermath of a week embroiled in controversy and an exhausting 6-6 tie on the playing field, Royal began to seriously plan his retirement.<sup>104</sup> His team's final game that season against old-rival Broyles, who

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<sup>103</sup> *Daily Texan*, undated, clipping in Almetris Marsh Duren Papers, Box 4A249, Folder: Football Team, 1968-1979; Jake Trotter, *I Love Oklahoma / I Hate Texas* (Chicago: Triumph Books, 2012), 82-87; Maher and Bohls, *Long Live the Longhorns*, 183, 190-191.

<sup>104</sup> The weekend following the game, ABC ran a halftime feature on the controversy and included interviews with the two coaches. Jim Lampley of ABC wrote to Royal afterwards expressing his "regret" that the network provided Switzer "a forum for a non-denial denial" and ensuring Royal that he thought his "commitment to ethics and morality came through strongly." In a comment that may have stung Royal with its irony, Lampley said, "as far as I am concerned, this was one Texas – Oklahoma battle you won easily." Letter: Jim Lampley to Darrell Royal, October 19, 1976, in Darrell K. Royal Papers, Box 3J18, Folder: Correspondence, Notes, Clippings, Telegrams, 1958-1979.

had also announced his retirement, brought a symbolic curtain down on older era of racial exclusion and restriction.

The first half of the 1970s proved a watershed moment in the desegregation of college football in the Southwest. The Oklahoma coaching staff's willingness to embrace growing numbers of African-American athletes and their 1972 rejection of all limits on black recruiting changed the competitive balance on the field and forced their competitors to rapidly adapt to the new era of the black athlete. When the decade began most of the major universities of the South, including the University of Arkansas and the University of Texas, had yet to feature a single black player, but by 1976, at these same universities, the football team was the most integrated organization on campus. Barry Switzer's unique background and connections to the African-American community along with Oklahoma's distinctive racial history helped foster the change. Switzer's readiness to recruit blacks and, more importantly, his creation of an open and accepting racial climate on his football team allowed the Sooners to reach the elite level of college football and win back-to-back national championships in 1974 and 1975. Despite its deep cultural connections to the South, the state of Oklahoma proved less resistant to the federally mandated racial changes of the second-half of the twentieth century. The talent of the black athlete along with the passion for Sooner football success of so many Oklahomans allowed integration on the gridiron to proceed more rapidly there. In contrast to Oklahoma, deep connections to Southern traditions and the backgrounds of their coaches ensured that Texas and Arkansas would approach desegregation much more haltingly. Broyles and Royal are often blamed for the deliberately slow pace of racial change within their programs. Both were products of an

earlier, more segregated era and both certainly avoided recruiting blacks for several years after it became feasible, but both had also utilized black athletes in previous coaching positions during the mid-1950s and both oversaw the gradual desegregation of their programs in the first-half of the 1970s. Ultimately, it was the entrenched racial attitudes of many whites and the long history of racial exclusion in the two states that dictated the slow pace of desegregating football at their two flagship universities.



## **Conclusion**

The desegregation of major college football in the states of Oklahoma, Texas, and Arkansas took place within the context of the larger Civil Rights Movement during the three decades between 1947 and 1976. As a much-loved part of twentieth-century Southern culture, the sport resisted racial change longer than many other institutions in the region. The overthrow of the color line in the Cotton Bowl beginning in 1947, Oklahoma's signing of Prentice Gautt in 1956, and the recruiting of Jerry LeVias by SMU in 1965, all marked gradual, but halting, steps toward the goal of athletic integration. Well after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 signaled the zenith of the peaceful Civil Rights Movement, Jim Crow on the college football fields of the Southwest finally collapsed in the late-1960s. By the early-1970s, even the most staunchly segregated universities gave in and began accepting African Americans into their programs. Ironically, after desegregation, the tremendous talent of black athletes coupled with an overwhelming desire to win football games among the general populace turned the college gridiron into one of the most thoroughly integrated social spaces in the region. As such, these spaces reflected both the potential and the limitations of a newly emerging racially desegregated social order. At the same time, they also played an important role in shaping these new patterns of race relations. In a more open social world, for example, young African-American football players became mainstream athletic heroes during a period when styles of black masculine expression made major inroads into the American cultural mainstream for the first time.

The Second World War inspired massive changes throughout American society, including a fundamental challenge to traditional patterns of race relations. The fight

against German fascism, in particular, placed the plight of African Americans in stark relief and encouraged many Americans to advocate for racial democracy.

Transformations that began during the war continued in the postwar era; throughout the Cold War, the U.S. continued to position itself as an international champion of democracy. In this context, the position of African Americans, especially in the segregated, disenfranchised South, drew increasing criticism and slow change ensued. In 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802, ordering the desegregation of defense industry jobs. In the case of *Smith v. Allwright* in 1944, the Supreme Court banned the all-white primary—one traditional tool of Southern racial disenfranchisement. The wave of racial change reached the college football gridirons of the Southwest on New Year's Day 1948 when Southern Methodist University took on Pennsylvania State University at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas. Driven more by self-interest than any desire to achieve racial justice, SMU, the Cotton Bowl Athletic Association, and the city of Dallas set aside segregationist traditions and embraced a game against Penn State—a team that did believe in racial equality and that included two African-American players. They did so because they were the best opponent available and a victory against them offered to bring glory and profits to the team and its city. For only the second time in history, black athletes participated in a major college football game played in the states of the former Confederacy.

White Dallas accepted the game largely for the prestige it would bring to the SMU football program and the dollars it would pump into the local economy. In terms of race, however, they tried their best to maintain the status quo as strictly as possible. In fact, as they organized and planned the event, they focused on limiting any advances

toward desegregation to the field of play. The result was a Southern bowl event unlike any other of that era, and it was the players on the integrated Penn State squad who lost out the most because of it. Instead of a swank downtown Dallas hotel, the team stayed at the local Naval Air Station where, because bowl officials cancelled the pregame celebrations and parties that typically highlighted the days before the game, they ate their meals in a military chow hall rather than enjoying some of the finest restaurants the city had to offer. Moreover, while the national black press covered the groundbreaking aspects of the contest and explored their ramifications fully, the local white press avoided the issue and downplayed its significance as much as possible.

Despite these limitations, the game did provide evidence of evolving attitudes and hinted at an early dawning of a new era in race relations. Competing against a team that included African Americans won general acceptance among SMU's players, students, and administrators and highlighted changing attitudes toward race at SMU and on campuses around the country. The Mustangs head coach, Madison Bell, spoke out against racial exclusion and pointed directly to its contradiction of the nation's democratic values. In the war's aftermath (and moving forward into the civil rights era) the ideal of racial equality often received its staunchest defense and most active support from faculty and students at the nation's universities. Economic factors were equally important. When the possibility of an interracial competition that would boost civic pride and pump dollars into the local economy emerged, city leaders and the Dallas business community backed the effort and took the lead in making the event a reality. During the next two decades of civil rights protests, in cities such as Montgomery, Greensboro, and Birmingham, civic boosters concerned about their locale's image and

businessmen focused more on profits than social egalitarianism often led the way in eliminating barriers and achieving desegregation. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it proved impossible for Dallas segregationists to limit the forces of racial change to the football field. The game inspired a great deal of interest among the city's black community and, on game day, black fans spilled out of the traditional Jim Crow section and mingled among white fans without causing controversy. Moreover, the planned segregation of off-field activities broke down when the entire Penn State team, including its two black players, attended the traditional postgame banquet recognizing the two teams. The spirit of democratic competition on the field of play spilled over into other social spaces and life in the city continued without incident.

The desegregation of the Cotton Bowl game beginning in 1948 proved the only real progress toward the integration of college football in the region for almost a decade. During that time, prejudice denied yet another generation of talented black high school athletes the opportunity to compete for athletic glory and a subsidized higher education. In the late-1950s, however, that began to change as a few schools on the region's geographic and cultural fringe took the first steps toward integrating their athletic programs. Most significantly, the University of Oklahoma in 1956 awarded Prentice Gautt, an outstanding African-American student and athlete, a scholarship. When Gautt made the varsity the following year, the Sooners became the first major Southern football program to field a black player.

The unique history of the state of Oklahoma combined with the early achievements of the civil rights activists in the state to make this breakthrough possible. Settled initially by the slaveholding "Five Civilized Tribes," the land that came to be

called Oklahoma possessed a significant black population from its earliest days. During the Civil War, the tribes allied with the Confederacy against the United States and the end of the war brought an end to slavery in Indian Territory. During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, residents of Indian Territory and, later, the state of Oklahoma constructed an elaborate system of legal segregation and discrimination like other states in the region, which left their African-American population with a distinctly second-class form of citizenship.

By the mid-twentieth century an assertive civil rights campaign launched by the state's black residents culminated in two Supreme Court cases which overturned segregation in higher education and opened the way for the gradual desegregation of the state. The cases also paved the way for the complete desegregation of the University of Oklahoma by 1955. Progressive faculty members and administrators played an important role in achieving racial change at the University and head football coach Bud Wilkinson did the same in regard to football. When Gault emerged as one of the premier high school athletic talents in the state, the coach's professional ambitions united with his commitment to social justice and led him to pursue the University's first African-American football player. In a state as passionate about winning football games as maintaining racial segregation, it took a coach with Wilkinson's record of success and esteemed position to break down barriers and initiate the process of racial change. It also required a young athlete of exemplary athletic talent, as well as intelligence and character, to ensure that the experiment succeeded. Embarking on a journey similar to that of Jackie Robinson a decade earlier, Gault experienced loneliness, isolation, prejudice, and even physical violence in his effort to play football

in what was formerly an exclusively white world. Like Robinson, he persevered in the daunting task. Gault excelled in the classroom, earned a spot on the varsity, emerged as a star player, and eventually became one of the university's most beloved graduates. While Gault's talent and character proved essential to the success of desegregation at Oklahoma, these factors did little to promote full-scale integration. While Wilkinson, and his successors, continued to recruit a limited number of black players, it would be more than a decade before the program embraced significant numbers of black athletes.

In the late-1950s and early-1960s, a handful of other schools in the region began to accept black athletes. At North Texas State College, Texas Western, Texas A&I, and the University of Houston, a mix of idealism and the desire to establish a name for themselves through athletic success led to the desegregation of their athletic programs. The more prominent members of the Southwest Conference, however, continued to resist change and their teams remained all white during the same period. In 1963, the Board of Regents at the University of Texas mandated the desegregation of all campus activities, including athletics, and optimistic progressives in the state felt that the Longhorns would take the lead in bringing integration to conference playing fields. Their hopes were unwarranted, however; instead, it was left to the conference's small private institutions to lead the way toward athletic equality. Once again, SMU played a path-breaking role and, just like at Oklahoma, both the contributions of the head coach and the outstanding talent and exemplary character of the first black player proved keys to success.

Like many of the head coaches who helped breakdown racial barriers in college football, Hayden Fry came from a lower middle-class background that encouraged him

to develop friendships with African-American peers during his youth. Seeing the discrimination that limited the opportunities available to his black friends, Fry vowed that one day, given the chance, he would do his part to change things. When he emerged as one of the top assistant coaches in the nation in 1961 and SMU approached him to fill their vacant head coaching position, that opportunity came. Fry insisted that if he took the position he be allowed to recruit African Americans. When the school initially balked at this condition, it looked as if Fry's idealism would cost him the opportunity. Fortunately, officials at SMU changed their minds and agreed to take the controversial step; thus, Fry accepted the job and began searching for the ideal candidate. Fry and his staff eventually focused on Jerry LeVias, an outstanding athlete and model young man from Beaumont, Texas. In 1965, they made history when LeVias became the first African American to accept a football scholarship in the Southwest Conference.

As fate would have it, however, LeVias did not become the first black to play varsity football in the conference. By an accident of scheduling, that honor fell to John Westbrook, a young black man from Central Texas who walked on at Baylor at the same time LeVias arrived at SMU as a star recruit. In 1966, Baylor's game against Syracuse came a week earlier than SMU's season opener with Illinois and, when coach Frank Bridgers inserted Westbrook into the lineup late in the game, the color barrier fell in Southwest Conference football. Early in his first season, Westbrook demonstrated real potential in the Baylor backfield, but a serious mid-season knee injury proved a downward turning point in his athletic career at Baylor and he never made a significant contribution to the football team.

As a player of marginal impact, Westbrook's career illustrated many of the challenges faced by the first black athletes on college campuses in the region. As one of only a handful of blacks on the Southern Baptist campus, Westbrook found the majority of his white peers distant and unwilling to transcend traditional barriers against interracial socialization. He encountered hostility and overt racism at times, but loneliness and isolation proved to be more difficult and enduring challenges during his four years at Baylor. As with other pioneering black athletes at the collegiate level, a progressive coach played a significant role in opening up opportunities for Westbrook. Against the wishes of some of his coaching staff, Bridgers awarded Westbrook an athletic scholarship before his sophomore year that allowed him to remain in school. He also battled his assistants to get Westbrook on to the field throughout his career. In fact, it was Bridgers' staff that probably did the most to negatively impact Westbrook's Baylor experience. Hardened racial attitudes led members of the staff to verbally taunt and abuse their first black player. At times the abuse turned physical, such as during the brutal contact drill in which Westbrook suffered a concussion that effectively ended his junior season. Prejudice led several members of the staff to dismiss Westbrook as someone who did not deserve a chance or, after his injuries, to view him as a slacker taking advantage of his football scholarship without giving his best effort back to the university.

As his time on the field decreased, Westbrook's on-campus political activism grew and his outspoken positions, while far from radical in the black power era, may have also alienated many in the conservative Baylor community. Ultimately, a majority on the Waco campus agreed with Baylor President Abner McCall; that



Westbrook was not that good of a football player and, in the meritocracy of college football competition, he failed to garner their attention. He did, however, accomplish his educational goals, earning his degree and using it in a successful career before his early death. As Westbrook's football career suffered, so did the Baylor football program. Dissention of Bridgers' staff arose from a host of issues, including the coach's handling of the program's first black player. With his team in a downward slide and on its way to a 3-7 season, the school fired Bridgers just before his and Westbrook's final game. Under Bridgers' successor, Bill Beall, Baylor lost every game the following season and only won three during the next two years.

At SMU, Jerry LeVias faced many of the same hardships Westbrook endured at Baylor. Ultimately, because of his success on the field, he gained widespread acceptance and his career reflected on a much larger scale the scope of racial change in a turbulent era. Like Prentice Gaultt at Oklahoma, LeVias was the Jackie Robinson of his time and place: an upstanding citizen, exemplary student, and transformative athletic talent. Upon arriving at SMU, he encountered overt prejudice and racial stereotyping from both professors and his fellow classmates, but that began to change when he took the field for the SMU varsity in 1966. After almost two decades of mediocrity, a stout defense and the big-play heroics of LeVias returned the Mustangs to the top level of conference competition. As they did, the league's first black star became the target of verbal and physical assaults by opponents unhappy with his success and the changes he represented. The two trends converged in the final game of the season when the team traveled to nearby Ft. Worth to take on TCU with the chance to win the conference title and a death threat hanging over LeVias's head. As he had all season, LeVias overcame

the added pressures of race to deliver a clutch performance and help the Ponies win the title. The hostility targeting LeVias, and Fry's protests against it, forced the conference leadership to address integration and to publically endorse sportsmanship and fair play for all. His game-changing ability and his star status forced the public to directly confront the reality of black athletes and their impact on a beloved game. It also forced opponents to recognize black talent and consider the competitive disadvantage they would face if they refused to integrate. Between 1967 and 1969, TCU, Texas A&M, Texas Tech, and Rice joined SMU and Baylor in adding African-American athletes to their programs.

LeVias's time at SMU spanned the transition from a fight for civil rights to a quest for black power in the African-American community. Early in his career his image as a racial pioneer melded with the tenor of the times and played an important role in gaining early acceptance for himself and other black athletes. In the increasingly radical late-1960s, however, LeVias's stature as a significant social and cultural figure declined. He remained a great player and a difference maker on the field, but the task of moving beyond desegregation and confronting the barriers to large-scale racial change remained for the next wave of black players to face.

Before that could happen, segregationists held on as long as they could and their persistence produced one last dramatic contest. By 1969, only Texas and Arkansas in the Southwest Conference, along with the football powers of the Deep South, maintained all-white varsity teams. The Longhorns' and Razorbacks' epic, season-ending made-for-TV clash in December 1969 turned into one of the most dramatic contests of the era and propelled Texas to the national championship. A cultural

spectacle viewed on over half of the television sets in the country, the contest captured the powerful symbolism of a turbulent, transitional period. Events on game day highlighted the complex political divisions of the period. A bipartisan coalition of elected officials from both states watched from the stands. Republicans like Congressmen George H.W. Bush and John Paul Hammerschmidt joined Democrats like Senator J. William Fulbright for the excitement of a big game and to link themselves to one of the most popular activities in the region. President Richard M. Nixon endured a round-trip flight from Washington D.C. to Fort Smith, Arkansas on game day. After arriving in Fort Smith, he and other top politicians rode out a perilous helicopter flight into the Ozark Mountains in stormy weather to reach Fayetteville and participate in the festivities. For the members of the political establishment, it was a day of consensus—a day to put away divisive issues like the Vietnam War and celebrate the mainstream American consensus. For others, the spectacle produced an opportunity to air their political grievances on a national stage. Antiwar protestors on the campus saw the game, particularly with the President attending, as an opportunity to publicize their dissent. They staged a dramatic protest just outside of the stadium replete with mock graves symbolizing the victims of American war policy. On campus, militant black students in the Black Americans for Democracy (BAD) disrupted the final weeks of football season with their aggressive efforts to eliminate the playing of “Dixie” at Razorback games. As “The Big Shootout” approached, their threat to stage a protest in the middle of the football field if the band played the song hung over the campus. The actions of band director Richard A. Worthington, however, won the day for racial moderates as the band excluded the newly controversial song from its game day

repertoire for the first time in years. Sport, which many of its supporters believed should stand above the world of partisan struggle, was, on this occasion at least, indelibly immersed in it.

In its racial overtones, “The Big Shootout” sketched in rough outline the rapidly changing patterns of American race relations. Although few noted it at the time, that day in Fayetteville represented the high-water mark in the final chapter of the long history of segregation and racial exclusion in college football. It was the last game of national significance contested by two all-white teams and winning it helped make Texas the last segregated team to capture the national championship. In the face of Jim Crow’s final stand, however, the forces of desegregation were slowly winning out. Both programs allowed a small number of blacks to walk-on and participate on their freshman and lower level teams beginning in the mid-1960s; and, after much delay, Texas finally awarded a scholarship to an African-American player in 1968. Arkansas did the same the following year. In 1970, both programs integrated their varsities and afterwards slowly but steadily increased the number of blacks on their teams. By the mid-1970s, black athletes participated on all of the region’s teams and made up an increasingly large percentage of the game’s stars.

The victory over Southern traditions won by the student members of BAD represented another advance for the forces of inclusion on the day of “The Big Shootout.” Their elimination of “Dixie” from Arkansas football games proved an early step in a decades long effort to untangle the traditions of the Confederate South from the pageantry of Southern college football. Not all of the racial images produced that day, however, were progressive ones. The appearance and major role played by

President Richard Nixon in the day's festivities pointed to the growing conservative backlash against the changes of the late-1960s. A football fan always willing to capitalize on the game's popularity, Nixon's appearance at the "The Big Shootout" fit nicely into his plan of converting conservative Southern Democrats to the Republican Party. This "Southern strategy" hoped to win white Democrats who were disillusioned by civil rights advances and convinced that racial change had proceeded too far over to the Republican cause. By associating himself with one of the South's most popular pastimes and awarding a national championship trophy to the region's top team on national television, Nixon built trust among Southerners who viewed him as an outsider and with suspicion. Nixon's trip to Fayetteville might have played a relatively small part, but the larger strategy paid-off. In the next election cycle, the states of the once thoroughly Democratic "Solid South" all went for Nixon and the votes of white Southerners helped propel the incumbent president to the largest popular vote majority in U.S. presidential history.

After many years of slow change and small steps forward, wholesale racial change finally came to college football in the Southwest during the 1970s. Barry Switzer's 1973 decision to remove all restrictions on the recruiting of black athletes at Oklahoma symbolized a critical turning point in the racial history of the game. By the end of the decade, each of the region's major programs similarly reached this decision. Switzer and his staff's success in recruiting some of the most talented black athletes in the region propelled the Sooners to consecutive national championships in 1974 and 1975, making them a national power throughout his tenure. Switzer's background and his connections in the black community gave him an advantage over his rivals in the

competition for black athletic talent. His personality and his relaxed disciplinary style also created an atmosphere where these black recruits flourished and his program thrived. While some coaches focused on maintaining discipline in an increasingly individualistic age, Switzer allowed his players the freedom of self-expression. Silver shoes, red bandanas, and long Afro-hairstyles distinguished his Sooners as much as their speed and consummate athletic talent. Motivated by the opportunity to win football glory, Switzer and his assistants had little trouble adopting new models of manhood that included African-American styles of masculine expression and the expanding individualism of the period. At the forefront of racial change, Switzer's coaching style and teams, nonetheless, embraced one very old college football tradition: a willingness to bend, and at times break, the rules to achieve a competitive advantage.

While Switzer succeeded in the new racially diverse era, rivals like Royal and Broyles had more difficulty adapting. Representing institutions central to their state's identity—schools that had long stood as proud symbols of segregationist tradition—these coaches recognized that they worked for powerful politicians and countless everyday citizens who preferred that their teams remain white. Despite coaching integrated teams in the 1950s, both men embraced the segregationist policies of their new schools in the late-1950s and then defended racial exclusion during the 1960s. With impressive winning records, they initially faced little competitive pressure to change. The successes of the Civil Rights Movement and the national unwillingness to further tolerate Southern segregation pushed both coaches to change their position by the late-1960s. Their foot dragging and obstruction during the early phases of desegregation, however, made both coaches symbols of white resistance to racial

change and hurt their recruiting efforts in the black community, even after they finally took the first tentative steps toward integration. Forced to court black players, to coach a new generation of individualistic athletes, and to address issues of gender equity in college athletics, the early to mid-1970s proved a difficult time for both coaches. While their teams remained better than most, they slipped from the top levels of national competition. Following the 1976 season, when both finished with identical 5-5-1 records, Royal and Broyles retired from coaching.

Ultimately, the racial desegregation of major college football during the three decades following World War II stood as a small but significant piece of the larger desegregation of American society occurring during the same period. As one part of that bigger story, the path to athletic integration in the Southwest highlights some important facets of a monumental change. For one hundred years after the end of slavery, African Americans fought for an equal place in the nation that they helped build. Advances proved hard to come by but, beginning in the 1940s, tangible progress began to be made. Jackie Robinson's integration of major league baseball in 1947 demonstrated sport's ability to play a vanguard role in promoting racial change, but that was not always the case. As a beloved cultural institution with deep ties to Southern identity, college football resisted desegregation longer than most other areas of regional life. In Oklahoma, and especially in Arkansas and Texas, residents proved willing to work, attend school, and eat with their black fellow citizens before they sanctioned African-American participation on their state's premier college football teams. When the first halting steps toward desegregation did take place, they often did so because of the economic benefits and cultural glory the white majority stood to win more than any

desire on that group's part to establish racial justice. From SMU's acceptance of a racially-mixed opponent in the 1948 Cotton Bowl game to the wholesale integration of Southwest Conference rosters in the mid-1970s, black athletes won approval because of the money and success they could bring to their respective universities and their football-loving fans.

In the end, it was the universities, and those who controlled them, that determined the pace of racial change. At schools such as Oklahoma and SMU, progressive attitudes toward racial inclusion among students, faculty, and administrators won out over a prevailing public sentiment to maintain the racial divide. Coaches such as Fry and Wilkinson played critical roles in initiating the process and seeing it through to a successful conclusion. Without the support of administrators such as William Tate and George Lynn Cross and significant portions of their university communities, however, they would not have succeeded. Conversely, the same logic holds true on the other side of the desegregation debate. Royal and Broyles receive much of the blame for the slow pace of desegregation at their universities. To be sure, both men did at times serve as spokesmen for the old order, but resistance ran much deeper than any one individual. The opposition to racial inclusion at Texas and Arkansas ran deep in the general populace and extended to the highest levels of the two universities. Both coaches plainly understood the largely unspoken dictate of their Board of Regents to not recruit African Americans. Their universities' connections to the highest levels of state government backed that mandate with state authority. Ultimately, responsibility for the delayed desegregation of college football in the two states grew out of their long racial histories and extended to large segments of the population.



Once afforded the opportunity, African-American athletes transformed the game on the field. From early path breakers like Prentice Gautt and Jerry LeVias to Earl Campbell, Joe Washington, and the other black stars of the mid-1970s, the influx of African-American athletic talent significantly raised the level of competition throughout college football. This was especially true in the Southwest. The desire to win football games proved so strong that white fans turned away from generations of discrimination and began to embrace black athletes. The tremendous success of these athletes propelled racial change forward and soon the fields of college football became one of the region's most integrated spaces.

These dramatic advances, however, were tempered by very limited progress in other areas. Blacks integrated the playing fields, but few other aspects of university athletic operations. In the 1970s, programs in the region began adding one or two black assistants to their coaching staffs to help with recruiting and managing the African-American athletes on their teams. With talent more difficult to measure on the sidelines, coaching integration usually stopped there and it would take another two decades before black coaches made significant inroads into the higher levels of their profession. Also, while African-American players found tremendous success on the field, many struggled to meet eligibility requirements in the classroom. Graduation rates for black athletes lagged behind those of their white peers and the switch by NCAA schools to a one-year renewable athletic scholarship in 1973 left all scholarship athletes in a more precarious position. Beyond football, deeply embedded structural inequalities endured, stacking the odds against young African Americans and making the path to success in any field more difficult. As many critics pointed out, sport

possessed the power to promote social change, but the changes it produced were often painfully shallow.

With these limitations in mind, the story is still a significant one. The emergence and triumph of the black athlete played a powerful role in pushing desegregation forward, even as it reflected the monumental changes already taking place. The victories of the Civil Rights Movement and the federal government's determined enforcement of equal access enabled black athletes to play college football in the region. Their success on the field of play allowed them to make inroads among white fans and, for the first time, many whites in the region began to identify with African-American athletic heroes in large numbers. This development was not limited to the sport of college football; indeed it was a national phenomenon. In the Southwest, however, the integration of African Americans into a beloved pastime encouraged a measure of tolerance for blacks in society as a whole. It also allowed these young black athletes to make their contribution to the American cultural mosaic—their style of play and modes of masculine expression indelibly changed the game and the culture surrounding it. The successful desegregation of major college football in the Southwest occurred because of the sacrifices and courage of many individuals across nearly three-quarters of a century. Ultimately, the young black college football players who accomplished desegregating the line of scrimmage won a hard-fought and contested glory.

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