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BLACK POWER IN GREEN AND WHITE: INTEGRATION AND BLACK PROTEST IN MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL, 1947-1972

by

John Matthew Smith

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
Department of History

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
April 2006
While southern college football teams remained all white until the late 1960s and early 1970s, Michigan State University head football coach Duffy Daugherty formed championship teams in 1965 and 1966 by recruiting the best southern black players. While coaches in the North recruited black athletes and played them regularly by the mid-1950s, no other coach took the risks Daugherty did to integrate his teams. Duffy Daugherty’s path-breaking teams broke all the rules of integrated competition and forced southern schools to reconsider their stance on segregated college football.

The groundbreaking integration of black athletes in the mid-1950s and 1960s under Duffy Daugherty set the stage for the black athletes’ civil rights activism in the Black Power era. At the height of the Black Power Movement, black athletes at MSU became outspoken civil rights activists, demanding more than just an opportunity to play football. Over a period of 25 years Michigan State advanced the status of African Americans in college football whereby State’s black athletes transformed their newfound position of privilege into a position of power.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the support of scholars, colleagues, and family. I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to my supervising professor, Mitch Kachun, whose constant encouragement and direction helped me reach all of my academic goals at WMU. I would also like to thank my committee members Lewis Carlson and Ronald Kramer for their valuable insights and contributions. In addition, WMU faculty members Nora Faires, Judith Stone, and Marion Gray were some of my strongest supporters. Discussions with Keith Widder on Michigan State's history helped me uncover sources and ideas I would never have found on my own. Special thanks to Paulette Martis of the MSU Sports Information Office, who took the time to pull every file I requested and answer every question I had. Many of the sources used in this study were obtained with the assistance of the WMU Interloan Library staff and the MSU Archives and Historical Collections staff. Finally, I would like to thank my family, especially my parents, Jay Smith and Kim St. Onge, for their unwavering support. I dedicate this work in the memory of Ricky Byrdsong. I would not be the person I am today without his example.

John Matthew Smith
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Looking back on his career as Michigan State’s first black starting quarterback on one of the Spartans’ greatest teams in 1966, Jimmy Raye made it clear that the football program owed much of its success to black athletes. “Let’s face it,” Raye claimed, “MSU couldn’t put a team on the field and win without any black guys on it. No college in the country could. You got to have the good black athletes to win.”¹ No other coach in the country understood this better than MSU head coach Duffy Daugherty (1954-1972), who canvassed the entire country to bring talented black players to East Lansing. While the football teams of southern schools remained all white until the late 1960s and early 1970s, Daugherty formed championship teams in 1965 and 1966 by recruiting the best black players the South had to offer. In fact, by the mid-1960s Duffy Daugherty had “built a reputation as the master recruiter and ‘handler’ of Negroes, where big-time football and Negroes” became “almost synonymous.”²

Daugherty’s most successful teams during these years relied on so many black players that the team was often compared to the squads of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) like Grambling and Florida A & M. In the context of such comparisons, Daugherty’s teams were unlike any others in the history of college football. Daugherty’s 1965 and 1966 teams defied racial myths of the era that claimed teams could not win by playing more blacks than whites, and that black players did not have the intelligence to handle leadership positions. In 1966,

Michigan State's defense started eight black players and three whites; the offensive backfield started two black halfbacks and a black quarterback, and the team was captained by two African Americans. Daugherty's "experiment" worked. By recruiting black athletes at a higher rate than any other coach in the country, Daugherty's 1965 and 1966 teams finished a combined 19-1-1, including a share of the 1965 National Championship. Four of his African American players were drafted in the first eight selections of the 1967 NFL Draft.

Duffy Daugherty's teams benefited from southern segregation. While coaches in the North recruited black athletes and played them regularly by the mid-1950s, no other coach took the risks Daugherty did to integrate his teams. Michigan State's fully integrated teams of the 1960s paralleled the growth of television, where young African American athletes and high school coaches could see blacks and whites running onto the football field together. Throughout the country, and especially in the South, African Americans identified with Daugherty's teams; as a result black high school coaches and parents entrusted Daugherty with the future of their players and sons by sending them to East Lansing. Duffy Daugherty's path-breaking teams broke all the rules of integrated competition and forced southern schools to reconsider their stance on segregated college football.

In order fully to comprehend the process by which Michigan State became a leader in integrated college athletics and to understand the consequences of Daugherty's successful recruiting of African American athletes, I researched the history of Michigan State football from the time its first black player suited up in 1913 through the end of Daugherty's career in 1972. The thesis is organized into four
chapters to reflect the major changes in the experiences of African American athletes at Michigan State. Chapter one introduces the early years of integration from 1913 to 1953. Throughout most of this period the pace of integration and the treatment of MSU’s black athletes mirrored other large predominantly white northern schools. Then in 1947 the University finally took a stand against segregated competition, insisting that if segregated southern opponents wanted to play against Michigan State, they would be playing against both whites and blacks.

The second chapter examines the process by which MSU expanded its recruitment of African American athletes under Duffy Daugherty. This chapter considers the meaning of integration and the local and national consequences of fielding fully integrated teams with star black athletes in the 1960s. Daugherty’s teams challenged racial norms, and his 1965 and 1966 squads became examples of successful integration. However, as chapter three shows, integration at MSU did not mean the Spartan football program was free of racism. At the height of the Black Power Movement, black athletes became outspoken civil rights activists, demanding more than just an opportunity to play football. While black athletes protested racial discrimination on college campuses all over the country from 1967 to 1972, the boycott at Michigan State stood out because Duffy Daugherty had built an image of equality in MSU’s athletic program. When 38 of MSU’s black athletes, including 24 of Daugherty’s football players, boycotted athletics for one day in April 1968, they succeeded as civil rights activists by raising the public’s awareness of discrimination against blacks throughout college athletics.
Yet, as I discuss in chapter four, the progress for black athletes at State was slow even after the 1968 boycott. Not until MSU Professor Robert L. Green, his colleagues, and an organized group of black athletes, the Coalition of Black Athletes (CBA), joined forces in 1972 did the status of African American athletes and non-athletes improve in Michigan State’s athletic department and in the Big Ten as a whole. The CBA argued that MSU, as a national leader in playing black athletes, had an obligation to demonstrate leadership throughout the conference in providing opportunities for African Americans on all levels of the Athletic Department. In a real sense, the ground breaking integration of black athletes in the mid-1950s and 1960s under Duffy Daugherty set the stage for the black athletes’ civil rights activism in the Black Power era.

The most important primary sources for this study include: newspaper accounts from the mainstream and African American press, the school newspaper, school yearbooks, photographs, books, popular magazines, autobiographies, oral histories, journal articles, MSU Sports Information Department records, coaches’ correspondence, and the personal papers of MSU Presidents located in the MSU archives. African American newspapers such as the *Michigan Chronicle*, *Pittsburgh Courier*, *Chicago Defender*, and the *Baltimore Afro-American* proved invaluable. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the central role of the black newspapers’ sports sections was to illuminate the athletic achievements of African American athletes. However, the black press also served as an agent in the fight for integration by campaigning for equality and uncovering racism in sports, as the *Michigan Chronicle* did in 1947 when its sports editors challenged Michigan State to
reject segregated competition when southern schools insisted African Americans be barred from games played in the South and the North.

While this study could not have been produced without African American newspapers, I also utilized secondary sources that asked important historical and sociological questions about Civil Rights, including scholarly monographs, journal articles, general histories, essay collections, institutional histories, and biographies. I have drawn from non-academic sources as well; especially popular sports histories, institutional histories, magazines, and newspapers. Clearly, this thesis incorporates numerous approaches and perspectives including popular culture, institutional history, local history, regional history, biography, and sport history.

The historiography of African Americans in sport emerged in the 1980s when professional historians began to explore the meaning of sports to better understand the larger history of African Americans. Previously, the history of African American athletes was written by non-historians, mostly journalists, educators, and activists.  

Throughout the 1980s the historiography focused primarily on boxing and baseball, the two professional sports where African Americans made the greatest impact in the first half of the twentieth century.  

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African Americans in sport has advanced in quantity and quality. Increasingly historians have examined sport to explain the complex process of desegregation and black protest movements. An important scholar of African American sport history, Donald Spivey, was one the first scholars to explore the experiences of black athletes at predominantly white colleges and universities. In an essay co-authored with Thomas A. Jones, Spivey examined the integration of African Americans in major sports at the University of Illinois, where he found that from 1931 to 1967, black athletes earned more scholarships in football than in any other sport. Spivey's work was important not only for its quantitative analysis, but also for its consideration of the social conditions under which black athletes performed. He documented the difficulties of

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being a black student on a white campus by investigating the extreme social isolation
the athletes experienced off the field, academic difficulties, coaches’ warnings against
inter racial dating, and discrimination in housing.  

"The failure of the scholarly community to look seriously at the history of
blacks in big-time intercollegiate sports," Spivey argued in 1983, "is a missed
opportunity to understand an important dimension of African American intellectual
history, the nature and development of the modern civil rights struggle, and the black
protest movement." In "The Black Athlete in Big-Time Intercollegiate Sports, 1941-
1968," Spivey attempted to fill in this gap in African American history by exploring
their protests in college athletics. This nine-page essay provides an overview of
important events, reflecting the need for scholars to spend more time researching
important changes in the black athletic experience from World War II through the late
1960s. In 1988, Spivey answered his own call by looking back to 1940 when New
York University student protests demanded African American halfback Leonard
Bates be allowed to play against the University of Missouri, which successfully
barred him from their game in 1940. His essay successfully connects the fight for
equality in athletics to the larger struggle for civil rights.

Spivey’s work was part of a shift in the historiography on black athletes that
increasingly examined the African American experience in intercollegiate athletics.
Beginning in the late 1980s through the late 1990s, scholars generally have focused

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7 Donald Spivey and Thomas A. Jones, "Intercollegiate Athletic Servitude: A Case Study of the Black
8 Donald Spivey, "The Black Athlete in Big-Time Intercollegiate Sports, 1941-1968," Phylon 44 (June
9 Donald Spivey, "End Jim Crow in Sports: The Protest at New York University, 1940-1941," Journal
more on the dismantling of the color barriers in the South than in the North. Over the last thirteen years, more than any other historian, Charles H. Martin has advanced the scholarship on African Americans in college sports, but consistent with most historians, he has focused primarily on the South. His essay, "The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow in Southern College Sports," is centered on the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) in three different time periods: first, the Jim Crow era of the 1890s through the mid-1930s, then, the late 1930s to the early 1960s when southern schools began to accept games against integrated schools, and finally, the period from 1963 to 1974, when ACC schools finally integrated their own teams. Martin's scholarship is significant because it is not limited to one school, or one sport, or a short time period. By examining the conference as a whole, Martin is able to identify the changes over time in the context of major sports, mainly basketball and football.

Martin's most recent essay, "The Color Line in Midwestern College Sports, 1890-1960," explores how predominantly white schools in the Midwest/North practiced, acquiesced, or resisted segregated competition in college athletics over a period of 70 years. He explains that although the color line in this region has largely

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been ignored by scholars, “It lasted in some form for nearly six decades and reflected the second-class status to which most African Americans in the area were relegated.” Martin identifies patterns of inclusion and exclusion of black athletes in college football and draws attention to instances where southern schools imposed Jim Crow on northern schools, forcing black players to remain barred from competition, especially during the 1930s and 1940s. Based on this study, Michigan State was not unlike most integrated schools in the region that limited black players to competing in games against non-southern opponents. Martin’s work provides the context in which my study was produced. However, Martin does not address how integration in the North affected southern college sports. It is important to understand that changes in race relations in the North made an impact on the South and vice versa. That this symbiotic relationship did not exclude college athletics is one of the points I attempt to make in this study.

While Martin is the only recent historian to examine the integration of college athletics in the North, John Behee was the first and only historian to produce a monograph on black athletes at a single institution. In *Hail to the Victors! Black Athletes at the University of Michigan* (1973) Behee provides an excellent model of inquiry that informed my thesis by allowing me to compare the two major Big Ten football programs in the state of Michigan. “In nearly every sport at Michigan,” Behee contended, “blacks were either banned, restricted in number by an unwritten quota, or expected to possess talent well above that required of white athletes.” Before World War II only 12 black athletes lettered at Michigan, but after the war

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through 1972, 159 lettered at Michigan. The integration of Michigan State football followed the same post-World War II pattern of providing more opportunities for black athletes. However, that is where the similarities end, since the number of black football players at MSU from 1954 to 1972 was twice the number that played at Michigan.

The experiences of black athletes at Michigan and Michigan State also differed in their participation of athletic protests. While MSU’s black athletes were at the center of the “Revolt of the Black Athlete” in 1968 and 1972, Michigan’s black athletes did not take a public stance against discrimination in athletics. David K. Wiggins, a leading historian of African American sport history, demonstrates in his essay, “The Year of Awakening: Black Athletes, Racial Unrest, and the Civil Rights Movement,” that the boycott by State’s black athletes took place within the context of a larger movement of amateur and professional black athletes who protested racism in 1968 in unprecedented numbers. Wiggins’ essay “The Future of College Athletics is at Stake: Black Athletes and Racial Turmoil on Three Predominantly White University Campuses, 1968-1972” looks at the racial disturbances that took place at three universities similar to Michigan State in size and stature. While Wiggins and I employ similar methodologies, our interpretations differ. He contends that protesting

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15 John Behee contends that from 1950 to 1972 69 blacks lettered in football at Michigan. I have determined that five of those players played before 1954 by looking at Michigan’s team photos and rosters from 1950 to 1953. Behee, *Hail to the Victors!,* 31.

16 Ibid., 112.

black athletes “were, to be sure, athletes first and civil rights activists second.”

However, as my research shows, in 1968 Michigan State’s African American athletes placed activism ahead of athletics by risking their scholarships for the greater good of the African American community inside and outside the athletic department, to benefit black athletes and non-athletes, during and after their athletic careers.

In the aftermath of the 1968 boycott, Beth J. Shapiro, a graduate student in sociology at Michigan State, conducted important research on State’s African American athletes in her master’s thesis, “The Black Athlete at Michigan State University.” This work draws upon excellent primary sources. In the text Shapiro reveals responses from some of the 23 black athletes who anonymously answered questionnaires that dealt with academic advising, degree attainment, discrimination by the coaching staffs and by white athletes. The athletes from which she collected data on degree attainment were black and white letter-winners in basketball, football, track, and wrestling who were freshmen between the Fall 1960 and Fall 1964. Shapiro’s study focused on five questions:

1. Do black athletes come to Michigan State University to receive an education or to participate in sports?
2. Are black athletes counseled differently from white athletes?
3. Do the black athletes acquire degrees at the completion of four years at MSU?
4. Do the black athletes perceive that they are being discriminated against by the coaching staffs?
5. Do the black athletes feel discriminated against by their white teammates?

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18 Wiggins, ““The Year of Awakening,”” 120.
20 Ibid., 7.
This study allowed me to compare the perceptions and experiences of black and white athletes at Michigan State during the 1960s.

Shapiro continued to study Michigan State athletics in her doctoral dissertation “Intercollegiate Athletics and Big-Time Sport at Michigan State University; Or the Difference Between Good and Great is a Little Extra Effort” (1982). This work examines the growth of MSU’s athletic program under President John A. Hannah (1941-1969). Shapiro relies on her previous master’s research to examine the changes in State’s athletic program. Her interviews with black athletes revealed instances of racism in the athletic department by football coaches and white athletes. The black athletes interviewed explained the difficulties of social isolation and their reasons for going to MSU in the first place.21 The statements made by State’s black athletes in MSU’s program, when compared to other “big-time” college sports programs, reveal that black athletes’ experiences were similar to those at other major universities nationally.22

The historiography of African Americans in college athletics shows that while Michigan State’s black athletes shared many of the same experiences as other black athletes at northern schools, the history of integration at MSU is unique. The history of African American participation at Michigan State can be divided into four periods: (1) Limited Integration, 1913-1947, (2) Complete Inclusion, 1947-1953 (3) Full

21 Beth J. Shapiro, “Intercollegiate Athletics and Big-Time Sport at Michigan State University; Or the Difference Between Good and Great Is a Little Extra Effort.” PhD diss., Michigan State University, 1982.
Integration, 1954-1967, and (4) Politicization, 1968-1972.\textsuperscript{23} The first period represents an era in which Michigan State fielded integrated teams mostly with one or two black players per season, allowing them only to play against northern opponents. Complete inclusion began in 1947 when Michigan State became a pioneer in the fight against segregated college athletics after the athletic department and the administration, under President John Hannah, determined that MSU would only play against schools that would allow the on-field participation of State’s black athletes.\textsuperscript{24}

Full integration began with the arrival of Duffy Daugherty as head coach in 1954. There was no question that by 1966, with a predominantly black defense, a black quarterback, and two black co-captains, Michigan State was the national leader in affording opportunities to African American athletes. Moreover, Duffy Daugherty’s willingness to recruit black athletes from the segregated South was a contributing factor to the desegregation of southern college football. As segregated southern schools slowly dropped their bans on black players, black athletes throughout the North became civil rights activists. The era of politicization began when State’s black athletes confronted racism within the athletic department in 1968, and with the support of three African American faculty members pressured the Big Ten Conference to integrate athletic positions beyond the field of play in 1972. Over a period of 25 years Michigan State advanced the status of African Americans in


\textsuperscript{24} Not until the mid-1950s did schools in the Midwest take such a stand against segregated athletics. In 1956 Indiana, Purdue, Notre Dame, and Butler finally followed MSU’s precedent. “Segregated Stand Applauded,” \textit{New York Times}, March 24, 1956.
college football whereby State’s black athletes transformed their newfound position of privilege into a position of power.
CHAPTER II

BREAKING THE PLANE: ‘SEGREGATED INTEGRATION’ AND THE RISE OF BIG-TIME FOOTBALL, 1913-1953

“Any time a southern team plays one from the North, it fights the Civil War all over again and starts protecting home and earth against the dam yankees.”

-Daily Tar Heel, 1938

On a crisp October afternoon in 1913, Michigan Agricultural College took the field against Olivet College in East Lansing. This football game was more than just the first of the season - - it marked the first time in MAC’s history that an African American stepped on the football field for the Aggies. While Gideon Smith battled in the trenches, he was fighting for more than extra yards - - with every key block and tackle, Smith proved that African Americans could compete with whites on an equal playing field. As the only black player on the field, like all African American football pioneers at predominantly white schools during the height of the Jim Crow era, Smith was a target of racial abuse on the field and experienced isolation off the field. Over the next thirty-plus years, black players at Michigan State wore the same pads, cleats, and jerseys as their white teammates, but were not treated as equals as they were barred from playing southern teams. Michigan State’s unequal treatment of its black players mirrored the practices of most integrated football teams in the North until 1947 when the University finally took a stand against segregated competition, insisting that if segregated southern opponents wanted to play against Michigan State, they would be playing against both whites and blacks.

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Racially integrated collegiate football began in the late nineteenth century at Northeastern and Midwestern colleges and universities. In 1889 William H. Lewis and William T.S. Jackson both joined the Amherst squad, becoming the first known African Americans to play football at a predominantly white college. In 1890 George H. Jewett joined the University of Michigan and William Arthur Johnson, played halfback for Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Throughout the 1890s African Americans became college football pioneers by integrating previously all-white elevens, including George A. Flippin at Nebraska, Preston Eagleson at Indiana, Iowa’s Frank “Kinney” Holbrook, and Howard Lee at Harvard.

With the exception of Lewis and Jackson, these pioneers were the only African Americans on their respective teams, all but guaranteeing they would be targeted for opponent abuse. The presence of African Americans on white teams threatened the social hierarchy of white supremacy and further challenged white notions of manhood. “Kill the coon! Kill the coon!” Purdue fanatics shouted in 1892 as Jewett found himself a casualty of deliberate violence at the bottom of piles. In an effort to uphold Jim Crow ideology, the University of Missouri refused to play against George Flippin and Frank Holbrook. Missouri officials forfeited a match with

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2 Ocania Chalk, Black College Sport (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1976), 140-42.
4 For an outstanding monograph on race and masculinity during this period see Gail Bederman, Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995); Also see 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 (Spring 1991): 81-102.
Nebraska in 1892 after learning Flippin was black to avoid “the risk of being knocked down and trampled by a Negro.” Surprisingly, in 1895 Holbrook played with his Iowa teammates in Columbia, Missouri, without incident. The following year Missouri officials echoed their fans’ shouts of racial epithets by demanding that Holbrook be barred from the contest. Reluctantly, Missouri conceded Holbrook’s participation. After an especially physical first half and numerous penalties, Missouri players walked off the field early in the second half trailing the Hawkeyes twelve to zero. From the 1890s to the 1950s southern schools fervently resisted playing against integrated college football teams, maintaining the strict rules of Jim Crow.

From 1890 to 1915, African American football pioneers were among the few black students on northern campuses. Historian Robert A. Bellinger claims that between 1890 and 1909 a total of 2,739 black men and women graduated from college, less than one percent of the total black population. During this span, 397 of these graduates received their degrees from predominantly white institutions.

Throughout these years, “the proportion of black students on northern campuses rarely if ever reached more than two percent, and usually it never exceeded one half of one percent of a college’s total enrollment.” Throughout this period African Americans were expected not to go to college, let alone enroll in colleges “for whites.” For most blacks going to school with whites was an impossible dream.

7 Southern schools resisted integrated competition well into the 1950s. The first integrated Orange Bowl did not take place until January 1, 1955. That same year Georgia Governor Marvin Griffin urged the Georgia Tech board of regents to prohibit participation in the Sugar Bowl against an integrated Pittsburgh team. See Charles H. Martin, “Integrating New Year’s Day: The Racial Politics of College Bowl Games in the American South,” Journal of Sport History 24 (Fall 1997): 368-72.
By 1900 not a single African American had graduated from Michigan Agricultural College (now Michigan State University). Although evidence suggests that African Americans were on campus in the 1890s, their experiences have been erased from the historic record because of social segregation. While many students participated in clubs, literary societies, and fraternities, African Americans were barred from such social activities. Whereas most students were pictured alongside their classmates in the school yearbook, *The Wolverine*, only a handful of African Americans found their pictures and names on those same pages during the first quarter of the twentieth century. In fact, MAC’s first black graduate, William O. Thompson, is not pictured with his senior class and his name is not listed with any student organization for 1904.\(^\text{10}\) While MAC did accept a small number of African Americans on campus, they were not accepted as equals. Keith Widder, a historian of the school’s developing years, argues that this form of “segregated integration” was a contradiction that “both reflected and reinforced the prevailing public attitudes in Michigan and the United States, which allowed, even encouraged, racial integration in some spheres of public and private life, but not others.”\(^\text{11}\)

Those African Americans at the vanguard of integrating colleges and universities faced enormous pressure because they represented the future leaders of the black community. The academic and social success of African American pioneers on predominantly white campuses was significant because their relationship with whites shaped future opportunities for black youths. Against a backdrop of segregationist policies and social isolation, these African Americans often struggled

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 343.
not only to be themselves, but also to prove that they were the opposite of racial stereotypes perpetuated by racism.

MAC’s first African American varsity athlete, Gideon Smith, arrived in East Lansing in 1912. Born in Northwest County, Virginia, in 1889, Smith graduated from Virginia’s industrial-training college, Hampton Institute, in 1910. For the next year Smith studied at Ferris Institute in Big Rapids, Michigan, for preparatory work before attending MAC. Playing on the Ferris eleven Smith learned the difficulties of being the only black player on a white team. After playing for the freshmen team for a season, Coach John F. Macklin hesitated to put Smith on the varsity squad. Born in Worcester, Massachusetts, Macklin spent his college years at Penn playing basketball, baseball, track, and as a star tackle and halfback for the varsity football team in 1906 and 1907. In 1911 “Big John” arrived at MAC the same day “a noted ‘white hope’” was scheduled for an exhibition match to prepare for a fight against boxing’s first black heavyweight champion, Jack Johnson. Macklin, defined by his gigantic proportions, was easily mistaken as the contender. Following Macklin down the street, one hopeful enthusiast exclaimed, “Gee, if that big guy ever hits Jack Johnson, good night Jack.”

While whites waited to find a white “King of Men” to bring the heavyweight title back to the white side of the color line, integrated athletics were discouraged. When Macklin reluctantly admitted Smith to the 1913 varsity team, Smith instantly became an important contributor, winning the respect of the head coach and his

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12 The Wolverine, 1914, 108.
teammates. Before 9,000 Michiganders, on October 18, 1913 MAC finally defeated Michigan for the first time in the school’s history. Starting at left tackle, Smith’s performance won the praise of the local writers. *Detroit Times'* Eddie Batchelor credited Smith and Hugh Blacklock as the difference in the 12-7 victory. Batchelor, like most whites of his time, was quick to point out the animal-like traits of the black player, whose arms "seemed to be ten feet long" and who defeated his opponents with "the agility of a cat."15 Many whites credited the success of black athletes to inherent physiological characteristics, while white athletic achievements were often ascribed to intelligence. Elmer D. Mitchell, the director of intramural athletics at the University of Michigan, conducted a study on “Racial Traits in Athletics,” affirming that blacks athletes were “physically large and inclined to be heavier in the upper than the lower part of the body. Usually long arms, narrow hips, high placed calves, and flat feet are distinctive racial peculiarities.” Furthermore, Mitchell added, “temperamentally, he is inclined to be lazy.”16

Describing Gideon Smith’s football skills solely in physical terms sent a message to white readers that his talents were purely racially innate. The 1914 *Wolverine* described Smith as “that tall colored gentleman, [who] was sauh some tackle.”17 Headlines often praised the spectacular contributions of the “Negro

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Lineman” and described Smith as, “the giant negro tackle of M.A.C.” Smith, “the negro, as a fellow player with white men” had to be “quiet and unassertive,” and “mingle easily with white participants, accepting an inferior status and being content with it.” As a result of strict stereotypes, African Americans were required to accommodate their white coaches and teammates. Physical Educator Edwin B. Henderson wrote in the NAACP’s journal the Crisis, “Nearly every Negro athlete of prominence in college has been a gentleman . . . and has gained respect by playing the game and ignoring the taunts of prejudiced opponents.”

While the MAC community was not immune to attributing racial stereotypes to Smith, he did win the respect of the college. At the end of Smith’s varsity career the Wolverine determined “he must be given his due.” In 1915, Gideon’s playing of his position was one of the notable things of the year in central western football. He was a mountain of strength in the line, but his greatest value to the team lay in his almost uncanny faculty for doping out the other fellow’s intentions. If close tab had been kept in the matter, it would undoubtedly have been demonstrated that Gideon broke up more enemy plays before they were started than did any other man on the team. Coach Macklin paid him the tribute of classing him with the best tackles he has ever seen, while critics generally accorded him favorable mention.

Over the course of Smith’s career MAC’s teams won seventeen games and lost only three. With Smith’s determination, MAC went undefeated in 1913 and he was named

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19 I have substituted “mingle” for “mingles.” See Mitchell, “Racial,” Ibid.
to the All-Western team. In 1915 Smith was the only Aggie presented with a watch from a group of Lansing citizens.22

Smith’s playing career at MAC did not go without incidents of discrimination. One teammate recalled that when the Aggie football team went on the road Smith could not stay at the same hotel with everyone else. Upon arrival Macklin would hand him room and food money and the next time the coaches and players saw Smith was at practice and at game time.23 Smith, like most African Americans on predominantly white campuses, experienced social isolation. In The Autobiography of An Ex-Colored Man, James Weldon Johnson described the experience of a black graduation speaker in front of a white audience. In many ways, Johnson captures what it must have felt like for Smith to perform with and against white players, in front of a white crowd:

What were his thoughts when he stepped forward and looked into that crowd of faces, all white with the exception of the score or so that were lost to view? I do not know, but I fancy he felt his loneliness. I think that solitary black figure standing there felt that for the particular time and place he bore the weight and responsibility of his race; that for him to fail meant general defeat; but he won and nobly.24

Smith endured his loneliness and learned to surrender his pride in the process of breaking down barriers. In Smith’s case it was his own school that segregated him from his teammates, not southern opponents, since MAC did not begin to play those schools until the 1920s. By not seeking common lodging for Smith and his

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22 E.C. Patterson, “Three Maroons Awarded Berths on All Western,” Chicago Tribune, December 7, 1913; Author unlisted [teammate of Smith? c. 1913-1915], Gideon Smith file, MSU SIR.
23 Author unlisted [teammate of Smith? c. 1913-1915], Gideon Smith file, MSU SIR.
teammates MAC set a precedent that it would not defend its black players from racism.

For African Americans, 1915 was a year of devastation and hope. In Gideon Smith’s last year at MAC Jack Johnson, a symbol of black pride and achievement, lost the heavyweight title to Jess Willard. Not until Joe Louis in 1937 did another African American fight against a white heavyweight champion. The Supreme Court outlawed the Grandfather Clause which had prevented black men whose grandfathers had not possessed the right to vote from doing the same. The death of Booker T. Washington, the most powerful African American leader of the previous twenty years, ushered in a new era of black leadership headed by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The NAACP lost its first major battle to prevent movie theaters from showing D.W. Griffith’s white supremacist film *The Birth of a Nation*, which dramatized black men as animalized rapists lusting for white women and glorified the Ku Klux Klan as their protectors.²⁵

World War I precipitated the Great Migration of African Americans out of the South to the urban North in a quest for improved working conditions. African Americans temporarily received better paying jobs, some as high as two to three times what they could earn in the South.²⁶ But to many whites, the influx of blacks in cities like Chicago, Detroit, New York, and Philadelphia was alarming. For African Americans, “The War for Democracy” began at home and their support for the NAACP grew over the course of the war. In 1914 there were 50 NAACP branches;

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²⁶ Ibid., 90.
by 1918 that number grew to 117, with Lansing adding its own branch a year later.\footnote{Ibid., 91; Bettye Thomas Gilkey, “Lansing Michigan Branch History,” Lansing Branch NAACP, \url{http://www.naacplansing.org/LansingNAACPHistory.htm} (accessed January 30, 2006).}

While the NAACP urged full participation of African Americans in Europe, southern whites staunchly resisted the idea. The military remained rigidly segregated, relegating most blacks to cooks, road construction workers, and stevedores. Out of more than 380,000 black troops only 42,000 saw combat.\footnote{Darlene Clark Hine, et al., \textit{The African American Odyssey, Volume II: Since 1865}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., 2006), 412.}

World War I did not create more opportunities for African Americans at white colleges and universities or in athletics. Gideon Smith became the third known African American to play professional football when he joined the Canton Bulldogs on November 29, 1915, but his pro football career was short lived, lasting but one game before he served in the military from 1917 to 1919.\footnote{Charles K. Ross, \textit{Outside the Lines: African Americans and the Integration of the National Football League} (New York and London: New York University Press, 1999), 18; Gideon Smith file, MSU SIR.}

MAC’s football team returned to being all-white until Harry C. Graves, a fullback from Pratt, Kansas, made varsity in 1918. In MAC’s first ever victory over Notre Dame in 1918 and head coach Knute Rockne’s only loss from 1918 to 1920, Graves accounted for both touchdowns, one on a pass to Edmund Young and the second on the ground.\footnote{“Michigan Aggies Earn Win From Notre Dame, 13-7,” \textit{Chicago Tribune}, November 17, 1918.} \textit{The Wolverine} attributed Graves’ outstanding play against Notre Dame to his “weight, speed, and natural ability.”\footnote{The \textit{Wolverine}, 1919, 182.} As was true of Gideon Smith, success on the gridiron did not change whites’ beliefs that African American athletes’ talents were purely physical and innate.

The following season Graves did not play football, but did participate in class track and was also pictured with the varsity track team, but did not receive a letter,
leaving questions as to whether or not he was the first black varsity track member.\footnote{The Wolverine, 1922, 81; The Wolverine, 1920, 189.} However, at some point during the 1919-1920 school-year Graves was suspended from school for unknown reasons. After only two seasons head coach George Gauthier stepped down, leaving George “Potsy” Clark to take over the reins. Assistant coach Lyman L. Frimodig, a former teammate of Gideon Smith, stayed on the staff and wrote to Clark about the returning talent. “Frim” informed Clark, “If you have no objections to a colored man you will find Graves a good man-quickest starter on the squad and is usually going at full force before the opposition is set. [He is] mighty strong on defence [sic] and a good worker for a colored man. [He’s] very fast as he runs the hurdles in good time.”\footnote{Lyman L. Frimodig to George “Potsy” Clark, 25 August 1920, Clarence L. Munn Papers, UA 17.75, Box 769, Folder, 38-39, Michigan State University Archives and Historical Collection (hereafter MSU Archives).} At a time when whites perceived African Americans to be lazy, Frimodig’s assessment of Graves communicated to Clark that this black player was surprisingly industrious and an asset to the team, thus Graves was considered a credit to his race. Consistent with the times, Frimodig measured Graves’ performance purely in physical terms. For whatever reasons, Graves did not return to the team until 1921 after Clark’s only season as head coach.

The 1920s witnessed tremendous growth in American football. In 1920 both the National Federation of State High School Athletic Associations and the organizations that became the National Football League were formed. By 1923, ninety-one percent of high schools had football teams. Historian Michael V. Oriard asserts it was the development of “college football into a spectator sport to rival major
league baseball that most importantly marks the years between the two world wars.\textsuperscript{34} Between 1921 and 1930, college football attendance doubled and gate receipts tripled.\textsuperscript{35} Oriard suggests that the stadium building boom of the 1920s was both a cause and effect of the tremendous interest in the sport. By 1930 there were seventy-four concrete stadiums, fifty-five of them built since 1920.\textsuperscript{36} The stadium-building phenomenon spread to East Lansing, where the Michigan State legislature granted the MAC a $160,000 loan to erect a 15,000-capacity stadium built in time for the 1923 season, signaling an emphasis of the importance of college football to MAC’s reputation.\textsuperscript{37}

For the last two seasons of Harry Graves’ playing career, MAC was coached by Albert M. Barron, who played football at Penn St. in 1910, 1913 and 1914. In Barron’s only two seasons as head coach, he failed to live up to the school’s expectations with a combined 6-10-2 record in 1921 and 1922 but did demonstrate a willingness to play black players. At the beginning of the 1922 season Graves was joined by Benjamin L. Goode, from Charleston, West Virginia, after attending West Virginia Collegiate Institute, an all-black college. Even though Goode did not become a full-time varsity member until 1924, he did play and start in one game at halfback against Massachusetts State on November 25, 1922, while Harry Graves was mysteriously absent.\textsuperscript{38} Playing for Ralph Young in 1923, Goode struggled to crack

\textsuperscript{36} Oriard, \textit{King Football}, 5-6.
\textsuperscript{37} Stabley, \textit{The Spartans}, 57.
\textsuperscript{38} Since Goode started at halfback, Graves’ normal position, it seems most likely that Graves was injured. “Sectional Game Won by Michigan Aggies”, \textit{The Washington Post}, November 26, 1922.
the lineup, playing a total of 38 out of 480 minutes, all of which came in the final two games against Creighton and Detroit.\textsuperscript{39} 

The following year Goode was a consistent starter for the Aggies but was not the only black varsity athlete at MAC. Clarence E. Banks, an Evansville, Indiana, native, became the first black varsity cross-country member.\textsuperscript{40} Despite Goode’s contributions to the team, he did not make the southern road trip to St. Louis.\textsuperscript{41} Without evidence of an injury, Goode’s absence against St. Louis was the first instance where Michigan State excluded its black players against a southern team. Although Goode did not make the trip South, he was featured in the black press with headlines that read “Goode Makes Good on Michigan Aggies” and “Michigan State Has Negro Star” in the \textit{Baltimore Afro-American} and the \textit{Pittsburgh Courier}.\textsuperscript{42} B.L. Goode became a symbol of black pride in the eyes of the African American press by proving black students who went to school and played sports at all-black colleges, could be equally successful at predominantly white schools.

Over a span of twelve years three racial pioneers proudly represented MAC.

The athletic achievements of Gideon Smith, Harry Graves and Benjamin Goode

\textsuperscript{39} “Football Rosters, 1923,” Ralph Young Papers, UA 17.114, Box 902, Folder 54, MSU Archives.
\textsuperscript{40} Widder, \textit{Michigan Agricultural}, 351-53; \textit{The Wolverine}, 1926, 42.
\textsuperscript{41} It should be noted that in 1922 Harry Graves and Benjamin Goode did not make the southern trip to St. Louis. However, that season, Graves also did not play the week before against Massachusetts State, but Goode did play in his place. Since Goode was not a fulltime member of the varsity and Graves was probably hurt, we cannot conclude that the two black players were left behind solely because of their race. \textquote{Aggies Leave for Tilt with St. Louis Thanksgiving Day,} \textit{The State Journal} (Lansing), November 29, 1922; \textquote{Aggies Battle St. Louis to 7-7 tie in Game of Thrills,} \textit{The State Journal} (Lansing), December 1, 1922; \textquote{Long Run For Score Gives Billiken Team Victory,} \textit{The State Journal} (Lansing), November 10, 1924.
\textsuperscript{42} While the headlines and bylines differ, these articles are nearly identical. Oddly, the author of the story is names “H.A. Scott” for the \textit{Afro-American} and “H.A. Lett” for the \textit{Courier}. The Courier also inserted a large picture of Goode next to the article. Both articles contended that MAC had four black students including Goode and Banks. H.A. Scott, “Goode Makes Good on Michigan Aggies,” \textit{Baltimore Afro-American}, October 24, 1924; H.A. Lett, “Michigan State Has Negro Star,” \textit{Pittsburgh Courier}, November 8, 1924.
demonstrated the value African Americans had as football players to predominantly white schools. Remarkably, all three of these pioneers utilized their education in the classroom and on the gridiron to give back to the African American community at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Benjamin Goode coached four major sports for two years at South Carolina State College before returning to West Virginia Collegiate Institute, teaching and coaching as an assistant for a total of nineteen years until his abrupt death in 1948.43 While there were no official black championship teams, the *Pittsburgh Courier* began to select its own unofficial national champions in 1920.44 Two years later coach Gideon Smith led Hampton Institute to its first national title. Harry Graves followed Smith’s lead, coaching Wilberforce University to its first championship in 1931. Significantly, from 1920 to 1932, all of the national championship coaches were trained in predominantly white schools by white coaches.45 The consistent winning of black colleges coached by former black players of predominantly white teams left many wondering if blacks had to “steal” the best coaching philosophies from whites. Despite outstanding leadership exemplified by Smith and Graves, they were limited to coaching at HBCUs as a result of persistent racial stereotypes of African Americans as mentally inferior to whites.

While blacks were limited to coaching positions at HBCUs, southern schools vehemently protested the inclusion of African American players on northern teams. In order to avoid conflict, northern universities acceded to Jim Crow racial divisions, giving in to “gentlemen’s agreements” where northern schools compromised

principles of democracy and equality by withholding their black players in athletic events. This informal ban on black players from interregional contests even applied to games played in the North. The power of Jim Crow laws granted southern coaches and administrators the unofficial authority to impose their state laws on northern institutions.

In 1927 the color bar was raised against Michigan State starting tackle Chester Smith when the Spartans traveled to Raleigh, North Carolina. Even though Smith was an important contributor to the team and received a varsity letter, his talents were less important than honoring the gentlemen's agreement with North Carolina State. Historian Charles H. Martin suggests these incidents of racial exclusion garnered little attention in the Midwest during the 1920s since there were few black players, and there were a limited number of interregional games. That same year Edwin B. Henderson observed that African Americans on white teams were "scarcer today than for many a year." Still he believed black athletes had the ability to "soften racial prejudices." An increasing number of black players on integrated teams coupled with the rising frequency of North-South games uncovered the mistreatment of African Americans in college football.

The Great Depression exacerbated the inferior social and economic status of African Americans. By 1934, while seventeen percent of whites remained

46 Martin, "Color Line," 95.


unemployed, thirty-eight percent of blacks were jobless; in Chicago the African American unemployment rate reached forty percent and in Detroit that figure rose to sixty percent. Even the low-paying menial jobs customarily held by blacks were given to whites. President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal program national welfare programs, while poorly administered at the local level helped many African Americans survive the Depression. Thanks to the efforts of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who called for “fair play and equal opportunity for Negro citizens,” African Americans also gained government positions.50

Throughout the Depression years, African American athletes were often marginalized against southern opponents. Blacks at Ohio State, Minnesota, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, as well as Michigan State became victims of the gentlemen’s agreement.51 In 1930 William Bell, the first black player to earn three varsity letters at Ohio State, was benched against the United States Naval Academy and again against Vanderbilt in 1931. The next year Navy allowed Bell to play at Columbus. After the game Navy’s Athletic Director found that “all of the Navy players were loud in their praise of Bell . . . and I, a South Carolinian, share their opinion that he is a marvelous player.”52 Bell’s accolades did little to erase racial exclusion on other integrated squads. That same season the University of Minnesota prevented Ellsworth H. Harpole from playing a home game against Oklahoma State. In 1932 Indiana withheld two black players in a home game against Mississippi State and

51 In 1925 Michigan Agricultural College changed its name to Michigan State College.
Iowa left behind two African Americans in a road game against George Washington University.53

In 1932 two African Americans, James McCrary and Alvin Jackson were candidates to make the varsity at Michigan State, however under the coaching tenure of Jim Crowley, not a single black player made the squad from 1929 to 1932.54 After three years of great success, the former Notre Dame “Four Horseman” and assistant coach at the University of Georgia moved on to coach at Fordham University.55 From 1933 to 1946 Charles W. Bachman filled the head coaching position and held it longer than any other head coach up to that point. Before coming to Michigan State, Bachman coached at Northwestern (1919), Kansas State (1920-27) and the segregated University of Florida (1928-32).56 At the beginning of the 1933 season three African Americans took the field for Bachman. James McCrary and Alvin Jackson won varsity letters while, William Baker earned the “service award.”57

Before the 1934 season began the members of Michigan State’s football team gathered on a bench to take a team photo. McCrary, Baker, and William Smith had returned for a promising season. The Wolverine predicted McCrary’s “excellent defense work together with his ability to smash the line will give Bachman a tower of strength in the fullback position about which the 193[4] aggregation will be

54 List of MSC Varsity Candidates, 1932, Ralph Young Papers, UA 17.114, Box 902, Folder 143, MSU Archives.
56 Ibid., 942.
57 The Wolverine, 1934, 88.
molded." After taking the first team picture, McCrary, Baker and Smith were told to step down so the photographer could take a shot without the three black players. While African Americans were denied access to most colleges, hotels, restaurants, playgrounds, and parks, having black men stand side by side with whites, as their physical equals, warranted the physical removal of these black players from a temporary position of equality back into "their place." Even if James McCrary was among the best, if not the best player on the team, he was immediately reminded that he was still "just another Negro" in a white world.

William H. Smith should have known this episode of disunity was a sign of continued inequality to come. Housing had always been a concern for African Americans at white schools. In his freshman year Smith roomed by himself in Wells Hall. The next year he and four other black students, including Jackson, Baker, and McCrary moved into a house in East Lansing. That season, Smith found Bachman and Kentuckian Tom King, an assistant coach, to be less than supportive toward the black members of the team. On road trips McCrary and Baker roomed together, leaving Smith without a roommate, and therefore sitting in East Lansing. Appalled at this injustice, Smith quit the team even though it meant he would not have the funds for school. Former head coach and current Athletic Director Ralph Young convinced Smith to stay on and compete on the track team. Rather than take a stand against racism, the MSC athletic department found a way to accommodate segregation.

58 The sentence should have read "1934 aggregation" not "1935" since the yearbook covered the 1933 season. See The Wolverine, 1934, 96.
59 See Figures 1.1 and 1.2, Michigan State Football Season, 1934, MSU SIR.
60 Interview, William H. Smith with Dorothy Frye (MSU archivist), 20 September 1996.
On October 7, 1933, Michigan State fell to Michigan 20-6. More important than the outcome itself, the contest marked the first game where both schools fielded integrated squads. Beginning in 1901 as football coach, and continuing as athletic director from 1921 to 1941, Fielding Yost, the son of a Confederate soldier, prevented African Americans from playing football at Michigan. While Yost did allow a few

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African Americans like Olympian DeHart Hubbard on the track team, he was unwilling to play blacks on the football team until head coach Harry Kipke convinced Willis Ward’s father that his son would be happy at Michigan. When Ward made the 1932 team it represented the end of a forty year period of segregated Michigan football. When asked if Kipke would play Ward, the former MSC head coach resoundingly answered, “You’re darn right I’ll take that kid.” Kipke went out of his way to make sure the rest of the team made him feel comfortable on the team by asking some of the Michigan players to look out for Ward.\(^{62}\)

Coming off consecutive losses to Michigan State and Chicago, Michigan prepared for a home game against Georgia Tech. For two seasons Ward was an important playmaker for Michigan on back to back National Championship teams.\(^{63}\) Before his third season began, Georgia Tech Head Coach W.A. Alexander informed Michigan officials that his school would have to cancel the game unless Ward was barred. Jim Crow custom demanded that “no team in this section play against a Negro athlete,” he justified. Michigan officials accepted Georgia Tech’s conditions, but as the game grew closer the school’s newspaper, the *Michigan Daily*, called for a student boycott of the game. Upon Alexander’s arrival, officials from both schools reached an unprecedented version of the gentleman’s agreement, whereby Michigan withheld Ward and Georgia Tech benched star end Hoot Gibson.\(^{64}\) The gentlemen’s agreement with Georgia Tech left a number of Michigan officials, players, and fans

\(^{63}\) Ibid., 22.
\(^{64}\) Martin, “Color Line,”’98.
embarrassed. Consequently Michigan did not play another southern team for nineteen years.  

That same week James McCrary shined against Carnegie Tech (PA). “Carnegie Tech gridders are still talking about the splendid defensive and offensive playing of Jimmy McCrary, flashy bronzed back of Michigan State’s fast-moving eleven, which tripped the Skibos 13-0.” The Pittsburgh Courier wrote, “When your opponents admit you’re good and you’re a Negro, you’re usually GOOD.” At halftime of the Thanksgiving Day game between Wilberforce and West Virginia State College at Hamtramck Stadium, McCrary, Albert Baker, Willis Ward and teammate Franklin Lett, along with Edward Salters of Western State Teacher’s College (now Western Michigan University) were “honored guests” at the black football classic.  

Equally important, this story was carried in the Pittsburgh Courier, which had a national readership. The Courier also ran a picture essay, “Grid Phantoms Who Streaked to Fame in Major Colleges” that featured McCrary, Baker, and Iowa’s Oze Simmons. Together, these pioneers were heroes of the black community beyond Michigan and role models for African Americans who perceived that players like Baker and McCrary were playing at the highest level of college football.

Despite the praise from the local black community and McCrary’s clear talents, Michigan State failed to learn from Michigan’s embarrassing example and withheld their black players from their last game against Texas A & M in San

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65 Behee, Hail, 30.
68 “Grid Phantoms Who Streaked to Fame in Major Colleges,” Pittsburgh Courier, December 8, 1934.
In 1933 the Texas legislature had outlawed "Caucasians" and "Africans" from boxing and wrestling together and for most Texans football was no different. Although McCrary was out due to injury, Coach Bachman brought the senior on the western road trip to play Kansas in the second to last game of the season as "a gesture of friendship and sportsmanship to the fallen Negro star." On December 5, 1934, the Michigan State football team, minus Baker and McCrary, boarded the train at the Lansing station for its travel south. After listing all the players that made the trip South, *The State Journal* noted, "There was just one catch in the plans for the game. The squad headed southwest without the services of Al Agett." The school’s newspaper also noted that Agett would be left behind due to injury, but simply stated McCrary and Baker were "unable to make the trip," without mentioning injuries to either player. In the minds of local sportswriters and MSC administrators, there was no way they could travel through Memphis, Little Rock, and Texarkana with Baker and McCrary, let alone play them in San Antonio. While the University of Michigan decided to stop playing southern teams for nineteen years, MSC continued to play southern teams nearly every season under Charles Bachman. After gaining

73 This suggests that McCrary may have been healthy enough to play after resting the weeks before.
74 Itinerary, Football Team to San Antonio Texas, 1934 Football Season File, MSU SIR.
75 From 1934 to 1946, MSC played segregated squads, and in some cases played the same southern schools numerous times throughout this period. They were: Texas A & M, Washington University (St.
recognition within the African American community as a school open to black players, MSC acquiesced to Jim Crow.

From 1935 to 1945, Michigan State had only one season in which a black player made the varsity squad. Michigan State’s exclusion of blacks over the course of a decade overlapped the resegregation of the National Football League from 1934 to 1946. Bill Gibson of the Baltimore Afro-American wondered whether his readers had “noticed the decline in the number of our football stars at mixed institutions, particularly at the big Eastern colleges and universities?” He suggested there was a coordinated effort to “decrease the number of colored players at the larger institutions.” As the Texas A & M game proved, segregation made southern road trips nearly impossible for teams traveling with black players. Coaches began to question “whether it is worth the battle” to carry blacks on the roster. One coach believed traveling with a black player was distracting to the rest of his team, and after all, “winning games is as often as not due to the proper frame of mind as it is that of physical fitness and craftiness.”

Some coaches tested black players to see if they were worth the trouble. Harry Kipke, who had fought to get Willis Ward at Michigan, may have been willing to include a black athlete on his team but informed the rest of the team to “level him without mercy.” Kipke’s grueling field exam was a time honored system because, “If, at the end of the week he doesn’t turn in his uniform, then I know I’ve got a great

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76 The gentlemen’s agreement extended in a coordinated and informal fashion where no black player made an NFL squad during this period. See Smith, “Outside the Pale: The Exclusion of Blacks from the National Football League,” 255-57.
77 Bill Gibson, “Hear Me Talkin’ To Ya!,” Baltimore Afro-American, November 16, 1935.
player.” On the surface this was an abusive trial, but it may have been a necessary evil. The punishment an African American took in practice would be no worse than the hammering opponents unloaded. Even Branch Rickey, the Brooklyn Dodgers owner, verbally assaulted Jackie Robinson with a barrage of racial epithets in 1945 to determine if he had "guts enough not to fight back."  

While blacks were barred from major league baseball and professional football, and the number of blacks on predominantly white college football teams dwindled, the achievements of Joe Louis as the heavyweight champion transformed him into a race hero. After waiting over twenty years for another black champion, Louis’ 1937 victory over “The Cinderella Man,” James Braddock, uplifted the race. “All the Negroes in Lansing, like Negroes everywhere, went wildly happy with the greatest celebration of race pride our generation had every known,” Malcolm X remembered in his autobiography. Louis’ fists symbolized black people swinging back at white supremacy. With each punch Louis landed on a white fighter, blacks felt a little stronger, and tilted their chins up a little higher. Sitting close to the radio, African Americans closed their eyes as if they could not watch Louis against the ropes. Essayist and poet Maya Angelou described blacks’ fear of Louis hitting the mat:

It was our people falling. It was another lynching: Yet another Black man hanging on a tree. One more woman ambushed and raped. A Black boy whipped and maimed. It was hounds on the trail of a man running through slimy swamps. It was a white woman slapping her maid for being forgetful . . .

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78 Ibid.
If Joe lost we were back in slavery and beyond help... We didn’t breathe. We didn’t hope. We waited.81

When Louis rose up to defeat German Max Schmeling in 1938, he was transformed from a black hero to an American hero. In the eyes of all Americans, Louis’s triumph over Schmeling scored a victory of democracy over fascism.

In the end, Louis remained a contradiction; he was a black icon in a segregated America. All the accolades given to Louis by whites brought little change to the status of African Americans in the 1940s. In 1941 black activists demanded that President Franklin D. Roosevelt issue an executive order to protect African Americans’ rights to equal employment. The President complied, issuing Executive Order 8802 creating the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC), and declared that “there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries and in Government because of race, creed, color, or national origin.”82

Black agitation for equality met mass resistance by whites in the South and in the North. In 1943 Detroit went up in flames when competition for housing between blacks and whites erupted into violence. At least 40 people were injured, 220 were arrested, and 34 people died. After the riot the Detroit Housing Commission mandated segregation as official policy in public housing.83

Although World War II did little to improve housing conditions for African Americans, the war prompted college athletic programs to recruit athletes from

82 Fairclough, Better Day Coming, 157.
previously untapped talent sources.\textsuperscript{84} Yet throughout his coaching career Bachman resisted playing African Americans. After six seasons without a black athlete, Charles Bachman added Lansing Central's Hugh Davis as a substitute halfback in 1941.\textsuperscript{85} At first glance, a scheduled game against Missouri threatened the chances of Davis playing in November. The University of Missouri had garnered national notoriety in 1936 when Lionel Lloyd Gaines was rejected admission to its law school because of his race. With the persistence of NAACP lawyers, the Supreme Court ruled the state of Missouri had to provide equal education to African Americans. The Court did not, however, force UM to integrate its school.\textsuperscript{86} In 1940 students at NYU protested Missouri segregationist policy when they learned that halfback Leonard Bates would not be allowed to travel with the team to Missouri. Despite student protests, the game was played without Bates. The next season Bates would have been allowed to play against Missouri since the game was played at Yankee Stadium, but he was out due to injury. In 1941 Missouri also did not challenge the participation of MSC's Hugh Davis in a game played in East Lansing.\textsuperscript{87} Although Missouri did not


\textsuperscript{87} Donald Spivey, "'End Jim Crow in Sports': The Leonard Bates Controversy and Protest at New York University, 1940-1941," Chap. 8 in \textit{Sport and the Color Line: Black Athletes and Race Relations in Twentieth Century America} (New York: Routledge, 2004); "Missouri Beats Michigan State in Rain, 19-0" \textit{Chicago Tribune}, November 2, 1941; Martin, "The Color Line," 101. Upon further investigation of Hugh Davis' football career, I have learned he was selected in the 17th round of the 1944 NFL draft by the Pittsburgh Steelers. This is remarkable considering he was not a starter for MSC and the selection occurred at a time when the NFL did not have any African Americans on its rosters. This information warrants further investigation of Davis' career and the process by which the NFL reintegrated.
impose Jim Crow on games played in the North, future contests between MSC and southern schools continued to threaten the participation of State’s black athletes.

In 1946 MSC was scheduled to play at home against Mississippi State and at Kentucky. In the week before and the week after the Mississippi State game Horace Smith, a track and football star at Jackson High (MI), played against Boston College and Penn State, but was withheld from the October 12 game against Mississippi State.88 After the Penn State game, Smith played again against Cincinnati the week before the Kentucky contest. Kentucky, playing by “southern rules,” forced MSC to bench Smith in Lexington.89 Michigan State officials reported that Smith’s two absences were due to injuries.90 Smith continued to see action throughout the rest of the season, even against Maryland, which had allowed two black players from Boston College to play in a 1941 game hosted by the Terrapins.91 While Smith had not yet established himself as an important cog in the Spartan offense, his participation in every game of the 1946 season with the exception of the two games against southern opponents revealed the “inconsistency and incompatibility of Jim Crow” in sports.92 The exclusion of Horace Smith from interregional games mirrored the second-class treatment blacks experienced in everyday social life.

The arrival of Clarence “Biggie” Munn as head coach in 1947 presented an opportunity to reverse discriminatory policies against black players. Munn had played with a black player, Ellsworth Harpole, at the University of Minnesota and

90 “MSC Bows to Race Bias; Smith Out of Tilt,” Michigan Chronicle, October 4, 1947.
91 Spivey, “The Black Athlete in Big-Time Intercollegiate Sports, 1941-1968,” 120.
92 Spivey, “‘End Jim Crow in Sports,’” 148.
even coached African Americans as an assistant coach at Syracuse (1937) and Michigan (1938-45) before coming to MSC. When Munn was the line coach at Syracuse, the Orangemen withheld their star quarterback, Wilmeth Sidat-Singh, at the request of the University of Maryland in a game played in Baltimore. After spending one season as head coach at Syracuse in 1946, free of racial incidents, Munn inherited a Spartan team coming off a 5-5 season. With the addition of Don Sherrod, a Battle Creek native, plus Horace Smith, Michigan State had two blacks on its varsity roster for the first time in thirteen years.

The 1947 season appeared promising for African Americans playing football at the major Michigan schools. Between Michigan State and Michigan, five blacks were scheduled to play in the intra-state rivalry game. While both schools shared a history of inequality towards their black players, this was a sign that African Americans were beginning to take steps toward equal opportunity in the State’s two major football programs. But any progress Michigan State appeared to be making under Munn’s leadership came to a screeching halt when the *Michigan Chronicle*, Michigan’s major black newspaper, ran front page story on September 27 revealing that Michigan State once again accommodated Mississippi State with the benching of Smith and Sherrod. When asked before the game if he would play Smith, Munn responded, he “would use the best players available.” Ralph Young, the athletic director, reiterated Munn’s statement, claiming, “It is our policy to field the best

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possible team at all times.” To disguise any racial mistreatment, Young praised Smith, stating that MSC was “very proud of him.”

Ironically, the other major Chronicle headline that day read “Robinson Stars in World Series.” When Jackie Robinson broke major league baseball’s color barrier, he proved that integration could work anywhere. For decades, baseball’s institutional racism denied African Americans the opportunity to play for nearly 65 years. This was a defining moment in America’s civil rights history. The arrival of Jackie Robinson came before President Harry Truman desegregated America’s armed services, before the famous Brown vs. The Board of Education Supreme Court decision, before the Montgomery Bus Boycott and before Martin Luther King led the modern Civil Rights Movement. Robinson gained the respect of those that doubted whether blacks could “make it” and in the process became, in the words of Cornel West, “a transracial figure beloved by blacks and whites . . . against the absurdities of white racism and seductive security of black xenophobia.”

Robinson proved that sports were a means for African Americans to assimilate in America. For those whites who were ignorant of the race problem or had little contact with blacks altogether, Robinson served as an example of a black man who was intelligent, industrious, and articulate. Roger Kahn wrote in his timeless classic, The Boys of Summer:

By applauding Robinson, a man did not feel that he was taking a stand on school integration, or on open housing. But for an instant he had accepted Robinson simply as a hometown ball player. To disregard color, even for an

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96 “MSC Bows to Race Bias; Smith Out of Tilt,” Michigan Chronicle, October 4, 1947.
97 Before Robinson, the last black player to play major league baseball was Moses “Fleetwood” Walker in 1884.
instant, is to step away from the old prejudices, the old hatred. That is not a path on which many double back.\textsuperscript{99}

Robinson’s ability to change white attitudes toward African Americans was limited to the North. After all, the southern-most clubs during major league baseball’s integration years was the St. Louis Cardinals.\textsuperscript{100} Major league baseball was still a game played in the urban North and most southerners resisted sharing the playing field with African Americans.

While Jackie Robinson continued to hit Yankee pitching, the Detroit branch of the NAACP urged Michigan Governor Kim Sigler to investigate racial discrimination in the MSC football program. Edward M. Swann, Executive Secretary of the Detroit branch, suggested that future contracts with southern opponents include a clause that clarified Michigan State’s policy toward black players. Civic and religious leaders throughout the state sent letters to Sigler and MSC officials protesting the decision to remove black players against southern opponents.\textsuperscript{101} As local leaders awaited MSC’s response, James McCrary suggested that responsibility for honoring the gentlemen’s agreement with Mississippi State did not belong to Munn or Young, but with Dean Lloyd C. Emmons, Director of the Athletic Board. McCrary explained that when MSC played Texas A & M in 1934, the “Texas officials said the team would have played against me if my college had decided to use me in the game. But I was not used.” McCrary, no longer a player powerless to school officials, claimed “a close

\textsuperscript{100} The integration period of major league baseball ran from 1947 to 1959, when the Boston Red Sox became the last team to play an African American twelve years after Robinson broke the color barrier.
investigation will reveal that it is Emmons who sets the school’s policy.” McCrary pointed out MSC’s acceptance of racial exclusion “has outlasted the coaches.”¹⁰²

Michigan’s African American community no longer considered Michigan State “the citadel of liberalism.” Chronicle writer Russ J. Cowans asserted that Horace Smith’s public humiliation was “something new at Michigan State.” In his view, race bias did not exist when Gideon Smith and Benjamin Goode played at Michigan State. However, as MSC increasingly scheduled home and away games against southern opponents in the 1930s, the football program fielded completely white teams. If MSC added black players to its roster, the team would have had to bench them against southern schools, but if the team was composed only of whites, MSC could prevent any racial conflict. In this context, MSC fell in line with segregated competition and avoided gentlemen’s agreements.¹⁰³

What struck Cowans most was the silence of MSC students, but even without student protest, Michigan State succumbed to outside pressure.¹⁰⁴ On October 25, 1947 Horace Smith played against the University of Kentucky in an unspectacular 6 to 7 loss. It was the first time in UK’s history that they played on the same field with an African American.¹⁰⁵ The Michigan Chronicle patted itself on the back in its report, “Chronicle Cracks Bias On MSC Football 11,” declaring “the year long campaign” to “crack discriminatory sports practices” successfully came to close after Kentucky Athletic Director Bernie Shively informed Chronicle writer Bill Matney

¹⁰⁴ Cowans’ observation was confirmed in the school newspaper, the State News. There is no evidence to suggest students petitioned on behalf of Smith and Sherrod.
¹⁰⁵ It should be noted Don Sherrod did not play. “26,997 Watch Kentucky Beat Mich. State, 7-6,” Chicago Tribune, October 26, 1947.
that the game would be played under any circumstances. Just as the *Pittsburgh Courier* ignited the “Double V” campaign in the fight against fascism at home and abroad during World War II, the efforts of the *Michigan Chronicle* demonstrated that local civil rights activism by the black press was critical to racial reform.

![Figure 3. Photograph of Horace Smith sitting on the bench in 1946. (*The Wolverine*, 1947).](image)

After the Kentucky game, the Spartans, led by Horace Smith’s brilliant play, finished the season on a four game winning streak. Smith, despite missing one game, and the constant stress he was under, led the team in touchdowns. State’s improvement to a 7-2 record excited the East Lansing campus where the student body celebrated football as a game of “loyalty and sportsmanship.” Yet, Michigan State showed Horace Smith no loyalty. The exclusion of Horace Smith exposed the

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hypocrisy in sports. Despite the clear advantage Smith offered State’s team, sports offered limited integration but without equality. Nevertheless, Smith’s participation in the Kentucky game represented a turning point for Michigan State when University President John Hannah insisted that Michigan State would play all of its players in future games regardless of location. However, not until 1959 when it played Miami did Michigan State play a segregated team in the South.

After the NFL ended its color line in 1946, the Detroit Lions were one of the few professional teams to have two black players on its roster in 1948. On MSC’s campus, nine men opened the first black social fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha. That season, Michigan State suited up three black players. Lineman J.C. Williams followed in the footsteps of Horace Smith from Jackson High School, while Flint native Jesse Thomas joined Smith in the backfield. Don Sherrod left East Lansing to play with fellow African American John Hazely at Wayne State in Detroit. Midway through the season Horace Smith quit the team because he wanted a larger role on the offense. For the most part, Smith was playing defense, raising the question of why was the team’s leading scorer from a year ago not touching the

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110 It should be noted that in 1949 MSC played at Arizona. This was only possible because 1949 marked the first year Arizona had black player, Fred Batiste (1949-50), on the roster. Michigan State officials must have been aware of this in order for them to travel south to play the Wildcats. The Spartans avoided segregated buses or railroad cars by traveling by chartered plane. Richard Paige, Tucson, Arizona, to author, January 18, 2006, email; “Spartans Work under Lights for Night Game,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 18, 1949.
112 The yearbook did not picture or list any of the football players as initial members. *The Wolverine*, 1949, 358.
113 Jesse Thomas was drafted by the New York Yanks in 1951. The Yanks were relocated as the Baltimore Colts in 1953. After serving in the army, Thomas joined the franchise in 1955 as a defensive back until he was cut after the 1957 season. Doug Mintline, “Thomas’ ‘rosy’ life still blooming,” *Flint Journal*, July 13, 1982.
football? On November 8, the team reinstated Smith. “Smith humbly admits that he made a mistake,” the team’s press release read, “and far be it from the coaching staff to jeopardize a boy’s future for an error in judgment, even though the team has demonstrated that it can win without him.” Whether or not Smith quit because he wanted a larger role on offense or because of racial mistreatment is unclear. Nonetheless, school officials must share the responsibility for Smith’s leave because they abetted an environment that condoned segregation. These school officials hoped to avoid any more controversy with Smith, but still made it clear that players who resisted the coaching staff would not be tolerated.

During Smith’s final season in 1949, Flint Central’s Don Coleman was promoted to the varsity squad as a tackle. For the first time, State carried four black players on the squad, which was a turning point in State’s ability to attract black players who were nationally recognized as impact athletes. In 1949 State had modest success with a 6-3 record, but in Coleman’s junior season the Spartans ran up an 8-1 season, including Munn’s first win over Michigan and the beginning of a twenty eight game winning streak. Don Coleman was a “sixty-minute man,” playing offense and defense in 1950, leading the Spartans in minutes played. More importantly, Coleman changed the way the Spartans played football. “We have Coleman to thank for what is called the Michigan State Offense,” line coach Daugherty explained, “He did so many improbable things that we adopted plays never before attempted.”

\[115\] “Horace Smith Quits MSC ’11,”” Michigan Chronicle, October 21, 1948.  
\[116\] Horace Smith file, MSU SIR.
was the type of athlete that Daugherty recruited throughout his head coaching career, “light, quick men,” whose speed could be utilized in all positions.117

Don Coleman was an example of how big-time college football provided African Americans upward mobility. The son of a hotel porter, Coleman lived in Oklahoma until his family moved to Flint in 1942. For Coleman, football was a means to a higher education to which most African Americans did not have access to. “I think it’s wonderful that football gave me an education,” Coleman told sportswriter Dave Condon.118 He came to Michigan State because Duffy Daugherty told him, “We need you.” Despite Munn telling the world that State could win without Horace Smith, Daugherty delivered a different message to Coleman. “He said three words which no else said, and this attitude helped me in coming to MSU,” Coleman asserted.119 Coleman was not naïve to believe that his football uniform protected him from racism. “The problems we had were a sign of the times. I played against some name-callers, guys who hollered, ‘you black so and so,’” Coleman recalled. The All-American lineman realized that he could not fight back even if he wanted to. “I was conditioned to take what was given” Coleman said, whose play communicated to anyone watching that African Americans could play against anyone, anywhere. Paul “Bear” Bryant, head coach of the 1946 Kentucky team that barred Horace Smith, told Coleman in 1951, “You could play for me any time.”120 The truth was Coleman could never play for Bryant.

117 Don Coleman file, MSU SIR.
In 1951 Don Coleman became Michigan State’s first unanimous All-American selection. Out of twenty two All-Americans named by the International News Service, he was one of three blacks awarded a spot on the all-star roster.121 Thanks to African Americans like Coleman, Chicago Tribune All-American Jim Ellis, Leroy Bolden, Ellis Duckett, and Willie Thrower, Michigan State had become “unquestionably the nation’s fastest rising athletic power.” Depth and speed defined Munn’s teams in the 1950s. “There’s only one word that describes Michigan State’s speed,” said Pittsburgh head coach Tom Hamilton after a 53-26 beating, “phenomenal. In all the years I’ve been in football I’ve never seen anything to match it.”122

The growing presence of African Americans in college and professional sports in the 1950s paralleled the growth of television. Before television only those thousands in attendance could see a football or a baseball game. Now, for this first time, millions of Americans could watch sports from their homes. Pulitzer Prize winning author David Halberstam observed that in the 1950s sports were “going from the periphery to the very center of the culture” where a “dual revolution” began to take place in terms of black athletes entering the larger public consciousness and the number of people who were now able to watch them perform.123 In fact, the growing numbers of African Americans on northern college football teams changed the way

121 The other two black All-Americans in 1951 were Ollie Matson of San Francisco and Ed Bell of Pennsylvania. “Coleman, Matson, Bell Selected on INS All-America Team,” Pittsburgh Courier, December 1, 1951.
122 Leroy Bolden was an exceptional athlete playing consistently as a freshman in 1951. Ellis Duckett played sparingly as a freshman that year, but playing as a freshman nonetheless demonstrates the remarkable talent Munn was recruiting. Tommy Devine, “N.D. Threat to Mich. State 12 Win Skein,” The Sporting News, November 7, 1951; Lawrence Casey, “MSC Unveils Two Aces,” Michigan Chronicle, October 6, 1951.
higher education and college sports were perceived. A short story by Langston Hughes exemplified how people perceived blacks at predominantly white schools:

“Delbert is going to college,” said Simple, “so if I live and nothing happens—and I get straight—I am going to send him the money for his first pair of football shoes.”
“Well, if Delbert is going to college, what you should think about helping him buy is not football shoes, but books. Men go to college to study, not play football.”
“Footballing is all I ever read about them doing,” said Simple. “Since I do not know any college boys, I thought they went there to play.”
“They do not,” I said. “Of course, the ones who play good football get their names in the papers. But there are thousands of others who graduate with honors and never even see a football game.”

Most whites never thought about the small number of black students at predominantly white schools, but could not help but recognize the growing numbers of black players who helped their alma mater win big games.

“A couple of generations ago, there might have been strong protests among students against the admission of Negroes to their classes,” the Chicago Tribune claimed. “Very little of that spirit will be found today on southern campuses. One reason, of course, is the remarkable record that has been made by Negro athletes in and out of colleges.” The Tribune was out of touch with the staunch resistance southern schools put up against the entrance of blacks into their universities. In fact, schools in the North were only just beginning to allow blacks to play basketball. In 1947 journalist John Gunther noted that while blacks played on Big Ten football teams, they were still barred from competing on the basketball court. “This is an indoor sport, and taboos are strong (though not so strong as in the South) against any contact between half-clad, perspiring bodies, even on the floor of a gym,” Gunther

The exclusion of blacks from basketball reflects the extreme black xenophobia of the first half of the twentieth century. Dan Kean, an African American who played tennis at Michigan in 1934, echoed Gunther, “If blacks played [basketball] their skin would rub against whites and that would be bad. They said this could be prevented in football by the uniform worn.”

Michigan State became the third Big Ten team to field an integrated basketball team in 1951. Born in Brooklyn to a Puerto Rican father and a Jamaican immigrant mother, Ricky Ayala joined the Michigan State basketball team the same year that Dick Lord, a black Montreal native, laced up hockey skates for the Spartans. Don Vest broke two barriers in 1951 as Michigan State’s first black gymnast and male cheerleader. The successful process of integrating African Americans into Michigan State’s football program and acculturating them into a campus predominated by a white culture opened the door for blacks to participate in other fields of athletics.

The Spartans carried a fifteen game winning-streak into the 1952 season, after a 17-1 record the previous two years. As a result of unprecedented success, Michigan State’s home ticket sales increased fifty percent. Munn was featured in popular magazines like Colliers and Time that detailed the “Biggie Munn method” of coaching. Munn’s formula of success calling for constantly substituting fresh

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127 Behee, Hail to the Victors!, 40-1.
128 Iowa was the first Big Ten team to break the color barrier in the conference in 1944 with Richard Culberson, followed by Bill Garrett in 1947. Martin, “Color Line,” 103-04.
players, relying on deft speed in the backfield, and recruiting home grown talent placed Michigan State near the top of the premier national football programs.\textsuperscript{132} Of the fourteen black players who played for Munn from 1947 to 1953, ten were from Michigan; two were from Duffy Daugherty’s home state, Pennsylvania, and two were from Indiana.

Arguably the most spectacular black player of the Munn era was Willie Thrower, a quarterback from New Kensington, Pennsylvania. According to Michigan State Sports Information Director Fred Stabley, Thrower was “almost a high school legend, pursued and lured by dozens of college scouts who had heard of the power and accuracy in his spreading fingers and lanky arm.” By 1952 Thrower, whose arm strength earned him a reputation as a great “punter” in practice throwing 50 yard bombs, finally had a chance to play quarterback, a position consistently unoccupied by blacks.\textsuperscript{133} Thrower became the full-time backup to All-American Tom Yewcic, an important event considering Munn’s system that required his second units to play a significant number of minutes. Will Robinson of the \textit{Pittsburgh Courier} believed that if Thrower had played anywhere else he “would easily have made the first team and rated All-America consideration.”\textsuperscript{134}

Eighteen years had passed since Michigan State last played Texas A & M in San Antonio. In October, the Aggies made the trip to East Lansing. Between State’s last game against the Aggies in 1934 and their early season matchup in 1952,

\textsuperscript{133} Fred Stabley, MSU’s Sports Information Director claimed Thrower could throw the ball “65 or 70 yards to the exact spot Biggie wanted it,” \textit{The Spartans}, 146; Paul Chandler, “Thrower, QB,” \textit{Detroit News}, September 17, 1951.
opportunities for blacks in higher education in the South remained basically the same. Texas A & M remained a segregated school until 1963 and did not accept a black football player until 1967. Over 49,000 people watched Willie “The Thrower” pass for two fourth-quarter touchdowns within two and a half minutes, completing seven of nine passes for 107 yards in a 48-6 trouncing. Thrower was presented with the game ball as he left the field. In MSC’s biggest game of the year, the Spartans trailed Notre Dame 3-0 in a defensive battle, with six minutes left in the third quarter. With the offense sputtering, the crowd chanted “We want Willie.” Thrower took over for Yewcic and engineered State to its first touchdown, and ran the offense to two of its three scores in a 21-3 win over the sixth-ranked Fighting Irish.

Clearly Willie Thrower had big-play capabilities. However, professional football did not welcome black quarterbacks. The Chicago Bears signed Thrower in 1953, but his pro debut was short lived. On October 18, Thrower entered the game at quarterback for George Blanda. The defense knew Thrower was put in to pass and held him to three completions out of eight passes and one interception in a 35-29 loss to the 49ers. Thrower never played again and was placed on waivers on November 7 and eventually released. The Bears never gave Thrower a legitimate chance to prove he could play in the NFL. “The Bears,” historian Charles K. Ross suggests, “were simply not ready to give a black player the opportunity to perform at the most

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important position on the field.” While Thrower was not the first black quarterback ever to play the position, he was the first in the modern era of professional football, after World War II.

Even though the Bears turned Thrower away, the Spartan signal-caller believed he had accomplished something. “I look at it like this,” Thrower said looking back on his career, “I was like the Jackie Robinson of football. A black quarterback was unheard of before I hit the pros.” Unlike Robinson’s path-breaking career, black quarterbacks did not win immediate opportunities in college or pro football because of Thrower. Not until 1968 when Marlin Briscoe became the Denver Broncos quarterback, did an African American start at the position. Racial prejudice of the era prevented organizations from believing African Americans had the ability to make the decisions required to lead a football team. Thrower found an outlet for his athletic talents in a less discriminating arena playing for the Winnipeg Blue Bombers in the Canadian Football League.

While the NFL was unwilling to extend Thrower an opportunity to play quarterback, Michigan State was unique in giving an African American a chance to play the most important position on the field. The Spartans were rewarded for playing Thrower, along with black All-Americans Jim Ellis and Ellis Duckett, with a National Championship in 1952. These three outstanding athletes, along with sophomore sensation Leroy Bolden, encouraged the 1952 Coach of the Year to bring

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140 Ross, *Outside the Lines*, 131.
in more black players that fit Munn’s system. In 1953 Michigan State played eight African Americans, up from four the previous season.

In Michigan State’s first official season playing football in the Big Ten, the Spartans led the league in black players. State’s eight black athletes represented nearly a quarter of all African Americans in the Conference. In 1953, nearly every Big Ten team had a black player, except Purdue, although nearby in South Bend, perennial power Notre Dame finally integrated en route to a National Championship. While the Fighting Irish continued to fight a reputation as a segregated institution, Michigan State became a recognized leader playing blacks. In the October 31 issue of the Baltimore Afro-American, twenty-three “top gridders” were pictured, including all eight of Michigan State’s athletes, clearly representing a significant proportion of the country’s top black players. Equally significant, the Pittsburgh Courier ran article praising the play of Michigan State’s “Negro Grid Talent.” Michigan State built a national reputation as an elite football program by playing African Americans who made a significant contribution to their success.

In Pasadena, California, on January 1, 1954, with over 100,000 fans in attendance and millions more watching on television, thirteen African American football players ran onto the field in Michigan State’s first-ever Rose Bowl against

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143 Lawrence Robinson, “Record Vote Names Munn as Coach of Year,” The Sporting News, December 17, 1952.
144 Michigan State joined the Big Ten in 1948, but did not begin playing football until 1953 because of advanced scheduling.
145 The Big Ten carried 33 black players in 1953. The team breakdown was: MSC-8; Illinois-7; Iowa-6; Michigan-4; Indiana-3; OSU-2; Minnesota-1; Wisconsin-1; Northwestern-1; and Purdue-0; Will Robinson, “Nine of the Big Ten Schools Are Using Negro Football Players,” Pittsburgh Courier, October 3, 1953; Notre Dame’s first black player was Wayne Edmonds. See Will Robinson, “Two Negroes Slated for Gridiron Action at N.D.,” Pittsburgh Courier, September 26, 1953.
146 “More of the Nation’s Top Gridders,” Baltimore Afro-American, October 31, 1953.
UCLA. With seven blacks representing the Spartans and six playing for the Bruins, it was “a new high in interracial athletic participation.” Respected *Baltimore Afro-American* sportswriter Sam Lacy wrote, “Never before in the history of any major bowl game had a total of 13 colored players been seen in action in a January 1st contest.”148 In the 1950s Bowl games posed problems when integrated teams were matched against southern squads, but not in the Rose Bowl which had a signed agreement with the Big Ten in 1947. The Rose Bowl was first integrated in 1916 when Fritz Pollard of Brown University played against Washington State.149 UCLA also shared an important history in fielding integrated teams dating to the late 1930s when the Bruins played outstanding African Americans such as Jackie Robinson, Kenny Washington, Ray Bartlett and Woody Strode.150 The presence and the vital role African Americans played in Michigan State’s 14-12 victory signaled tremendous progress for black athletes at Michigan State and beyond.

The important contributions of African Americans at Michigan State helped encourage the growing acceptance of blacks on northern campuses. More importantly to Munn, he discovered talented black players could help him win. As a result of the dominating play of Don Coleman, Munn sought out similarly talented black players. In a series of six seasons, Munn’s team shifted from practicing racial exclusion to leading the country in racial inclusion. Racial conflict was avoided not only because of the pressure of the *Michigan Chronicle*, but also by joining the Big Ten. As a member of the Big Ten, the Spartans avoided future racial conflicts since

150 Chalk, *Black College Sport*, 191-96.
there was little room to schedule games against southern opponents. By 1953, Munn
learned he did not have to play southern opponents to win national acclaim and his
teams could win by playing more black players than any other coach in the country.

For nearly the first half of the twentieth century, Michigan State’s football
team looked much like any other large, predominantly white school in the Midwest.
From the time Michigan State’s first black player arrived in 1913, through the 1947
season, the experiences of black athletes at Michigan State mirrored the experiences
of the North’s black athletes as a whole. For those seasons that blacks did make the
varsity team, they were often the only one or two African Americans on the team, but
even then they were treated as second-class citizens. Throughout this period
Michigan State practiced “segregated integration,” whereby the inclusion of black
players was limited to games against northern opponents. Beginning in the 1920s and
occurring again in 1934, 1946 and 1947, State acquiesced to Jim Crow by agreeing to
withhold its black players against southern schools. The 1947 season represented a
major turning point for black athletes when the University finally agreed to take a
stand against segregated competition. Within the same season Michigan State
transformed itself from an abettor of segregated competition to a leader in the fight
against segregated athletics. When Duffy Daugherty took over for Biggie Munn in
1954 he ushered in an era of integration that reshaped the importance of black athletes
to college football.
CHAPTER III

“Did you hear about the plane crash in Africa?”
“No. Was anyone hurt?”
“Just Duffy Daugherty and his coaching staff.”

When eighteen year old Charles Aaron Smith arrived in East Lansing in the summer of 1963, the Michigan State campus looked nothing like his hometown of Beaumont, Texas. Before his migration to East Lansing, he had only met one white person in his whole life. As a young boy, Smith was scarred by southern racial violence when he witnessed a black man cry out for mercy as five members of the Ku Klux Klan branded the letters KKK into the man’s chest with a hot iron. Those three letters were forever burned into Smith’s memory, leaving him wondering, “Why do white people hate me?” Football enabled Smith to escape the violence of the segregated South and enter “The Promiseland,” as some black southerners called the North. In Michigan there were no “colored only” signs hanging above water fountains, or nailed to bathroom doors, or “colored sections” where blacks sat at football stadiums. For the first time in his life the six foot-seven “Bubba” Smith competed in a football stadium where blacks and whites sat next to each other.

It is hard to trust white men when you have seen them disfigure a fellow black man. Yet, from 1954 to 1972 over one hundred young black men, just like Bubba Smith, entrusted their futures to Michigan State head coach Hugh “Duffy” Daugherty.

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Daugherty built Michigan State into a successful football program by recruiting and playing blacks at a higher rate than any other program in the country. From 1954 to 1972 128 African Americans played for Daugherty. In contrast, from 1954 to 1972, the University of Michigan lettered 64 black football players, half the number that played at Michigan State.  

Duffy Daugherty’s Michigan State football teams benefited from the segregated South. Jim Crow gave the Spartans’ coach access to a previously untapped talent source. While coaches in the Big Ten recruited black athletes and played them regularly by the mid-1950s, none were willing to risk their coaching reputations by playing African Americans at the same rate as Daugherty. His best teams developed in an age of television where young athletes and high school coaches could see blacks and whites lining up beside one another. As a result, black high school coaches throughout the South gained a level of respect for Daugherty and sent their players to East Lansing. With the support of the Michigan State administration, Daugherty’s pioneering efforts proved to the world that sports teams could win with a strong nucleus of talented black players.

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1 The statistics of Michigan State’s African American players have been compiled by examining football program team pictures and official rosters. Only those players who made the official roster in September of each season are counted in this study. John Bebee contends that from 1950 to 1972 69 blacks lettered in football at Michigan. I have determined that five of those players played before 1954 by looking at Michigan’s team photos and rosters from 1950 to 1953. See Bebee, *Hail to the Victors!* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ulrich’s Books, 1973), 31; “University of Michigan Athletics History,” Bentley Historical Library, http://www.umich.edu/~bhl/athdept/football/football.htm (accessed February 22, 2006).
Before Daugherty ran onto the field as Michigan State's head coach, the United States Supreme Court struck down “separate but equal” education. On May 17, 1954, the Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* that segregated educational facilities were “inherently unequal.” The Court’s decision “was the most momentous and far-reaching of the century in civil rights,” historian C. Vann Woodward argued.⁴ Enforcing the Court’s ruling proved remarkably difficult. In the South, desegregating schools was strongly resisted. All-white southern colleges and universities did everything in their power to block African Americans from attending their schools. When Autherine Lucy enrolled at the University of Alabama in February 1956 she met a mob of Confederate flag-wavers who threw rotten eggs at her while they shouted “kill her, kill her.” The next month 101 southern members of Congress signed the “Southern Manifesto,” which denounced the *Brown* decision, claiming it would destroy “amicable relations between the white and Negro races.”⁵ For more than a decade after *Brown*, white politicians and university administrators prevented African Americans from sharing classrooms and lockerooms with whites in the South.

While blacks were barred from playing college football at white schools in the South, Daugherty recruited Michigan State’s first southern black player in 1953. In 1955 sophomore Karl Perryman of Mobile, Alabama, was one of ten blacks on the team.⁶ As a black Alabaman, playing football at an integrated school in the North was a remarkable experience for Perryman. African Americans in Mobile “didn’t

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worship football like white Southerners did," Mobile native and baseball’s all-time home run leader Hank Aaron explained, since “none of us could go to Alabama or Auburn or LSU.” Perryman grew up in an environment where blacks and whites read in separate libraries, lived in different neighborhoods, and rode in the back of busses, if they were not forced to give up their seat to a white passenger. Perryman had joined the U.S. Marines during the Korean War where he received the Silver Star, Bronze Star, and the Purple Heart. His courage and experiences working together with whites in combat likely proved to Daugherty that Perryman was the kind of man who could play with white teammates under any conditions.

While fielding a black player from the South may seem insignificant in 1955, Daugherty had set a precedent of recruiting talented players from a region that most white coaches ignored. The migration north represented an opportunity for blacks to get away from the restrictions of southern racism and a chance at a better life. In fact, some of Michigan State’s black players who were raised in Michigan were born in the South. For instance, Jim Hinesly (1953-56) was born in Miami, Florida, but his family moved to Detroit in 1947. Clarence Peaks (1954-56) was born in Greenville, Mississippi, in 1935 but his family moved to Flint in 1939 where his father took a job working in a Chevrolet plant. While the auto industry provided better paying jobs for African Americans in the urban North, by the mid-1950s Michigan State opened the door for young southern African American men to compete at the highest level of

9 Karl Perryman player file, MSU Sports Information Records (hereafter, MSU, SIR).
10 James Hinesly player file, MSU SIR.
11 Clarence Peaks player file, MSU SIR.
college football and as result gave a select few southern African Americans access to a quality college education.

By 1955 every Big Ten football team had at least one black player, led by Indiana with twelve, to Michigan State’s ten. Early in his career Daugherty’s ability to recruit significant numbers of African Americans was strengthened because the rest of the conference was open to playing black players as well. Nationally the Big Ten stood out as a conference that welcomed black athletes. In 1955, the *Baltimore Afro-American* listed the names of “colored players holding positions on major college football teams:"

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While these teams do not represent every team with a black player, they do provide a context within which we can compare Michigan State and other Big Ten squads.

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12 According to journalist Will Robinson, the Big Ten had 63 total black players. He states that MSU had 11 black players and lists a player named “Rudolph Pope” as part of this group. However, MSU did not list such a player in its official roster or in any of its pictures. In 1955 MSU did have a white player named Robert Popp. Nonetheless, Michigan State was clearly among the leaders in a conference that had a growing number of black players. See Robinson, “Every Team in Big Ten Has Negroes Listed,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 15, 1955.

13 We must use these numbers with caution since I have only been able to corroborate the numbers and names of the Michigan State players. It appears the *Afro-American* statistics represent players with actual roles whereas the *Courier’s* statistics suggest the total number of players on each Big Ten team. See “Pigskin Parade,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, October 11, 1955.
Disproportionately, the Big Ten teams played more black players than any other conference.

In 1955 Michigan State’s depth and speed produced a 9-1 season, including a 17-14 win over a fully integrated UCLA squad in the Rose Bowl. Just as the two teams made history in the 1954 Rose Bowl, the 1956 matchup “established a new high in tan faces.”14 The Rose Bowls between UCLA and Michigan State in 1954 and 1956 were significant because they reflected the progress of equal opportunity in college athletics. From 1916 to 1946 only three black athletes played in the Rose Bowl. Duffy Daugherty was named Coach of the Year by his fellow coaches by the largest margin in the 21-year history of the poll and made the cover of Time in October 1956.15 As a nationally recognized American sports figure and leader, Daugherty’s example of playing black players promoted Michigan State as a symbol of all that was good in sports—fair play, equal opportunity, and sportsmanship.

The son of a Pennsylvania coal miner, Daugherty grew up in Barnesboro while his father struggled to put food on the table during the Depression. As a teenager, Daugherty worked as a special-deliveryman and as a miner to help his family survive. By 1936 the Daughertys were no longer living in deep poverty, and Duffy’s football talents landed him a scholarship at Syracuse. Without football, Daugherty admitted he would not have been able to go to college. For Daugherty, the key in recruiting was always to look for himself in the young men. He sought working-class kids and appealed to parents since he looked “like anything but a big-time football coach.” Daugherty had “neither the portentous air nor commanding

presence of the typical big-time football coach.” Daugherty was a master public speaker. Whether he was giving talks at the Michigan High School Coaches Association banquets, alumni dinners, or sitting in a living room drinking coffee with the mother of a future player, Daugherty’s honest, friendly, gregarious nature appealed to anyone who met him.17

Daugherty’s ability to recruit black players also rested on the support of University President John Hannah, who in 1957 was appointed Chairman of the United States Commission of Civil Rights by President Dwight Eisenhower. Hannah’s long tenure as University President was marked by positive actions in race relations. In 1941, he integrated all student dormitories, and followed this act by removing racial identifications from student records.18 It was under Hannah’s leadership that Michigan State finally refused to play schools which demanded that blacks be barred from competition. The same month the Commission was created, Central High of Little Rock, Arkansas, became the focal point of a national crisis when Governor Orval Faubus called in the National Guard to prevent nine black students from entering the school. Ultimately, President Eisenhower reversed the power of the Guard, and sent in 10,000 troops to protect the students.19 The only senior among the nine students, Ernest Green, graduated on May 25, 1958, and was given a full scholarship to Michigan State University by an anonymous donor. For 36 years Green never knew who paid for his tuition until 1994, when President Peter

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16 “Driving Man,” Time, October 8, 1956, 66-75.
McPherson read Hannah’s personal papers and learned that it was Hannah himself who paid for Green’s education.20 Hannah and Daugherty distinguished themselves as leaders in higher education by extending opportunities to African Americans at a time when young blacks were often denied the chance to go to college at all. As a result of their efforts, MSU became an agent of upward mobility for African Americans.

After compiling a 7-2 record in 1956, the Spartans finished 8-1 in 1957 and were ranked third nationally in both the Associated Press (AP) and the United Press (UP) polls. In the fall of 1957 The Sporting News declared Michigan State a “powerhouse.”21 Of the eight black athletes on that year’s roster, two were from the South. Willie Boykin, a native of Columbia, South Carolina, arrived from a segregated Booker T. Washington High. Jerome McFarland, State’s second black player from Alabama, attended Birmingham’s Parker High School, one of the first public high schools for African Americans in the South.22 Like Karl Perryman, McFarland served in the military, and played three years of football in the Army before his discharge in 1954. While playing at Michigan State, McFarland became a symbol of race pride for African Americans in the “Tragic City.” The Birmingham World, an African American newspaper, featured articles on McFarland in 1957 and

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1958. For the countless number of blacks in Birmingham who survived racism on faith and hope, McFarland represented all African Americans who wanted a chance to prove themselves on an equal playing field beyond the limits of segregation.

Michigan State’s football program promoted the fact that they had a large number of African American athletes. At the beginning of the 1958 season the Michigan State Sports Information office distributed a press release that read “MSU’s Grid Squad Lists 9 Negroes.” By calling attention to the number of black players on the team, the University and the football program were consciously aware of the potential benefits of being known as the Brooklyn Dodgers of college football. What better way could the university promote itself as an institution of equality than by fielding an integrated football team that millions could see on television?

When young black athletes saw State’s African Americans on television, it was clear that East Lansing was a potential destination to realize their dreams. When Philadelphian Herb Adderley watched the Spartans he knew he wanted to play for Duffy Daugherty because “At that time black players couldn’t go south. I had seen Michigan State on television. Number 26, Clarence Peaks, was my idol. I noticed that black players could get a chance at Michigan State.” After Daugherty met Adderley’s high school coach at a coaching clinic, Adderley, who was not heavily recruited, found himself wearing number 26 at Michigan State. Adderley’s

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23 The articles were obtained in Jerome McFarland’s player file, MSU SIR. See untitled news article, The Birmingham World, September 13, 1957; untitled news article, The Birmingham World, September 24, 1958.

24 Despite listing the biographical information of nine black players, Bill Wyatt did not make the official roster, and the team carried eight black athletes for the 1958 season. See Herb Adderley player file, “MSU’s 1958 Grid Squad Lists 9 Negroes,” MSU SIR.

identification with Peaks and the other black Spartans, and Daugherty’s outreach to Adderley’s high school coach, demonstrates the process by which black athletes migrated to Michigan State.

Coming off a disastrous 1958 season where the Spartans fell to 3-5-1 and failed to win a single conference game, Daugherty began giving coaching clinics to black high school coaches in the South. Daugherty and his assistants Hank Bullough, Cal Stoll, and Dan Boisture also began recruiting African Americans in Texas, South Carolina, North Carolina, Kentucky, and Virginia. After playing only seven African Americans in 1959 (Daugherty’s lowest number of black players in his eighteen years as head coach), Daugherty’s recruitment efforts registered an increase to twelve black players in 1960. Still, Daugherty’s coaching clinics did not immediately bring a large number of blacks from the South. That season, Clifton Roaf of Pine Bluff, Arkansas, was the only black player from the South. In fact, half of the black players on the team were from Michigan. Still, Daugherty was beginning to establish a bond with southern black coaches that would develop over time.

“The 1960s,” Gerald Early has argued, “was a time when democracy had never seemed more promising, and it was a time when it had never been more threatened. It was a time when everyone believed in democracy more fervently than ever and it was a time when no one believed in it at all." The 1960s was an era of turbulence, violence, and radicalism where African Americans marched, boycotted, fought the Klan, bled, and cried for their freedom. It was an age of definition and

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27 Gerald L. Early, This Is Where I Came In: Black America in the 1960s (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), x.
redefinition. The struggle for equality was in many ways the struggle for integration. Sports not only reflected the progress of the Civil Rights Movement, but also actively contributed to that progress. Liberals of the 1960s hoped that the integration of athletics would “create a highly visible model of interracial cooperation” that could be recreated in other areas of American life.²⁸ Throughout the decade, African American college students and athletes would play an integral role in the integration of America.

In 1960 African American students joined the Civil Rights Movement in larger numbers than ever before. The sit-in movement began on February 1, 1960, when four black college students from North Carolina A & T sat down at the lunch counter of a Woolworth’s department store in Greensboro. The decision to order coffee at Woolworth’s counter, knowing full well they would be refused service, was a conscious decision to protest discrimination. The following day, 29 students from North Carolina A & T joined them. Within days, the sit-ins spread across the state and across the South as black students became civil rights activists, physically challenging segregation, “placing their bodies directly in the way of Jim Crow.”²⁹ The sit-ins were followed by pickets, marches, and rallies, protesting the segregation of public space. These black students risked their lives in the face of violent white mobs and police who would not tolerate demonstrations in their towns.

In April 1960 black students met at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, to discuss how best to organize students nationally as the momentum of the

sit-in movement grew. The conference was organized by Ella Baker, who had worked for Dr. Martin Luther King in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). She encouraged students to form an organization that was founded on “group-centered leadership,” instead of being a “leader-centered group.” The students followed Baker’s advice and formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The students believed in direct confrontation and non-violence. Despite the strength of the youth-centered civil rights group, southern white colleges and universities remained largely segregated. In January 1961, Hannah’s Commission conducted an investigation and found that “almost half the state colleges and universities established for white students in the Southern and border states remain completely segregated.” There were no integrated schools in Alabama, South Carolina, and Mississippi.

Since the *Brown* decision, not a single black student had entered the University of Mississippi. At the beginning of the 1961 season Ole Miss’ lily-white squad and Michigan State’s team with fifteen black players remained undefeated through October. The University of Mississippi continued to abide by the unwritten code of not playing integrated teams since state legislators threatened to withdraw funds from schools that violated segregation. After Michigan State defeated Indiana in a 35-0 blowout, the Spartans moved ahead of the Rebels in both the AP and UPI polls. After learning that MSU moved ahead of the Rebels, *The Mississippian,*

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30 Ibid., 245-46.
Mississippi’s school newspaper criticized the pollsters and claimed the Spartans were an inferior team. The *Michigan State News*, responded:

> While MSU students hold pep rallies . . . Ole Miss Students burn the Associated Press in effigy. And now that the UPI has seen the light and dropped the Rebels down to the number two slot and moved the Spartans in, they will undoubtedly set an effigy of the UPI.  

As long as southern schools remained lily-white, the students of liberal northern universities questioned the reputation of segregated sports teams.

As James Meredith’s attempt to integrate the University of Mississippi played out, Jimmie Robertson of *The Mississippian* wrote to the *Michigan State News* to make clear that the students at Mississippi “would love to see the Rebels play one or two Big Ten teams each year. And on the other hand, we would like to see your Spartans,” and other Big Ten teams play southern squads. Yet, it was not the students that implemented the scheduling policy that adhered to segregated competition. Robertson acknowledged that Ole Miss faced three major problems scheduling games against top competition: the location of the school, resistance to play the Rebels because of their strong team, and “the race issue.” “We can’t play any teams which have Negro players,” Robertson lamented, “I feel this is ridiculous; so do the majority of the students at Ole Miss.” *The Mississippian* began campaigning to play integrated sports teams in 1959, but he continued, “The archaic thinking which prevails in our capital city makes this impossible.”

Finally, Robertson explained that the effigies were an expression of frustration, since in 1959 and 1960 Ole Miss finished number two in both polls.

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behind the integrated squads of Syracuse and then Minnesota.\(^{35}\) In 1959 Ole Miss finished 10-1 while Syracuse went undefeated. In 1960 Mississippi ran up a 10-0-1 mark, tying mediocre Louisiana State. However, both the AP and the UPI named Minnesota, which finished 8-2, as the National Champion. Clearly the pollsters felt the best teams were playing above the Mason-Dixon Line. Still, there was no coordinated effort by the media to encourage southern schools to integrate their athletic teams. In 1961, 1963, and 1964 both polls voted segregated teams as national champions.\(^{36}\) The media was less concerned about the racial makeup of college football teams than the quality of the teams.

Ironically, the week after the exchange between Mississippi and MSU students both teams lost. Nonetheless, it was clear that recruiting more black players than other coaches gave Daugherty a decisive advantage. Recruiting was central to Daugherty’s coaching philosophy. “Our biggest job,” Daugherty asserted, “is recruiting. The thing we do least is coach. Eighty percent of a winning team is material.”\(^{37}\) In 1961 black players made up nearly 20 percent of the athletes on the team.\(^{38}\) While MSU carried a large number of black players, 75 miles away the University of Michigan “maintained its one or two in spot performances.” Lawrence Casey, sports editor of the *Michigan Chronicle* took notice, suggesting that Daugherty would be “a good candidate for the NAACP’s annual Spingarn Award.”

After all, how many other white men were responsible for giving 15 scholarships to

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\(^{35}\) Ibid.


\(^{37}\) “Driving Man,” 74.

\(^{38}\) In 1961 MSU had 15 black players out of 77 total players on the team’s official roster. *Souvenir Program*, Michigan State Spartans versus Stanford Indians, October 7, 1961.
African American students at a predominantly white school? Casey argued, “True, it’s a pretty fair distance from the cleat-scarred football turf to the civic-minded NAACP, but Duffy through his liberal employment of Negro players has ably bridged the gap.” Ron Hatcher, Herman Johnson, Ernie Clark and Jim Bobbitt were among the most important players on the team. Casey concluded, “We’re not saying the answer to a winning team is the Negro player, but there’s no doubt they help, eh, Duffy?”

Heading into the 1962 season it was clear the Spartans would have to rebuild. The team struggled to finish with a winning record, ending the season at 5-4. In the face of on-field struggles, Daugherty’s program continued to receive national attention for playing African Americans when the AP reported that MSU “has probably the largest delegation of Negro players in the history of major college football.” Slowly other coaches began to realize the benefit of recruiting black players. Ohio State’s Woody Hayes contended that most coaches began playing black players not because they believed in the importance of equal opportunity regardless of color, but they believed in the importance of winning and the financial rewards that accompanied success. While speaking to a group of coaches at a clinic Hayes stated, “We had a Negro problem once, I know. That was in 1959, when we had no Negroes on the team and we lost four [conference] football games. I hope we never have a problem like that.”

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40 The AP’s story was reported in the Nation of Islam’s newspaper *Muhammad Speaks*. While black athletes were integrating MSU football at an accelerated pace, members of the NOI did not seek integration into American culture, and instead followed tenets of Black Nationalism, that for some required separation from whites. “MSU’s 17 Negro Players May Top Major Colleges in Football,” *Muhammad Speaks*, October 31, 1962.
Chalmers "Bump" Elliot were slow to play black athletes, Daugherty increased his recruitment of black players in 1962 and 1963, especially in the South.

The Spartans' climb back to the top was slow. The 1964 team finished 4-5, finishing sixth in the Conference. Nonetheless, while State's squad was inexperienced it was talented. Much of that talent came from the black players that migrated from the South. Of the 21 black players on MSU's team, 10 or 47.6 percent were from the South. African Americans represented over one quarter of the team's players. It was clear, however, Daugherty limited recruiting in the South almost exclusively to black players. Only three of MSU's white players were from the South. Equally important, Daugherty's recruitment of black players took place overwhelmingly outside of Michigan. Only 4 black players on the 1964 team were from Michigan, a drastic change from his previous teams.

Yet, even as Daugherty had firmly established the football program as a haven for black athletes, in 1964 Michigan State football alum J.C. Williams, who played for Clarence "Biggie" Munn from 1948 to 1950, wondered why there were no black coaches on the staff. When Williams asked about the possibility of having a black coach a few years earlier, Munn, serving as Athletic Director, told him that "the Negro was not ready for positions of responsibility in coaching." Williams, writing on behalf of Lansing's People For A Humanitarian Democracy, informed Munn that his group was "intent on knowing your position on this issue, because it is our intention to contact all Big Ten schools" and if "Negroes are not being hired in all aspects of physical education jobs, then we intend to picket all Big Ten football

42 African American players hailed from Indiana (1), Louisiana (1), Mississippi (1), New Jersey (1), New York (1), North Carolina (1) Ohio (2), Pennsylvania (2), South Carolina (3), Texas (2), and Virginia (2). Band Day Program, Michigan State v. So. California, October 3, 1964.
games, encourage all Negro athletes not to participate” and encourage fans not to buy tickets. Williams and his supporters planned to employ disruptive tactics by tying up traffic before the game, interrupting the halftime festivities and making their grievances known to the media “to call attention to this national disgrace where coaches and athletic directors exploit our Negro boys by riding their backs . . . to enhance their own positions.”43

Williams was convinced that Michigan State did not deserve any special credit for playing a large number of African American players because “Naturally, all Negro players get an opportunity to play, because, in general, they are the best players and therefore, the coaches have no other choice and couldn’t be prejudiced, for he knows which side his economic ‘bread’ is buttered on.”44 Shocked by Williams’ letter, Munn responded, “You know as well as I do that your letter is not true. There has never been any discrimination in any way in the Athletic Department.” Munn further argued that “of all places Michigan State University has fostered and encouraged the young Negroes to develop their potential and get their college degree. . . .”45 Munn added emphatically, Michigan State was “the University that has cooperated the most with your race. This is the story.”46

Williams did not relent. He wanted Munn to acknowledge that there was discrimination in the Athletic Department. “Out of all this so-called democracy at Michigan State,” Williams wrote, “has your PE department hired any Negroes on a

43 JC Williams to Clarence Munn, 27 July 1964, Clarence L. Munn Papers, UA 17.75, Box 767, Folder 58, Michigan State University Archives and Historical Collections (hereafter, MSU Archives).
44 Ibid.
45 “Biggie” Munn to J.C. Williams, 29 July 1964, Clarence L. Munn Papers, UA 17.75, Box 767, Folder 58, MSU Archives.
46 “Biggie” Munn to J.C. Williams, 8 August 1964, Clarence L. Munn Papers, UA 17.75, Box 767, Folder 58, MSU Archives.
permanent basis?" The former player believed that playing talented black athletes meant very little. He believed it was hypocritical to call college football democratic since blacks were only used in playing positions. Williams stated,

You talk about coaching so called "All-Americans," but what is so great about this? [sic] Let's be honest, the more "All-Americans" a coach has the more his prestige is enhanced. This is precisely the point. The Negro athlete [sic] has given a lot to MSU to enhance the egos of various coaches, but what have the coaches done for them other than use them?

Williams grew frustrated with Munn's examples of temporary positions given to former black players. Williams wanted to know exactly when Munn would hire black coaches on a permanent basis. While it is unclear whether Williams ever led a protest of Michigan State football, this would not be the last time the Athletic Department would have to face questions of discrimination against African Americans.

While some African Americans like J.C. Williams found Michigan State to be guilty of discrimination, many whites were equally disapproving of Daugherty's liberal policy toward integration. In addition to recruiting black players from the South, Daugherty played a few Hawaiian athletes throughout his career. In 1965, kicker Richard Kenney and fullback Bob Apisa were major parts of the Spartans' success. With a large contingent of African Americans and a few standout Hawaiians, Daugherty's teams endured racial epithets from a number of angles, including sportswriters. In Jim Murray's column, "A Doff to Duff," he described what many could hear in the stands or in the press box at a Michigan State football game:

47 J.C. Williams to Clarence Munn, 10 August 1964, Clarence L. Munn Papers, UA 17.75, Box 767, Folder 58, MSU Archives.
Who peels the bananas for your first string line, Duff? I hear Tarzan is your chief scout. And you found your top linebacker on top of the Empire State Building with Fay Wray under one arm. . . . I hear your toughest recruiting fight was the San Diego Zoo. . . . And if there was a banana strike, one-third of your team would starve. . . . How do you feed that crowd, Duff? Throw the food in and slam the cage quick?

To bolster his point, Murray even compared the Spartans to heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali, who toyed with his opponents using his “rope-a-dope,” where he would rest against the ropes absorbing punches, while the contender wore himself out. Murray asked Daugherty, “And, above all, Duff, don’t treat ‘em like Cassius Clay. Don’t punt on first down, give ‘em the ball and just laugh at them.”

A number of alumni questioned Daugherty for using so many black players. Daugherty recalled one alumni meeting where in the middle of his speech someone yelled, “Hey, Duff, how many niggers are you gonna start this year?” Daugherty questioned the manhood of the racist who was willing to yell an epithet in the back of the room, but unwilling to step forward and be identified. The room fell silent and then Daugherty explained that it was his policy to “play the best players, whether they happened to be all black or all white.” At another gathering, one alumnus threatened the coach, “Duffy, you’ve been using a lot of niggers lately. You know, the minute you start four or five of them in the same backfield, you’ve lost me.” Daugherty looked the man straight in the eye and said, “Then I’ve lost you right now,” and with that he left the man’s home. Daugherty played African Americans to win, not to be known as a civil rights activist. Nonetheless, he risked his career by recruiting so many black players. What if his “experiment” had failed? It was one thing to play a few black players here and there, but to start more black players than whites, as he did.

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49 Daugherty, Duffy, 29-30.
in with his 1965 defense, was unprecedented. At the beginning of the season, the only question that remained for Daugherty was whether it would work.

Twenty-three African Americans made the 1965 team, a new high for Spartan football. Not only were there more blacks than ever before, but they stood out as top playmakers as well. Among those starting on defense were Charles "Bubba" Smith, George Webster, Charles Thornhill, Jim Summers, Jess Phillips and Harold Lucas.\(^{50}\) Willie Ray Smith, Bubba Smith’s father and head football coach of the all-black Charlton-Pollard High, had a lot to do with Daugherty’s success recruiting black players in Texas. After meeting Daugherty at a coaching clinic in Dallas in 1960, Smith and the Spartan coach developed a level of trust that produced an assembly line of talent that stretched all the way from Beaumont, Texas, to East Lansing. By 1966 seven black athletes from Charlton-Pollard were at MSU, including Smith’s youngest son, Lawrence.\(^{51}\) In fact, the city of Beaumont became a “football factory” for professional football; in 1972 fifteen black players represented the city in the NFL, although not all played for Willie Ray Smith. Smith’s aim was always to “send as many as possible to college on football scholarships,” not to make pro football players out of his kids.\(^{52}\)

For Bubba Smith and the dozens of other blacks who left their segregated hometowns for East Lansing, the trip north must have been both exhilarating and frightening. As Bubba prepared to leave Beaumont, one of his father’s assistant coaches predicted, “You’ll never make it up there with the big boys. Those corn-fed


\(^{52}\) “Texas town is a football ‘factory,’” *Newsday*, January 9, 1972.
white boys will lynch your fat ass without your pappy.” When a predominantly white crowd shouted “Kill, Bubba, Kill!” Smith became a campus hero and an animalized figure at the same time. The command eerily resembled the same order one would give a dog. While Smith was accepted on the field, he was refused an apartment in East Lansing because he was black. Constantly reminded of their skin color, Smith and his black teammates were a racially conscious group. “We knew it was the first time so many blacks had been on one team,” Bubba recalled.

Most of the African American players on State’s 1965 and 1966 teams came to MSU because so many schools, particularly in the South, did not recruit blacks even in the mid-1960s. George Webster went to school at Westside High, a segregated school in Anderson, South Carolina. When Webster first became a starter in 1964 he changed the way Michigan State played defense. Daugherty even invented an entirely new position, “roverback,” for Webster to take advantage of his lateral speed and tackling skills. Webster played from sideline to sideline, disrupting the opposing offense on virtually every play. But even Webster’s immense talent was not enough for Clemson University, only seventeen miles from Anderson, to recruit him. Clemson head football coach Frank Howard, born and raised in Alabama, once said on television, “I’ll never have a nigra at Clemson.” Ironically it was Howard, who knew Daugherty, who suggested Webster look at Michigan State.

As with Bubba Smith, living in an integrated town for the first time completely changed Webster’s life. Webster was the first African American in

53 Smith, Kill, Bubba, Kill!, 67.
55 Celizic, The Biggest Game of Them All, 124.
57 Celizic, The Biggest Game of Them All, 89.
Anderson to go to college. Football gave Webster choices most African Americans
did not have. “Football has enabled me to go to college,” Webster explained. Like
Daugherty he “wouldn’t have been able to otherwise.” Playing football in the Big
Ten made Webster rethink his future. “For one thing, I never went to school or
played athletics with white kids before and was a little apprehensive at first, even a
little scared,” Webster revealed. After visiting Indiana, Minnesota, and even Wake
Forest and North Carolina, Webster chose Michigan State because he found the
people to be friendly. After living in East Lansing, Webster wanted to remain in the
North, where it was “much easier living for a Negro” and play professional football
so he could help kids in underprivileged neighborhoods. Most importantly, Webster
realized his athletic gift gave him the chance to ride the elevator of success all the
way to the top, only to send it back down so others could benefit from his position.58
Webster realized his dream and played in the NFL for ten years. He is proof that
recruiting African Americans did not mean improving only one athlete’s life; the
integration of Michigan State football created a cycle of young African Americans
using their college educations to raise the status of their families and the black
community.

Just as Frank Howard pointed Webster to Michigan State, another coach from
the South convinced Charles Thornhill of Roanoke, Virginia, to play for Daugherty.
Thornhill was an exceptional athlete in every sense of the word. He may have been
the best athlete Roanoke had ever seen. By the end of his senior year in 1962,
Thornhill was the only running back to gain over 1,000 yards in each of his four

58 George Webster player file, MSU SIR.
seasons at Addison High. In fact, local white citizens came to watch Thornhill compete against other all-black high schools. Thornhill recalled at his last high school game, “There were eight thousand whites on one side of the field and eight thousand blacks on the other side.” After leading the city in scoring, the Roanoke Touchdown Club put race aside and Thornhill became the first African American to receive a trophy from the segregated organization.

By the end of his last season the talented back had all but decided he was going to Notre Dame until Paul “Bear” Bryant, head football coach at Alabama and Daugherty’s good friend, gave a guest speech at the Roanoke Touchdown Club awards banquet. Thornhill, like so many African American athletes began thinking about playing at Michigan State after watching the team on television. Still, it was only after Bryant called Daugherty that Thornhill really considered playing in East Lansing. Although Bryant still did not play African Americans, his legendary status carried a great deal of weight with Thornhill. “When Bear spoke to you, it was like God speaking,” Thornhill declared, “You did what he said.” In addition, State’s reputation for playing African Americans led the black community in Roanoke to encourage Thornhill to follow Bryant’s advice and sign with MSU. As long as coaches like Bryant and Frank Howard continued to send black athletes to Duffy Daugherty instead of their own programs, progress for African Americans in college football remained geographically limited.

59 Charles Thornhill player file, MSU SIR.
60 Celizic, The Biggest Game of Them All, 74.
61 Thornhill player file, MSU SIR.
62 Thornhill player file, MSU SIR; Dave Dye, “MSU’s Thornhill is Tough, Just Like His ‘Mad Dog’ Dad,” The Detroit News, September 15. 2005.
63 Charles Thornhill player file, MSU SIR.
While Thornhill, Smith, and Webster anchored the best defense in the country, State’s offense thrived on the spectacular playmaking of end (now referred to as a wide-receiver) Eugene Washington of La Porte, Texas, and runningback Clinton Jones, a Cleveland, Ohio, native. For Washington, Michigan State truly was “The Promiseland” compared to La Porte. “I left because I wanted to be a full American citizen.” In his Texas hometown, “Everything was segregated and the colleges were a part of it. I’m quite certain that if I had gone to the University of Texas and tried out for the football team, they wouldn’t have accepted me.”

In an offense designed around running the football, Washington made a name for himself as one of the premier receivers in the country. By the end of 1965, and only two years of varsity play, Washington had set new receiving records at MSU for career pass receptions and receiving yards, and the single-season record for receptions and receiving yards, among other single-game breakthroughs, he made three touchdown catches against Indiana.

Clinton Jones grew up in a working-class neighborhood on the east side of Cleveland. At Cathedral High School Jones was better known as a track star in the hurdles than as a football player. After being recruited by Ohio State’s Woody Hayes, Jones visited East Lansing and developed a relationship with the coaching staff. Jones, a devout Catholic, found a special connection with assistant coach Wayne Fontes. “He gave me that spiritual aspect I needed. He had compassion for a sensitive kid like I was,” Jones stated. Just as Fontes served as a mentor to Jones,

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65 Gene Washington player file, MSU SIR.
Jones was a role model to young people as a member of the Big Brother program in Lansing. Bud Wilkinson, who coached Oklahoma to three National Titles in the 1950s, wrote in a national column that Jones was “a young man who totally epitomizes America-our nation's unparalleled opportunity and its balancing of quality of responsibility.”

Michigan State's black athletes were acutely aware of their status as models of success in the African American community.

The 1965 Michigan State team shattered the myth that you could not win by playing more blacks than whites. After defeating their first six opponents, Sports Illustrated suggested, “It would appear that the only way to keep the Spartans from the Rose Bowl would be to have Northwestern, Iowa, and Indiana play them simultaneously.” When the Spartans held Notre Dame to minus 12 yards rushing in a 12-3 win, it marked the third time that season the Spartan defense held opponents to negative yards on the ground; the other two victims were Michigan (-51 yards) and Ohio State (-12 yards).

Notre Dame's head coach Ara Parseghian claimed, “I don't recall anything like this before.” The success of the 1965 team rested on Daugherty's ability to infuse talent that other coaches did not pursue. "Duffy Daugherty," the Michigan Chronicle's Lawrence Casey wrote, "is getting a lot of the

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68 John Lardner first suggested there was a “50 percent color line” in major league baseball in 1956. See “The Old Emancipator-II,” Newsweek, April 9, 1956, 84.
70 Amazingly, the Spartans also held Northwestern to 7 yards rushing and Iowa to just 1 yard on the ground.
second-guessers or Monday-morning quarterbacks off his tail with his liberal
treatment of those 23 Negro (count 'em-23) players."72

Michigan State’s undefeated streak ended in a 12-14 upset by UCLA in the
Rose Bowl. The Spartans perfect season got away, but it did not erase the team’s
record-breaking performances and the remarkable achievements by its star athletes.
Eight Spartans made All-Big Ten first teams, five of whom were African Americans
and four, Webster, Jones, Washington, and Smith, were selected by both the AP and
the UPI. Duffy Daugherty was named Coach of the Year by a number of media
outlets, including the *Football Writers Association, The Sporting News,* and the *New
York Daily News.* Despite UCLA’s upset over the Spartans, Daugherty finally won a
National Championship, voted by the UPI and the Football Writers Association.73

The success of integrated football at Michigan State took place against a
backdrop of urban race riots. The Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Act
(1965) could not change the attitudes of northern whites who wanted their
neighborhoods to remain white and southern whites who continued to fight for
complete segregation. For six consecutive days in August in 1965, Watts, California,
became a war zone after white police officers were excessively physical with an
African American detainee. African Americans responded by throwing bricks at
white-owned businesses, looting those stores, and overturning cars. The “Watts riot”
spread over forty-five square miles, destroyed an estimated $200 million of property,
resulted in the arrest of 4,000 people, and left 34 dead.74 Urban violence permeated

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73 While there was no “official” National Champion, the Spartans were voted by these two outlets
while Alabama finished first in the AP.
the urban North for the next three years. From 1965 to 1968, half a million African Americans participated in three hundred outbursts in cities like Detroit, Newark, and Chicago.\textsuperscript{75}

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\caption{Duffy Daugherty on the cover of \textit{Time}, October 8, 1956.}
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\textsuperscript{75} Dierenfield, \textit{The Civil Rights Movement}, 124.
The continued migration of African Americans to urban areas increased the amount of contact between blacks and whites in the North. Between 1940 and 1965 approximately 4 million blacks left the South for the North. From 1940 to 1960 Lansing’s African American population increased from approximately 1,600 to nearly 6,750. Two days after Martin Luther King was “nearly stoned to death” while marching in Chicago, violence erupted in Lansing after a fight between black and white youths. Racial tensions finally boiled over on August 7, 1966, three days after the Lansing school board approved school boundary realignment and the busing of black and white students in the city’s three high schools to achieve “greater racial

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balance.” 77 African Americans lashed out because Lansing was, in the words of James L. Schutes, Executive Director of the Capitol Area Economic Opportunity Committee, a city of “unequal job opportunities, scarcity of housing and severe sub-standard housing conditions and closing of already inadequate recreational facilities.” 78

While the city of Lansing confronted the demons of de facto segregation, the Spartan football team was held up as a model of successful integration. By 1966 the Spartans were compared not only to the greatest teams in college football history, but also to all-black schools. “When the Spartans come out of the tunnel for pre-game or half-time warmups,” Michigan Chronicle writer Lawrence Casey observed, “sorta looks like Grambling or Florida A & M, don’t they?” 79 The 1966 squad returned 23 lettermen from the National Championship team, and a total of 18 blacks, 61 percent of who were from the South. 80 The most significant change from 1965 to 1966 was the insertion of black players in positions of leadership. George Webster and Clinton Jones were named co-captains and for the first time in team history, the Spartans had an African American starting at quarterback.

Like many of his black teammates, Jimmy Raye had never played against white athletes while growing up in Fayetteville, North Carolina, but that did not

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80 Interestingly, the Michigan Chronicle included State’s three Hawaiian players and African American players as the “tan stars” returning to the 1966 squad. This suggests that the Hawaiian players, who also traveled far from home and were raised in a completely different culture, may have identified more with their black teammates than the white players. See “Tan Aces Sprinkle MSU ’66 Roster,” Michigan Chronicle, September 10, 1966.
prevent Duffy Daugherty from offering the quarterback a scholarship. Even though Raye wanted to go to North Carolina State, the University of North Carolina or Wake Forest, “Michigan State was the only Big Ten School that offered me a scholarship,” he explained.  

Equally important, Daugherty offered him a scholarship to play quarterback at a time when most coaches were reluctant to hand over the most important position on the field to an African American. Raye would prove to be an example of excellent leadership, breaking down stereotypes that blacks could not handle the pressure of making decisions and snap judgments. Of the thirteen black quarterbacks at predominantly white schools, Michigan State had two — Raye and backup Eric Marshall.

The Spartans opened 1966 with a “soul-brother backfield—three Negroes and a Hawaiian.” Playing Raye, Clinton Jones, Dwight Lee and Bob Apisa and throwing mostly to Gene Washington meant entrusting the entire offense to a group of players that did not include a white ball-carrier. In addition, Michigan State’s defense went well beyond breaking the “50 percent color barrier” by starting eight African Americans on defense. When Duffy Daugherty called out all eight names in the Fall, Bubba Smith thought to himself, “Emancipation at Michigan State had

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arrived.” When MSU’s defense huddled, with only three white players, for the first time in their lives Pat Gallinagh, Nick Jordan, and Phil Hoag were in the minority. Duffy Daugherty continued to challenge the boundaries of integration, and even obstinate white alumni could not argue with the results.

The Spartans picked up right where they left off in 1965, winning their first nine games and outscoring their opponents 283 to 89. Heading into the last game of the season the Spartans were not the only undefeated team in the country, as Alabama and Notre Dame also had perfect records. The buildup for State’s final game against Notre Dame was unprecedented since the Fighting Irish were ranked number one and the Spartans number two in both major polls; it was the first time that the top two teams were meeting so late in the season. In the minds of most sportswriters and football fans, “The Poll Bowl” or “The Game of the Century” would determine the National Championship.

The last time Notre Dame won a National Title was in 1953, the same year it finally integrated. Yet, the integration of Notre Dame football was a slow process. For decades, Notre Dame was arguably the most successful football program in the country without black players. Unlike Michigan State which seemed to need black players to win, Notre Dame was never in such a position since they drew talented white players from all across the country. Although, it had been thirteen years since the Irish had last won a National Championship, they did not attempt to follow the liberal policy that Daugherty operated. In 1966 the racial makeup of both teams was drastically different. Notre Dame had only 1 black player, Alan Page, compared to

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84 Smith, Kill, Bubba, Kill!, 84.
Michigan State’s 18. Notre Dame head coach Ara Parseghian found it difficult to recruit black players. “The school was lily white,” he explained, “Trying to find a black athlete who was academically qualified and was willing to accept Catholicism as it was in those days, at an all-male school, was a problem.”86 It was not just Notre Dame’s football team that failed to recruit African Americans, the school itself had only approximately 60 black students.

Terrence Moore, a sports columnist for the *Atlanta Constitution*, grew up in South Bend in a large extended black family. “Most of my relatives weren’t Notre Dame fans,” Moore recalled. When his family got together to watch the game against Michigan State he remembered,

but except for me, my mother, and my two brothers, everybody was cheering for Michigan State. It was the racial issue. Michigan State had a black quarterback. Most of its starting defense was made up of black guys. Notre Dame had Alan Page and that was it. So essentially, to my family, it was the white boys at Notre Dame against the black Michigan State team. In the black community Notre Dame was seen as a racist institution. And much of this came from the makeup of its sports teams.87

The game affirmed that even in sports, America was still very much divided along racial lines. “The Game of the Century,” proved that Michigan State’s football team was more progressive than the most celebrated football program in the country.

“The Poll Bowl” proved to have a larger cultural significance as millions around the country watched “the white boys at Notre Dame against the black Michigan State team.”88 Restrictions on television appearances initially posed a problem for ABC. The game was scheduled to be a regional telecast since Notre

86 Celizic, *The Biggest Game of Them All*, 106.
88 Ibid.
Dame had used up its allotment of nationally televised games. Letters and telegrams flooded the offices of the NCAA and ABC to make an exception and broadcast the game nationally. ABC claimed it received 50,000 letters.\textsuperscript{89} Even whites in the South clamored to see the biggest game of the year. The \textit{Baltimore Afro-American} reported:

A Dixie football fan has asked a Federal Court . . . to provide better games on Southern TV screens, asserting that the South’s aversion to civil rights appears to be influencing the selection of football programs shown in the area. S. Robert Tralins of Miami contends “that regions in this country that do not follow (Johnson) administration policies” may some day wake up and find themselves watching Slippery Rock (a small Pennsylvania school which thrives on being the butt of athletic jokes) . . . This year’s Spartans could cause something of a complex in Dixieland, what with their lineup that has a much stronger resemblance to Morgan or Florida A and M, than to Princeton or Alabama.\textsuperscript{90}

The most hyped game in football history forced prejudiced whites, even in the South, to admit that Michigan State was one of the best teams in the country, thanks in large part to its exceptional black players. Ultimately, the NCAA television committee gave in and millions across the country tuned in. This was a watershed moment for television companies that realized there was a great demand, and potential profit, in showcasing games nationally. For many southerners it was the first time they became consumers of an integrated American culture.

Notre Dame’s pep rally the Thursday night before the game was unusual because the school normally held rallies for home games, not away games. More than 4,500 students and fans attended a pep rally that lasted for two hours.\textsuperscript{91} Bubba Smith was hung in effigy next to a sign that read “LYNCH ‘EM.” Coaches and athletes were often hung in effigy by the students of opposing schools, but hanging

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item[90] “And he’s you know what,” \textit{Baltimore Afro-American}, October 18, 1966.
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Smith in effigy next to a sign that encouraged a symbolic lynching illuminated a culture of white supremacy at Notre Dame. Those in attendance were overwhelmingly white and supported a team that might as well have been all white since the Irish played only black player. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries lynching was an expression and an enforcement of white supremacy in the South, but the powerful memory of mob rule was not lost on African Americans in the 1960s when their churches were bombed or they were clubbed and hosed by police, or stoned by white crowds. Notre Dame’s rally reinforced a shared vision of a community that sanctioned segregation. In the minds of many at Notre Dame, a victory over “the black Michigan State team” would be a triumph of white power.92

On November 19, 1966, over 80,000 fans packed a Spartan Stadium designed to hold 76,000 people.93 For the thousands in attendance and the millions watching across the country, the game yielded an unsatisfying 10-10 tie. The game ended in controversy when Ara Parseghian elected to run out the clock. With 1:10 remaining and the ball on their own 30 yard line, Parseghian did not want to turn the ball over and give the Spartans a chance to win.94 As the clock ticked away, Bubba Smith knew the Spartans chances of winning the National Title were slipping away. He stood in the huddle and said, “Do you think we’re going win the National Championship even if they run the clock out? We got too many niggers on this team to win the National Championship.”95 While the Spartans’ season was over since the Big Ten had an odd rule of not allowing teams to play in the Rose Bowl in

92 See Figure 3.
93 Stabley, The Spartans, 240.
95 Celizic, The Biggest Game of Them All, 300.
consecutive seasons, the next week the Fighting Irish destroyed USC 51-0. Both the AP and UPI voted Notre Dame number one in the final polls, followed by MSU. The only undefeated team in the country, Alabama, finished third.

If Michigan State had too many black players, as Bubba Smith suggested, some wondered if Alabama and their segregated opponents influenced the voters. Bear Bryant firmly believed playing segregated opponents cost him the National Championship. When Alabama finished first in the polls in 1964 Jim Murray questioned the legitimacy of the ranking, “National Champions of what? The Confederacy? This team wins the Front-of-the-Bus championship every year.” In the eyes of most sportswriters, the 1966 Crimson Tide did not have the same level of talent as the Irish or Spartans, nor did they play nearly as difficult a schedule.

Finally in 1966, Bryant admitted, “A few years ago we had segregation problems. But now, we like to ask the help of you fellas up above in the North, who have been our critics, to help us get games with the Big Ten, the Big Eight, the Pacific Coast.” Although a black player did not take the field under Bryant until 1971, in 1967 Alabama began recruiting black players in the state and even had five African Americans tryout for “walk-on” positions. Murray offered Bryant recruiting advice,

So when you see Duffy Daugherty showing up in the cotton patches holding out a Michigan State letter of intent to a kid who’s carrying a plow home on his back, say ‘Wait a minute, Duff. That boy’s an Alabaman!’ And if Duffy says, ‘But he’s colored, Bear!’ Just tell him, ‘Our scoreboard’s color blind,

pardner. From now on, we don’t put pictures on it, just numbers.’ And then you’ll really be No. 1, Bear. No questions asked.”

Daugherty’s path-breaking recruiting of black players out of the South and the subsequent success he had playing African Americans proved to coaches all across the country, that star black athletes could lift a program to prominence. The achievements of Daugherty’s teams in 1965 and 1966, led predominantly by black athletes, demonstrated that not only could African Americans play well with whites, but that black athletes could be respected as leaders of an integrated team. “On most integrated teams,” Bubba Smith felt, “there’s always a little dissension, but not at MSU. We’re together like a family.”

George Webster echoed Smith’s sentiments: “It was a melting pot team. It went back to the family unit. It was amazing that prejudice didn’t exist with us, even though it was prevalent everywhere else.” Assistant coach Henry Bullough was proud to say, “I’ve never seen a team that was more close and cared for each other than those teams with George Webster, and that carried over on game days.” Not only did the players get along, they were on a mission to prove a fully integrated team could win at the highest level. “It was us against the world,” Webster continued, “Duffy made a statement to the sports world when he brought in all those blacks.” The coaching world began to take notice.


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103 Celizic, The Biggest Game of Them All, 122.
Daugherty fired back, “I’m not talking about Michigan, I’m talking about Texas.” After Michigan State’s 1965 and 1966 teams compiled a combined 19-1-1 record, including a share of the National Championship, Daugherty’s formula for success was clear. After the 1966 season, teams across the South began recruiting black players from their respective home states, making it increasingly more difficult for Daugherty to sign the best black players in the South.

The University of Houston’s Bill Yeoman was the first coach in the Deep South to follow Daugherty’s example. Yeoman, who was an assistant of Daugherty’s from 1954 to 1961, helped break the Southwest Conference’s (SWC) color barrier when runningback Warren McVea joined the Cougars in 1965. Yeoman made it clear why he was playing African Americans, “You can play football without Negro boys,” he said, “but if you want to win you’d better have three or four.” By 1966 southern football fans grew increasingly frustrated when players from their home state left the South. When Atlanta native Jack Pitts signed with MSU in 1966 the Atlanta Constitution’s headline read “Tech, Georgia Fumble; Michigan State Scores.” The next season the Southeastern Conference (SEC) color bar fell when Nat Northington debuted with the University of Kentucky. While Maryland was the first team to integrate the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) in 1962, the rest of the Conference was slow to follow their lead. Wake Forest added two black players in

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104 Scott M. Reid, “Millions Watched the Texas-Arkansas Game in 1969,” The Orange County Register (California), December 23, 2005.
106 Pennington, Breaking the Ice: The Racial Integration of Southwest Conference Football, 25-33.
107 Kaine, “Black Players Integrating Colleges.”
1965, but not until 1971 did every ACC team have a black player and a year later for every SEC team.\textsuperscript{109}

However, southern teams did not drop their ban against black players simply because it would help them win. In 1967 the U.S. Justice Department warned the remaining segregated SEC programs to comply with the law or be faced with running a university without federal funds. Federal interference also forced racist administrators and athletic directors to think with their pocketbooks and cease Jim Crow seating at football games.\textsuperscript{110} Thus, a combination of federal intervention, the success of northern teams playing African Americans, and pressure from sportswriters like Jim Murray, pushed southern athletic departments to “cut Jim Crow.”

Examining the integration of Michigan State football under Duffy Daugherty allows us to better understand the tension between the North and the South during the Civil Rights Movement. It is clear that the progress of equality in the North had a direct influence on the South. African American access to higher education gave hope to southern blacks who, without their football talent, would not have had the opportunity to escape their Jim Crow communities. Michigan State’s teams in 1965 and 1966 were more successful than any previous Spartan squad because of the star black athletes Daugherty recruited from the South.


In the end, the unprecedented success of Daugherty’s fully integrated teams also figured in his demise. “Recruiting was a lot easier when schools in the North had the corner on black athletes,” Daugherty wrote in his autobiography. Daugherty never lost sight of the importance of playing African Americans. “I’m proud to say to say that Michigan State was a forerunner not only accepting but aggressively recruiting outstanding black-scholar athletes,” he said, “Once the doors in the South were opened it made things a lot more difficult.” Daugherty added, “I got out of coaching when [Bear] Bryant starting recruiting black kids.” When southern schools recruited black athletes it had a devastating effect on Daugherty’s winning percentage. In Daugherty’s last five seasons, from 1967 to 1972, the Spartans finished a combined 27-34-1, with only one winning season during that span. After his coaching career peaked in 1966, the pipeline of southern black talent dried up in East Lansing. While Daugherty’s ultimate goal was to win football games, in the process of recruiting southern blacks he became an agent for equality, and Michigan State football earned a reputation as a successful model of integration. However, by 1968 the reputation of Michigan State’s athletic program as an institution of equality began to be questioned by the least likely of all groups - - the black athletes themselves.

112 Barra, The Last Coach: A Life of Paul “Bear” Bryant, 371.
CHAPTER IV

"Black Fullback"

They cheer me in each alien stadium
like a horse that runs well,
but there is no affection in that mob yell.
The players show some teamwork,
and slap my hands for touchdowns,
but in the stadium I am one of the clowns.
I glory in the running and the money,
but I am still a thing to sell
like my forefathers
with the plantation bell.
-Manfred A. Carter

In the wake of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in April 1968, a white assistant football coach at Michigan State University claimed the death of the Civil Rights Movement’s greatest hero did not “have anything to do with practice.” In his mind, King’s death was irrelevant to tackling, running routes, and throwing a football. But the murder of the civil rights leader deeply affected the young black men who played football; it changed their priorities from participating in spring practice to joining the national mourning of the fallen icon. The MSU assistant coach’s comment typifies the insensitivity of many white coaches to the problems faced by African Americans, including their own football players.

King’s assassination traumatized America. Young blacks lashed out at a system that bound them to a life without choices. Applying Black Power principles of self-determination and self-help, African American students became leaders of the

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Civil Rights Movement, using disruptive tactics to gain liberation. Black students at Michigan State were dissatisfied, and it was nowhere more evident than in the delegation of black athletes, including twenty-four football players, who boycotted all athletic events for one day in April. Risking their athletic scholarships, these young men used their athletic talents as a bargaining chip for the advancement of not just black athletes, but all black people on campus.

By 1968, MSU had integrated its sports teams to the point where blacks were needed for their success. Mass resistance by black athletes would not have been effective at Michigan State without a critical mass of blacks to unify their stance. An increase in numbers meant a unified force of black athletes could gain collective power. Placed within the context of the Black Student Movement and increased activism by black athletes nationally, and despite public perceptions that head football coach Duffy Daugherty had transformed Michigan State University into “a good place” for blacks, Spartan athletes had legitimate grievances and their organized and non-violent demonstration drew attention to discrimination against blacks throughout college athletics.

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The athletic boycott at Michigan State did not happen in a vacuum. The 1968 boycott on MSU’s campus grew out of two important national shifts: the larger Black Student Movement and what was popularly called “The Revolt of the Black
By the late 1960s many black students subscribed to an ideology of Black Power which emphasized “creative disruption” to overthrow an oppressive system of racism by, in the words of Malcolm X, “any means necessary.” Black Power was an uncompromising alternative to the non-violent movement. The slogan also represented independence and, for some, separation from whites. As one black student put it, “They are talking about reforming the system, we are talking about destroying it.”

Black Power meant that blacks would have a sense of empowerment. On college campuses, where administrators, faculty, and trustees were overwhelmingly white and the black student population was small, blacks protested to gain a measure of political power. In 1967 and 1968, over ninety percent of black sit-ins took place on college campuses. College students fought institutional racism because self-definition could only come if blacks shared power positions on campus. These young men and women understood that to unlock blacks from poverty, education was the key.

As increasing numbers of students identified with Black Power, black athletes also began to adopt a more militant attitude. The revolt of black athletes grew out of the outspoken and confrontational style of individuals like Jim Brown, Bill Russell, and Muhammad Ali. Ali’s refusal to enter the Vietnam War in 1966 inspired young black athletes across the country. In October 1967, Harry Edwards, then a sociology

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instructor at San Jose State College, brought together amateur black athletes to form the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR), with a boycott of the 1968 Mexico City Olympics as their primary objective. As the Mexico City games drew closer, however, the momentum for a boycott dissipated as many black athletes were less willing to sacrifice their athletic goals and careers. In the end, the OPHR decided that black athletes could individually determine their own course of action.

Beneath the shadow of a failed boycott emerged an enduring symbol of Black Power and black pride on the Olympic victory stand. On October 16, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, two-hundred meter gold and bronze medalists respectively, took the podium, and with the Star-Spangled Banner playing in the background, bowed their heads in defiance and raised their black-gloved fists. Smith wore a black scarf around his neck, Carlos a string of beads; both carried their white Puma sneakers in hand displaying black socks on their feet. Smith explained the symbolism of their actions:

My raised right hand stood for the power in black America. Carlos’ raised left hand stood for the unity of black America. Together they formed an arch of unity and power. The black scarf around my neck stood for black pride. The black socks with no shoes stood for poverty in racist America. The totality of our effort was the regaining of black dignity.\(^7\)

This was not only a defining moment in the struggle of the black athletes, but of the Black Freedom Movement itself. Carlos and Smith’s demonstration proved that sports could be a forum for political expression when initiated by the athletes themselves.

Several months earlier, on April 5, 1968, fifteen-hundred marchers paused at the stop light at Kedzie Street on the East Lansing campus for a moment of silence in

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\(^7\) Edwards, The Revolt of the Black Athlete, 104.
remembrance of King. Some held signs that read, “Black is beautiful, so was King,” while others sang “We Shall Overcome.” As the procession continued, the lyrics changed when a group of black high school students chanted, “We shall burn it down.”

Although the march ended without violence, the change in lyrics reflected not merely the changing mood of African Americans, but the turbulence and violence between blacks and whites on college campuses all across the country following King’s death.

The death of Martin Luther King, Jr. was a watershed moment for American universities. Black students challenged administrators to do more to desegregate all levels of their respective institutions. Many administrators had to admit that they had not done enough to improve race relations on campus. Michigan State University President John Hannah confessed that, “Michigan State University, like all its sister universities, and indeed all of America, has done less than could have been done to correct the injustices, the abuses, the prejudices that mar the image of our country.”

Harry Edwards explained, “The Black student revolt switched from an emphasis upon confrontations in segregated areas of American life to the college campus.” College campuses became the battlegrounds where blacks assaulted institutional racism.

Addressing mourning students, Michigan State professor of educational psychology and King’s colleague in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), Robert L. Green, claimed that black athletes had “made Michigan State University what it is today,” and pointed out that there were still no black coaches in

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8 Trinka Cline, “1,500 in memorial march for King,” State News (East Lansing), April 8, 1968.
9 Editorial, “In facing this most urgent task,” State News (East Lansing), April 12, 1968.
Green, along with the Black Student Alliance (BSA) and hundreds of other black students, stormed the administration building, sitting in the stairwells and standing on the outside steps. They presented a list of demands to Hannah, including an increase in the number of black students attending MSU; more black faculty, coaches, and counselors; and the addition of Afro-American courses in the curriculum.

Hannah, who also served as Chairman of the United States Commission on Civil Rights from 1957 to 1969, promised to “take a look” at the list and stated that he agreed with the proposals in principle. This demonstration was not unique to MSU. All over the country BSAs and black faculty urged administrators to take the proper steps to improve race relations on campus. However, no other school had the U.S. Civil Rights Chairman as its president. How Hannah responded to black students would send a message to universities and black students all across the country.

In late March 1968, pressured by Professor Robert Green and the BSA, Hannah had created the Committee of Sixteen to improve race relations on campus. On April 26, 1968, a day after the black athletes’ boycott, the committee issued its report. Hannah called it “one of the most significant things that has ever happened to the university.”

The committee’s goals for studying and developing a Civil Rights plan were organized around two questions:

1. What is appropriate for Michigan State University to do now and in the years ahead “to make a useful contribution to the solution of the

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problems that beset our society in the area generally referred to as Civil Rights?"

2. How should Michigan State University proceed in this effort?

The committee recommended that the University conduct "an all-out effort" to increase African American student enrollment; "aggressively search" for African American faculty to be placed in all colleges and departments; make a "conscious and continuous effort" to increase the number of African Americans in administrative positions; increase the number of minorities in the administrative-professional, clerical, technical and operational, staffs; and establish a Center For Race and Urban Affairs. The committee urged the President to implement its recommendations as soon as possible.\(^\text{14}\) One result was the establishment of the Center For Race and Urban Affairs, with Dr. Robert L. Green as its director. The Committee’s report provides the context within which President Hannah moved to eliminate discrimination from campus and increase the recruitment of African Americans at all levels at the University.

Hannah and Athletic Director Clarence "Biggie" Munn also offered Don Coleman, State’s first black All-American football player (1951), a position as an assistant football coach and professor of physical education.\(^\text{15}\) Yet the addition of Coleman as State’s first black assistant football coach was not enough to prevent the black athletes from walking out on football practice. Organized by football players Charles Bailey, Frank Taylor, LaMarr Thomas, and several others, African American athletes held a closed meeting in the basement of Dr. Green’s home to discuss their


\(^{15}\) James Spaniolo, "Alliance delivers grievances to University administration," State News (East Lansing), April 6, 1968.
course of action. On April 26, 1968 a group of thirty-eight black athletes threatened to boycott all athletic events for the year if their six grievances were not addressed by the athletic department. Thomas, the acting spokesman of the proposed boycott, stated that the black athletes were protesting against discriminatory practices by the athletic department. The six grievances were:

- Michigan State does not have and must recruit black coaches for all sports at the University, such as basketball, baseball, track, and swimming. We feel that one or two black coaches are insufficient.
- The Athletic Department discourages black students from participating in certain sports, especially baseball.
- Michigan State University does not employ black people in Jenison Field House, the Intramural Building, the ticket office and the Ice Arena in non-professional positions. We find this to be deplorable and no longer acceptable.
- Burt Smith, the athletic counselor, is under undue pressure attempting to assist all of the athletes in academic and personal problems. A black athletic counselor should be employed to assist in counseling. This need is highlighted by the fact that many black athletes fail.
- The academic counseling provided for black athletes is designed to place them in courses that will maintain their eligibility and not to enable them to graduate at the end of the four year period. Athletes are forced to take non-academic courses (such as physical education) when they need academic courses to graduate.
- Michigan State University has never elected a black cheerleader.

Conscious of the larger movement of black athletes protesting in America, MSU's athletes also announced that they were in full support of boycotting the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City.

Hannah was taken by surprise when he learned of the threatened boycott. His immediate response indicated that he felt the grievances presented were not

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16 The date of this meeting is unclear, but journalist Ron Johnson confirmed the meeting did occur previous to the presentation of grievances in “The Struggle of the Black Athlete,” The Grapevine Journal (East Lansing), May 9, 1972.

unreasonable. "The University will move as fast as it can in this area," Hannah urged, "But you don’t like it very well when they tell you to do it or else."¹⁸ Like it or not, these athletes were no longer willing to participate in an athletic system that only had room for black bodies.

These militant and vocal African American athletes threatened the social order and challenged the political power held by whites at the University. Many alumni were outraged by the black athletes’ stance and wrote to Hannah. Irritated by the athletes’ demonstration, alumnus Edward Soergel revoked his football season tickets, explaining to Hannah, "I can’t support a University or an Administration that doesn’t have the guts to stand up to a minority group of any students, such as the group of ‘Black Athletes,’ that are calling the shots for the Athletic Dept."¹⁹

Many whites simply could not understand why black athletes were complaining. After all, to critics like Soergel, had sports not been good to the Negro? "It wouldn’t be so bad if this group was poor and downtrodden," Soergel wrote, "but these athletes are the privileged few of the whole student body."²⁰ Such sentiments quickly spread to alumni, athletic directors, and coaches all across the country.

According to Sports Illustrated’s Jack Olsen, one unidentified university president agreed with Soergel’s perspective: "Sure, the Negroes helped our image, but don’t forget they got built up too. Every one of them that’s been here got out of the ghetto. Four of our colored alumni are playing pro basketball right now, and seven are in pro

¹⁸ Ibid.
¹⁹ Edward Soergel to John Hannah, 19 May 1968, John Hannah Papers, UA 2.1.12, Box 55, Folder 45, Michigan State University Archives and Historical Collections (hereafter, MSU Archives).
²⁰ Ibid.
football . . . It was profitable both ways."\(^{21}\) The Lansing \textit{State Journal} echoed this university president’s point by listing the accomplishments of black athletes at MSU: “Michigan State long has been noted for outstanding Negro athletes, particularly in football and track.”\(^{22}\) By raising the achievements of a select few black athletes at MSU, the \textit{State Journal} ignored the serious nature of the athletes’ grievances.

President Hannah believed that white alumni like Soergel misunderstood the complexity of the grievances, and he made it clear in his response to Soergel that he shared the African American athletes’ perspective in the need for integrating the Athletic Department on all levels: “I must dispute your assertion that black athletes are ‘the privileged few.’ Most of them are indeed poor, and could not hope for college educations if they did not have athletic ability. So they were in a real sense offering to sacrifice their hopes for the future to accomplish what they believed to be right.”\(^{23}\) As the University President, Hannah’s response was important because, in the eyes of misunderstanding whites, his support legitimized the blacks’ problems and empowered their mission.

Still, many alumni were concerned by what they perceived as a developing race problem where there was previously none, and demanded that Hannah “squelch the movement” and stop blacks from “running the Athletic Department.”\(^{24}\) In a letter to Hannah, alumnus L.J. Vincent indicated that many alumni felt black athletes had already taken too many scholarships at MSU: “To many of us it appears that Negroes

\(^{23}\) John Hannah to Edward Soergel, 22 May 1968, John Hannah Papers, UA 2.1.12, Box 55, Folder 45, MSU Archives.
\(^{24}\) L.J. Vincent to John Hannah, 30 April 1968, John Hannah Papers, UA 2.1.12, Box 55, Folder 45, MSU Archives.
have been treated more than fairly in the athletic department, and that scholarships to these students have almost outnumbered those to white athletes. Several of my friends from rival universities have commented on this and not too acceptably."25

The presence of African Americans on State’s sports teams alone signaled institutional equality to many obstinate whites, who believed the presence of too many African Americans in the athletic program endangered the prestigious image of their school.

Parents of future students wrote to Hannah as well, urging him “to display a little positive leadership.” One parent wondered, “Are you going to let a few rebellious Negro athletes and misfits tell you how to run your school?” And he added, “Please don’t contribute to the rapid decline of law and order in this country by giving in to troublemakers.”26 Another alumnus agreed: “Leaders and administrators . . . must be more firm in their handling of situations such as this or the taxpaying, law-abiding citizen will soon become the minority group, leaving the unshaven and unshorn militants and the radicals to rule as the majority.”27 These attitudes were consistent with broader white concerns with Black Power on a national level. In an opinion poll taken in 1966, eighty-five percent of all whites believed that demonstrations were “hurting the Negro cause.”28

Previous to violent demonstrations in Northern cities like Chicago and Detroit, the problems of African Americans

25 Ibid.
26 C.V. Lindsey to John Hannah, 26 April 1968, John Hannah Papers, UA 2.1.12, Box 55, Folder 45, MSU Archives.
27 Dr. John H. Richardson to John Hannah, 8 May 1968, John Hannah Papers, UA 2.1.12, Box 55, Folder 45, MSU Archives.
28 Fairclough, Better Day Coming, 301.
usually went unnoticed. Clearly, many whites were more concerned about order than equality.

Hannah’s correspondence with concerned alumni and parents proved his compassion for the plight black students suffered on campus. On more than one occasion Hannah explained that the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King had “a near traumatic effect” on many students, black and white, and in their frustration, “they struck back at the nearest target.”29 By connecting the death of King to student demonstrations, Hannah attempted to educate whites of the very real impact racism and hatred had on the campus. Hannah reached alumnus Dr. John H. Richardson, who had expressed difficulty in donating money to a university where students “defy authority and make the demands our ‘Black’ athletes recently made. If it is necessary for us to recruit this type of individual in order to win, then perhaps we should change our whole perspective regarding intercollegiate athletics.”30

Hannah’s response to Dr. Richardson emphasized that too often whites, distanced from the real problems blacks faced, simply could not comprehend the daily struggle of being black in a white America:

This experience has demonstrated to me, again, that it is not necessarily what administrators, especially white administrators, know to be the true situation that counts, but what members of the Negro or other minority perceive to be the situation. The first effort, it now appears, must be an honest effort to learn at first hand what such students think, followed by an honest effort to correct inequities where they are found to exist, and to dispel misunderstandings about the actual situation where they exist.31

29 John Hannah to Edward Soergel, 22 May 1968; John Hannah to L. J. Vincent, 7 May, 1968; John Hannah to Dr. John H. Richardson, 14 May 1968.
30 Dr. John H. Richardson to John Hannah, 8 May 1968, John Hannah Papers, UA 2.1.12, Box 55, Folder 45, MSU Archives.
31 John Hannah to Dr. John Richardson, 14 May 1968.
Hannah’s lesson in racial tolerance struck a chord with Richardson, who replied, “My only desire is that more alumni could be exposed to the points of discussion in your letter.”  

Of the thirty-eight boycotting black athletes, twenty-four were football players, including their spokesman, LaMarr Thomas. The boycott revealed that young black athletes did not believe the Civil Rights Movement brought social change to athletics. Michigan State did not have enough black coaches, black cheerleaders, or black Athletic Department employees. State’s African American athletes were a part of a larger movement of athletes who were, according to historian Sterling Stuckey, no longer willing “to equate personal success with racial success. The young black intellectual knows that individual success—for himself or for Negro athletes—means very little to the progress of the race.”

Black athletes at State charged the athletic department with placing black athletes in courses that helped them maintain their eligibility but did not satisfy graduation requirements. Beth J. Shapiro’s sociological study of black athletes at Michigan State found that the majority of blacks came to MSU with the intention of getting an education. However, she reported that among students who entered MSU as freshmen between 1960 and 1964, seventy-six percent of white football players graduated compared to only thirty-three percent of black football players.  

Graduation rates for black athletes at other schools were equally disappointing. At

32 Dr. John Richardson to John Hannah, 17 May 1968, John Hannah Papers, UA 2.1.12, Box 55, Folder 45, MSU Archives.


the University of Washington, between 1957 and 1967, seven of twenty black football players graduated. At the University of Oregon, from 1965 to 1967, six of eleven black athletes graduated, and at the University of Wyoming the graduation rate was less than twenty percent.35

Shapiro also noted that the average number of terms for MSU’s black football players to graduate was significantly larger than the average number of terms for all black varsity athletes to graduate. Clearly, black football players did not perform well in the classroom. Although this could be attributed to a variety of factors, such as motivation, educational background, intellectual capacity and academic counseling, it nevertheless raised questions about the recruitment and counseling of black football players.

Black athletes at MSU claimed that they were often forced to take physical education courses against their will.36 Harry Edwards, who called these types of non-academic courses “Mickey Mouse” classes, argued that “Educationally, black athletes have not been much better off at white schools than they would have been had they attended Negro colleges.” He blamed administrators and coaches who created an educational system of “Mickey-Mouse courses into which black athletes are inevitably herded and with the coaching staffs at whites schools who not only coach the black athletes, but often counsel them on academic matters.”37 At MSU, Burt Smith was the only athletic department counselor for all of its athletes.38 One black athlete commented, “It’s a way of controlling the guys. (Smith) is concerned only

with Big Ten eligibility, not with University eligibility.” Smith prepared class
schedules for the players and the players did not have the option to reject his advice.39
Historian Donald Spivey found that African American athletes at the University of
Illinois were also encouraged to major in physical education to help them maintain
eligibility.40 Coaches and athletic counselors all across the country held low
academic standards for black athletes.

The class schedules prepared for the athletes contained a disproportionate
number of Health, Physical Education and Recreation courses (HPER). In Shapiro’s
study, of the twenty-three black athletes who filled out questionnaires, the majority
reported that when they requested other courses, Smith attempted to talk them out of
it, telling them they were not academically prepared for college. Conversely, white
players interviewed stated that while Smith was hard on all players, he always had the
athletes’ best interest in mind.41 Apparently black athletes were talented enough to
play college sports for MSU, but not to take a full range of classes. Harry Edwards
affirmed this idea, charging, “The black athlete in the predominantly white school
was and is first, foremost, and sometimes only, an athletic commodity.”42 Pete
Axthehlm of Newsweek underscored blacks’ feelings of exploitation: “It is hard to
remain calm when your free education runs out at the same time as your sports
eligibility. Most blacks are still far from graduation when their playing careers end

39 Ibid.; It should be noted that Shapiro does not identify Smith by name in her study. I have been able
to confirm through newspaper accounts that Smith was the only athletic counselor.
40 Donald Spivey and Thomas Jones, “Intercollegiate Athletic Servitude: A Case Study of the Black
because they were ill-prepared when recruited and received no special counseling or encouragement once classes began."

Black students at predominantly white colleges needed black counselors who could identify with how it felt to be black in a white world. "The black athletes feel they need a black counselor or coach to understand their problems," surmised the recently hired assistant black football coach, Don Coleman. "The white coaches can't do it."

Sociologists Charles V. Willie and Arline Sakuma McCord found that black students trusted black academic advisors more than white ones. Black students complained that white faculty ignored, disregarded, and avoided them. Equally important, Willie and McCord found that black students expressed their perception that "white teachers do not or refuse to relate to the black experience." Adding a black advisor to the athletic department was essential to improve the academic progress of black players, and as a source of support that African Americans did not have.

On the other hand, the white athletes stated that the academic counselor was concerned with the players' graduation rates. According to Shapiro, white players' questionnaires implied that Smith was a man who would help them in times of need. Most importantly, the white players believed that Smith did not discriminate against the black players. Instead, one white suggested, most of the time blacks tried to "get off easy," and were unwilling to make the sacrifices to be successful in the

Clearly, white players and black players had different perceptions of how the academic advisor, Burt Smith, treated students. It is difficult to ascertain whether or not Smith predetermined blacks were incapable of taking academic courses. However, it seems clear that Smith and the Athletic Department failed to provide adequate academic counseling and tutoring to ensure that black football players graduated.

MSU’s black athletes also alleged that the athletic department discouraged blacks from participating in specific sports, especially baseball. Whether or not this was literally true, State’s integration record of its baseball team was abysmal. Its first black baseball player did not arrive until 1953. From 1953 to 1968, MSU fielded just three blacks on its baseball roster. In 1960, Professor Walter Adams, a member of the Athletic Council and a later President of MSU, learned that the baseball team struggled to find integrated accommodations for its southern road trip. Baseball coach John Kobs felt he had only two alternatives: ask the black players to accept segregated facilities or stay home. Outraged at this mistreatment, Adams complained to President Hannah that “No member of an MSU athletic team should be confronted with this kind of Hobson’s choice.”

Adams proposed that the Athletic Council adopt a resolution to prevent MSU from accepting segregation of its student-athletes in any way. He suggested the following:

1. That no MSU athletic team participates in an athletic event where an athlete is barred because of race, religion or national origin.

2. That no MSU athletic team accept any engagements where a team member may be barred from equal access to housing or team facilities because of race, religion, or national origin.

3. That no MSU athlete will participate in any contest where athletes are excluded based on race, religion or national origin.

The Athletic Council defeated these proposals, fearing they would draw negative attention to the University, and also, according to Beth Shapiro, struck all mention of these proceedings from the minutes of the Athletic Council meeting. President Hannah, however, assured Adams that the Athletic Director, Clarence “Biggie” Munn, had agreed to follow the principles outlined in the proposal.49

Even if African Americans made their way onto the baseball team or football team, they still experienced racism. Simply because Duffy Daugherty had an integrated football team did not mean racial equality existed on the team. “Never be caught with a white female at school,” Herb Adderley (‘58–’60) warned the younger Spartan, Bubba Smith. After being seen with a white woman, Adderley, a 1961 first round NFL draft pick, was benched.50 In this instance it did not matter how important Adderley was to the team’s success. The coaching staff determined that blacks could play with white ball players, as long as they knew their “place” and did not date white women. As late as 1955 with the murder of fourteen year-old Emmett Till, black men historically were lynched for looking at white women the “wrong way.” In the 1960s white men still felt obligated to protect the “purity” of white women by discouraging young black men from socializing with them. Smith ignored Adderley’s advice and secretly dated a white girl. Whether or not Smith was ever reprimanded for such behavior is unknown, but the fact that he had to hide his relationship suggests the

49 Ibid., 34-5.
football coaches did not approve of interracial dating. Black players indicated that they were afraid even to be seen walking to class with a white girl.\textsuperscript{51}

White coaches pressuring black players to stay away from white women was not exclusive to MSU. At UCLA basketball star Walt Hazzard dated a white woman. While he was walking on campus with his girlfriend, a football coach informed him, “We don’t do that here.” Ironically, before Mickey Cureton decided to play football at UCLA, he took a recruiting trip to Oregon where he went to a party with white women. Cureton was told by one of the upperclassman to keep the party a secret because “the athletic department did not approve of Negro boys and white girls mixing socially.” White coaches threatened to revoke scholarships or at least playing time from those players whose Saturday performances were necessary to propel them to play on Sundays. At the University of Washington, the nation’s third-leading rusher, Junior Coffey, was taken out of the starting lineup in the middle of the week before a conference game against Oregon. When Coffey asked the coach why, the coach suggested, “You’re dating this white girl, and I’d advise you not to do it. I think it could be detrimental to your future, and it could be a reflection on the other Negro players.”\textsuperscript{52} Coffey did not start another game the rest of the season.

At MSU the coaches’ attitudes toward interracial dating were not expressed explicitly, but black athletes still felt pressure to follow social norms prescribed by whites. The black players shared stories like Adderley’s to avoid benching, or worse. In the early 1960s a State football player was openly dating a white woman, and after several warnings, Shapiro stated, “It was reported that his scholarship was taken

\textsuperscript{51} Shapiro, “The Black Athlete at Michigan State University,” 27.
\textsuperscript{52} Olsen, “Pride and Prejudice,” 21.
away, and returned only when the girl involved complained to the administration.” A coach in the mid-sixties informed another black football player that when it came to black men dating white women, “They didn’t go along with that sort of thing here.” Whether true or not, such stories served as a warning for black players to comply with the prescribed racial patterns enforced by whites in power.

The black athletes’ greatest example of disrespect came in the form of Athletic Director Biggie Munn’s reaction to their list of grievances. According to Newsweek’s Pete Axthelm, when the athletes entered Munn’s office with their proposal, Munn “scanned the list, chuckled and began crossing out the demands one by one.” One athlete claimed that Munn then smiled and said, “Ho, ho, I guess you want a black ticket manager or something.” The athlete determined, “I wasn’t going to be his little black pet anymore.” Munn’s reaction precipitated the boycott. Spokesman LaMarr Thomas explained that when Munn refused to sign a statement that he would take the grievances to President Hannah, the athletes then determined a boycott was their only option. In the school newspaper, the State News, Munn’s reaction took on a different tone: “We are concerned, and we have been aware of this at MSU for a long time. We are not just paying lip service.” In the Lansing State Journal, Munn’s reaction showed greater empathy with the problems of the black athletes, “The problem is our concern and the nation’s concern.” Munn also pointed out that Don Coleman had just been hired. The black athletes, however, saw this as a token hiring.

55 Mitch, “Negro athletes call boycott,” State News
In 1967-68, against the backdrop of the Olympic boycott movement, thirty-seven black athletic disturbances took place on predominantly white college campuses including the University of California at Berkeley, Western Michigan University, the University of Kansas, Marquette University, and the University of Oklahoma.\(^{57}\) Coaches feared racial incidents under their watch because it could have devastating effects on their ability to recruit both white and black players. When a boycott by black athletes at Michigan State made headlines there was national surprise. “Duffy Daugherty has built a reputation as the master recruiter and ‘handler’ of Negroes, where big-time football and Negroes,” wrote Pete Axthelm, “have become almost synonymous.” Michigan State therefore, Axthelhm continued, “was stunned to find it had racial troubles, too.”\(^{58}\) In an editorial for *Sports Illustrated* in 1968, Daugherty was recognized for his recruiting of blacks:

> For years the Spartans . . . have recruited more Negro athletes than any other major college. At one point the majority of Michigan State’s starting 22 football players were Negro, and the 1965 championship team had what it called its soul-brother backfield-three Negroes and a Hawaiian. Even Spartan assistant coaches began to get alarmed when Head Coach Duffy Daugherty would constantly appear on magazine covers surrounded by players, and not a white one in sight—the coaches said it hurt them when they tried to get jobs elsewhere. Duffy knew what he was doing. Michigan State had the winning reputation it wanted, it was proud of its Negro athletes and it was acutely sensitive to the value of keeping them happy.\(^{59}\)

*Sports Illustrated* also addressed the black athletes’ charges. In response to the athletes’ claim of being forced to take non-academic courses, the editors wondered, “What other university has offered a degree in mobile-home building?”


\(^{59}\) “All-America Problem,” *Sports Illustrated*, May 6, 1968, 8.
However, *SI* was dismissive of the charges that blacks were discouraged from playing baseball and stated that some of the charges, such as the school’s lack of black cheerleaders, “as usual” were “silly.” *Sports Illustrated* clearly was unaware of the baseball program’s poor record of playing black players. Furthermore, the editors, like much of white America, failed to understand the African Americans’ need to be supported by people with whom they could identify. LaMarr Thomas stated, “The most humiliating thing about my career was to play my heart out and not even have a black cheerleader to encourage me.” Football coaches across the country began to reconsider the potential problems of recruiting black players. The editors suggested that coaches now had to wonder, “If it can happen to Duffy . . . ” Michigan State’s national reputation as a “good place” for blacks to play football was in jeopardy and Daugherty knew it.

There were national consequences to the racial turmoil in East Lansing. In the aftermath of protests by black athletes in the late 1960s, the *New York Times* investigated the racial climate in athletic departments across the country. Anthony Ripley suggested the increasing numbers of militant black athletes were “gambling their principles against their education,” and “there is an element of self-destruction in this. It has led to dismissals and a cutback in recruiting, and for many blacks from poor families a college education means a football scholarship.” Ripley also found that coaches began to avoid “all but the most outstanding blacks.” However in some places, this was already the case. Western Conference (today the Western Athletic Conference) Commissioner Wiles Hallock alleged that “Every major institution in the

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61 “All-American Problem,” 8.
country that has recruited heavily among black athletes is rethinking its position.”

_Detroit News_ columnist Pete Waldmier concluded, “Nobody says publicly they are
not recruiting as many blacks as they were. They’re just not recruiting. Most
coaches don’t understand the problem.”62 Most white coaches simply did not know
how to address, or even comprehend, the problems black athletes endured on
predominantly white college campuses.

Recruiting talented players was a legitimate concern for Daugherty, whose
teams were a combined 8-13 in 1967 and 1968. Duffy Daugherty admitted enlisting
black and white players could be difficult if his black players continued to be
outspoken. “We have many fine boys and the blacks won’t want to come if they get
the notion that there is discrimination, while the white boys won’t want to go here if
they think we have racial problems.” Daugherty also referred to the fact that MSU
led the nation in giving the most scholarships to African Americans with fifty, twice
the number granted by any other Big Ten school. Furthermore, his response indicated
that even though his heart may have been in the right place, he did not really
understand the problems of his black players. “But I try to treat everyone alike. I
believe this and I’ve conducted my life in this way,” he said. Daugherty’s reaction
suggested his belief that integration alone meant equality, and he insisted State was a
quality school for African Americans because “enough black athletes come to MSU
to play football, so there must be something appealing about our image or they
wouldn’t come here.”63

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63 Mitch, “Negro athletes call boycott,” _State News_.

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Why did black athletes want to play at a predominantly white school like Michigan State? Why did they stay? The answers to these questions are as varied as the number of black athletes who played for predominantly white schools. First, many southern schools were still segregated in the 1960s. Additionally, for many African Americans who attended substandard segregated public schools, an athletic scholarship offered a way out of the ghetto and access to higher education that otherwise would not have been possible. Harry Edwards suggested African Americans wanted to attend a school like Michigan State because blacks held a "driving obsession to prove themselves and because, in the black community itself, a heavy stigma attaches to the black athlete who goes to a big-name school and fails to make the grade."  

Within the black community there was immense pressure to "make it." Essentially, Pete Axthelm explained, black athletes had fewer opportunities: "A talented white boy can often decide whether to channel his various abilities into business, a profession, or a sport. A talented black is rarely exposed to the first two choices, so he works that much harder to run, jump or throw better than anyone else on the field."  

Daugherty addressed the football players' boycott in his autobiography, referring to it as the "so-called 'black problem," and defended his program, claiming, "It never was a problem." Daugherty's obtuse response revealed his lack of sensitivity to the problems his black players experienced off the field and the subtle forms of racism African Americans suffered within the athletic department. By referring to the athletes' grievances as the "so-called 'black problem," he discredited

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the athletes to whom he felt he had given so much. He went on to equate integration with equality: “I was the first coach who actively recruited blacks out of the South. And I didn’t go after them because they were black, but because they were good football players. I never thought of those players as being different, and they knew it.”

Similar to his assistant’s comment that the death of Martin Luther King had nothing to do with football, Daugherty too failed to understand the relationship between his black players and the larger black student and athletic protests taking place on America’s campuses. He wrote, “There was a problem on campus as there was all across the country but it had nothing whatsoever to do with football.” As a white liberal, Daugherty could not come to see that in this case race did matter, because these were not just players boycotting sports, these were black students who felt obligated to take a stand to raise the status of all African Americans on campus, not just athletes. The coach discredited the black student organization, in which some players were active members, referring to it as the “so-called Black Student Alliance.” To underscore the absence of any racial problems under his football program, Daugherty pointed to the hiring of Don Coleman and expressed that the BSA had problems with “other sports.”

Cloaked in green and white jerseys, black players were a part of the Michigan State “family” on football Saturdays. Off the field, their skin color was a badge of degradation. Yet, the boycott, according to spokesman LaMarr Thomas, was not an attack on Daugherty and his staff. He contended that, “We’re attacking the system

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66 Ibid., 128.
67 Ibid.
itself, not the coaches or any of the white athletes.” Thomas continued to vent the collective frustration of his constituency with his assertion that “This is a racist university, just like the system of the world. It’s a question of being black or being used.” Thomas' rhetoric speaks to the ideology of Black Power that filled so many black students who took individual risks to deal with community problems. As Historian William Van Deburg argues, “In an important sense, the black students’ expressions of rage at ‘the system’ reflected their membership in a vital, militant youth culture that sought self-definition and power for all college-age Americans.”

However, looking through the lens of the Black Power Movement, when State’s black athletes boycotted “the system,” they protested mistreatment by their white coaches. “The system” which LaMarr Thomas and his peers protested so vehemently favored their white teammates and was constructed by the white coaches and administrators that recruited them. Despite his good intentions to be an equal-opportunist, Daugherty reinforced the idea, for fourteen years, that blacks were good enough to play but did not have a place on the sidelines. Michigan State’s black players demanded an overhaul of a system that prepared them solely to play sports. Furthermore, these athletes held the athletic department accountable to recruit not just black athletes, but also coaches, cheerleaders, administrative assistants, and laborers.

After just one full day and the interruption of a total of two football practices, the black players resumed their roles. Even though Hannah was gone on a Civil Rights Commission meeting in Montgomery, Alabama, the athletes softened their stance after being assured the administration took their grievances seriously. As

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69 Van Deburg, A New Day in Babylon, 66.
LaMarr Thomas explained, after meeting with State’s Big Ten faculty representative, John Fuzak, “We feel the university is moving toward the alleviation of our grievances. It was not our intention to boycott.” Despite returning to the field and expressing satisfaction with the administration’s response, the black athletes were no less suspicious of the Athletic Department’s goals regarding recruitment of African Americans. Thomas stated the University wanted the athletes “to get back on the field— you know, a plantation kind of thing.”

Even if the boycott was resolved, the black players’ feelings of mistreatment and exploitation were far from reconciled.

Michigan State administrators agreed to hire another black football coach and a black track coach. On May 17, the University announced the hiring of James Bibbs, a 1951 All-American sprinter at Eastern Michigan University, as its first black assistant track coach. In addition, MSU agreed to “make efforts to recruit black baseball players and swimmers”; to hire black employees for Jenison Field House, the Intramural Building, and the Ice Arena “right away”; to obtain black physicians and trainers, to have black cheerleaders by September; to discuss the hiring of a black counselor; and to meet with black athletes on June 1, 1968, to evaluate the progress of these agreements.

After the athletes returned to practice, they released a statement to clarify the events surrounding the boycott that was printed in the school paper, the State News:

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72 “Black athletes cite distortion, misquotation,” State News (East Lansing), May 1, 1968.
We boycotted because the initial response of the University was apathetic and we returned because the University's later response indicated a rapid alleviation of our grievances. We, as students, athletes, but most important as black people, want it known that our problems are just a segment of the problems which face all of our people in this country. The black students' problems are the black athletes' problems and the black athletes' problems are the black students' problems. We as black people share in this common fight against a society that will not allow black people to meaningfully participate in it.  

These African American athletes wanted their intentions and goals to be clearly understood. After all, they did have to return to practice with white teammates who might not understand why they left practice, and they also had to return to classes where they were often the minority, surrounded by white classmates who might not comprehend that black students faced real problems of racism and bigotry in East Lansing.  

Michigan State’s African American athletes understood that the on-field success of a small number of black athletes did little to advance the equality for the rest of the African American student community. Historian David K. Wiggins contends that protesting black athletes “were, to be sure, athletes first and civil rights activists second.” However, at Michigan State, these young African Americans were willing to forego athletics and accept their roles as activists. For a moment in time, they realized their athletic goals meant little if they could not be treated as men and as equals off the field. Moreover, their boycott was truly altruistic, as it aimed not to provide immediate benefits to the players themselves, but to create equality for future black athletes and bring opportunities for African Americans as employees of the athletic department.

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73 Ibid.
74 Wiggins, “‘The Year of Awakening,’” 120.
At a time when some black college students attempted to overthrow university administrations with armed resistance, State’s black athletes fought for equality using collective non-violent resistance. For these players, Black Power meant questioning the civil rights leadership of University President John Hannah on campus and challenging the public perception that Duffy Daugherty’s integrated teams represented an absence of racism. State’s black athletes were no longer willing to allow white leaders to act for them. They demanded a role in the decision-making process to guarantee true racial equality at MSU. While most whites, including MSU alumni, assumed college sports were uncontaminated by the poison of racism, State’s black athletes raised the public’s awareness of campus racism. The boycott of Michigan State’s black athletes placed them at the center of black student activism on campus and transformed them into torchbearers in the fight for equality nationwide. Frustrated by the slow pace of change in the athletic department, Michigan State’s black athletes would rise up again in the struggle for equality.
"In every negro there is a potential BLACK MAN..."

Figure 6. "In every Negro there is a potential BLACK MAN," illustration in *The Grapevine Journal*, February 15, 1972.
CHAPTER V


_The Big Ten is segregated, pure and simple. Blacks can run, they can throw the football and dribble the basketball so the field houses and stadiums are filled to overflowing. But they aren't given any of the jobs on the administrative end of the structure. We want to end that segregation._

-Robert L. Green

Michigan State's black athletes' participation in campus political confrontations continued in February 1969 when the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) proposed two demands: (1) that a recently dismissed professor be rehired; and (2) the implementation of open admission. While attempting to disrupt a rally, several white athletes fought SDS members. The white athletes planned to return to a SDS demonstration the next day. When invited to join the white athletes' counter demonstration several black athletes refused. One white football player reportedly stated to a black teammate that two white assistant football coaches "said it was okay to go beat up the hippies—oh, I forgot, you're one of them." Incensed, black athletes quickly organized and joined the SDS demonstration as a way of showing their solidarity and to "protect" the SDS members. During the demonstration, several of the white football coaches observed the confrontation at the Administration Building. Fearing the white and black athletes might come to blows, the coaches stepped in and made the white players leave.² Black student athletes

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² Beth J. Shapiro, "Intercollegiate Athletics and Big-Time Sport at Michigan State University; Or the Difference Between Good and Great is a Little Extra Effort," PhD diss., Michigan State University, 1982, 156-57.
identified less with their teammates than with the SDS, whose open enrollment aims would have provided more opportunities for African Americans to go to attend State.

After President John Hannah retired in April 1969, Acting President Walter Adams dealt with white radicals, black student sit-ins, Vietnam demonstrations, ROTC protests, open admissions and quota policies, and angry alumni. As the black student population increased to nearly 2,000 out of 40,000 students, Michigan State administrators were confronted with a rise in black student demonstrations. Later that month, black students shutdown the Wilson Hall cafeteria, charging racial discrimination by white supervising employees. During the Wilson Hall demonstration African American students distributed a pamphlet calling for a black cheerleading team because black students felt African Americans were not given an equal opportunity to make the squad and the style of cheer was aimed solely at “middle class whites and the white Greeks.” An absence of African Americans on the Michigan State cheering squad reflected resistance to completely integrating the athletic department.

The racial makeup of the Michigan State cheering team reflected the symptomatic resistance of Big Ten schools to fully integrate athletic departments. While Duffy Daugherty’s football teams may have convinced many coaches to integrate their teams for the sake of winning, the Big Ten remained segregated in

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4 In 1971 there were 1,954 African Americans students at MSU. By 1972 of the 2,509 black students, 900 were freshman. “Michigan State sees increased enrollment,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore), February 12, 1972.
most departments. Since 1968 Michigan State’s administration had made little progress resolving the grievances of black athletes. While black athletes in the Big Ten continued to perceive and receive overt and covert, individual and institutional forms of racism, three African American professors at Michigan State initiated a coordinated effort to identify common grievances and implement a system to eradicate racial injustice. The leadership of Professor Robert L. Green inspired black athletes at MSU to organize formally. These athletes believed that MSU had an obligation as a pioneer in African American recruitment to demonstrate leadership throughout the conference in providing opportunities to African Americans in all levels of athletics. As a result of the collective effort between State’s black athletes and professors, conditions for African Americans throughout the Big Ten vastly improved.

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Big Ten black athletes at Wisconsin, Iowa, and Indiana followed the lead of Michigan State’s athletes with their own boycotts. In 1969, after sixteen black football players boycotted the first day of Spring practice at Iowa, the athletic board agreed to take steps to rectify the players’ grievances. The boycott of fourteen football players at Indiana was not resolved as smoothly. After they missed two days

8 “Iowa Board Agrees with Blacks,” Chicago Tribune, April 24, 1969.
of practice head football coach John Pont dismissed ten players.\textsuperscript{9} The departed players aired their grievances publicly after the dismissal. They charged the coaching staff with “discouraging and degrading remarks by coaches to Negro players, inconsistency in administering of disciplinary action and creation of an atmosphere that is mentally depressing and morally discouraging for blacks.”\textsuperscript{10} Black athletes in the Big Ten were forced to choose between taking a stand with their black teammates or putting their own athletic careers ahead of the black community. That week one of the four black players who returned to the Hoosier squad, Steve Orter, sat alone at the end of the bench, his tear-streaked face buried in his hands, sobbing as the clock expired in a 28-17 loss to Iowa. Before long, black athletes across the Big Ten would unify in the fight against racial inequality across the conference.

On January 1, 1970, Michigan State inaugurated its first African American President, Clifton R. Wharton, Jr. After John Hannah retired in 1969 MSU’s Board of Trustees authorized a twelve person search committee. Wharton’s resume attracted a great deal of attention from the committee. He was the first African American admitted to the Johns Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies and the first to earn a master’s degree there. In addition, Wharton was the first African American to obtain a PhD in economics from the University of Chicago in 1958. Prior to his election, Wharton served as Vice President of the Agricultural Development Council (ADC), a non-profit organization founded by John D. Rockefeller where he spent time directing programs in Vietnam, Thailand, and Cambodia, and taught and conducted research as a visiting professor at the


Universities of Malaysia and Singapore. After electing the first African American President of a major, predominantly white university, Michigan State became a symbol of equal opportunity in higher education leadership positions.\textsuperscript{11}

While Michigan State welcomed a new President, some alumni wondered if it was time for a new football coach. Duffy Daugherty’s teams never regained the kind of success they had in 1965 and 1966. Daugherty’s inability to recruit talented black players began to show when his teams finished a combined 27-34-1, with only one winning season from 1967 to 1972. In 1969 former MSU running back Sherman Lewis returned to East Lansing to replace Don Coleman as the lone black assistant coach.\textsuperscript{12} Three years later, in Daugherty’s last season, Jimmy Raye joined Lewis and the rest of the staff; it was the first time MSU had two black assistant coaches.\textsuperscript{13} This was a progressive change compared to other Big Ten staffs.

While the team did not have the talent to compete for Big Ten or National titles during Daugherty’s last six years, a few African American players stood out as individuals. South Carolinian and co-captain Eric “The Flea” Allen ran circles around the Purdue defense on October 30, 1971, to the tune of 350 rushing yards, a national record. Co-captain Allen was named First Team All-Big Ten and the


\textsuperscript{12} Sherman Lewis was an assistant coach for fourteen seasons at Michigan State from 1969 to 1982 under Daugherty, Denny Stolz (1973-75), Darryl Rogers (1976-79), and Frank Waters (1980-82). In 1983 Lewis was promoted to the National Football League as an assistant football coach for the San Francisco 49ers. Nine years and three Super Bowl rings later, Lewis became the offensive coordinator of the Green Bay Packers from 1992-1999, earning another championship ring in 1996, but never received a head coaching opportunity at either the college or professional level.

\textsuperscript{13} Raye coached with the Spartans from 1972 to 1975. In 1977 Raye began his NFL coaching career with San Francisco 49ers and coached for eight teams over the next twenty eight years. Raye is currently the offensive coordinator for the Oakland Raiders.
Chicago Tribune Big Ten Player of the Year.\textsuperscript{14} The next season, State's brightest star was co-captain Billy Joe Dupree, a tight end from West Monroe, Louisiana. Along with African American linebacker Gail Clark, an Ohio native, Dupree earned All-Big Ten status and was then drafted twentieth overall by the Dallas Cowboys.\textsuperscript{15} Allen and Dupree symbolized the last vestige of significant Southern blacks that defined Daugherty's most successful seasons and his career.

While Duffy Daugherty had established that he was not afraid to play a predominantly black team, many whites were still not comfortable with college teams dominated by African Americans. On January 25, 1972, twenty million viewers tuned into the CBS nightly news to see Walter Cronkite narrate footage showing the University of Minnesota's Corky Taylor, an African American forward on the Gopher basketball team, knee Ohio State's white seven-foot center Luke Witte in the groin. What appeared to be a cheap shot in the final thirty seconds of a major conference game turned out to be the precipitating event of African American professors and athletes organizing to gain equal treatment in all levels of athletics in the Big Ten.

With thirty-six seconds remaining and OSU leading by six, Witte was fouled hard by Minnesota's Clyde Turner. Turner was called for a flagrant foul and ejected. Witte lay on the ground while Taylor stretched his hand out, appearing to help him up;

\textsuperscript{14} Jack Seibold, \textit{Spartan Sports Encyclopedia: A History of Michigan State Men's Athletic Program} (Champaign, IL: Sports Publishing, 2003): 499-500; Allen's single-game rushing mark still stands as an MSU record, but has since been broken nationally numerous times. The current single-game record is 406 yards by Texas Christian's Ladanian Tomlinson, set in 1999 against UTEP.

\textsuperscript{15} Dupree went on to have a fairly successful professional career, highlighted by three Pro-Bowl trips in 1976, 1977 and 1978.
instead he threw his knee into Witte. Taylor claimed that while helping Witte to his feet, Witte spat on him.¹⁶

Immediately, Witte fell back to the ground only to have Ron Behagen, another black player, come off of Minnesota’s bench and stomp on his head. Chaos ensued, as hundreds of fans began throwing debris on the floor. A few others stormed the court and jumped on Ohio State’s Mark Minor. Dave Winfield, an African American power forward for Minnesota, hit white Buckeye Mark Wagar five times in the face with his fist at midcourt.¹⁷ Ohio State head coach Fred Taylor darted across the floor to Witte’s rescue pulling Behagen off of him. Both Witte and Wagar suffered concussions.

A closer examination of the Minnesota-Ohio State fight reveals clear racial tensions between blacks and whites. Minnesota head coach Bill Musselman’s rotation consisted of six players, five of whom were black. This talented and imposing team was described by Sports Illustrated as “the most intimidating team in the conference. All except [Bob] Nix were blacks who had learned the game on city playgrounds.” Besides having a team led by African Americans, many fans were uncomfortable with the warm-ups where the players dribbled and shot to the beat of music that sounded nothing like the school’s fight song. Comparing the warm-ups to those of the Harlem Globetrotters, Sports Illustrated’s William F. Reed described the pre-game scene:

¹⁷ Winfield was a two-sport star, playing basketball and baseball at Minnesota. He was also drafted by the Minnesota Vikings even though he never played a down of college football. Winfield became the only athlete in history to be drafted by the NBA, NFL, and Major League Baseball. In 2001, Winfield was elected to baseball’s Hall of Fame.
When the Buckeyes came on the floor, they were booed. Then came the Gophers with their Barnum & Bailey act. While their ball handling, passing, and dribbling tricks—all done to the loud, steady beat of heavy rock music played over the P.A.—are entertaining—they are designed to hype up the team and the crowd.\textsuperscript{18}

Ohio State Athletic Director Ed Weaver said “such a circus” had no place in basketball and called for an investigation of the entire Minnesota basketball program.\textsuperscript{19}

A day after the brawl, Ohio State’s Benny Allison, an African American guard, explained what many whites failed to see. Allison said, “It was a racial thing. You will remember that Wardell [Jackson] and I were right out there in the middle of it, just like everybody else, but nobody swung on us. They just passed us up and went for the other guys.” The reaction from whites had clear racial overtones. Luke Witte’s father, Dr. Wayne W. Witte, suggested Musselman’s “players are brutalized and animalized to achieve” winning at any cost. William F. Reed wrote, “instead of a fight erupting from blows struck in the heat of competition, this was a cold, brutal attack, governed by the \textit{law of the jungle}.\textsuperscript{20} Big Ten Commissioner Wayne Duke led a three-man investigation, all of whom were white, that resulted in the suspension of Behagen and Taylor for the entire season and concluded Witte did not spit on Taylor, but rather Taylor thought Witte was going to spit on him.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{19} Gordon, “Two Gophers Suspended Rest of Season As Result of Brawl,” \textit{The Sporting News}, February 12, 1972.
\textsuperscript{20} Emphasis mine; Reed, “An Ugly Affair in Minneapolis,” 21.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
Corky Taylor's parents insisted that Taylor and his black teammates were provoked throughout the game.\textsuperscript{22} Michigan State University Professors Robert L. Green, Joseph McMillan, and Thomas S. Gunnings vehemently agreed with the Taylors. Green, Director of the Center for Urban Affairs, disputed Duke's claim that the Minnesota-OSU game had no racial overtones. Green stated, "It was very obvious that the two black Ohio State basketball players who were on the court never came into a confrontation with black athletes from Minnesota or black fans. It was simply black athletes versus white athletes." To Green, the brawl confirmed his belief that there was a serious "need to take positive steps immediately to improve the status of black athletes in the Big Ten." He added, "Furthermore we are distressed over reports in the press . . . inferring that Minnesota coach Bill Musselman had succeeded in animalizing an essentially all-black basketball team. This, more than anything highlights the racism in organized collegiate sports." In Green's view, the Minnesota-Ohio State incident was another example of discrimination in the Big Ten. Although the fight itself did not clearly prove segregation in the conference, it was enough for the three African American professors, flanked by black Michigan State athletes, to hold a press conference on February 10 where they called for a full investigation of discrimination in the Big Ten.\textsuperscript{23}

Green, McMillan, and Gunnings asked to be heard at the upcoming Big Ten meeting. At the press conference they called for,

- One black official at each Big Ten event for the rest of the season
- A public hearing where black faculty, athletes, and administrators can testify and make recommendations to improve the status of African Americans in the conference
- The hiring of black officials at all levels for each sanctioned Big Ten athletic event no later than Fall 1972

Green, Gunnings, and McMillan sent a letter to Commissioner Duke, and forwarded it to President Wharton and Dr. John Fuzak, MSU’s Big Ten Faculty Representative and Chairman of the Athletic Council. The letter outlined their main concerns:

- The problems experienced by black athletes as a function of their race.
- The number of black athletes who never complete their formal education once their athletic eligibility has ended.
- The withdrawal of financial and other support for black athletes once their eligibility has ended.
- The obvious lack of representation of black officials in Big Ten athletics. (“We feel that the lack of black officials was partly responsible for the recent Ohio State-Minnesota melee.”)
- The method used to select Big Ten officials which are based upon the recommendations of the Big Ten coaches, a “closed club.”

These concerns reflected continued dissatisfaction that the Big Ten was willing to integrate its sports teams, but failed to provide opportunities to African Americans in the area of athletics that did not produce revenues or fill stadiums, and that there was little regard for African Americans outside the lines of play.

A number of parties responded to the professors’ call for an investigation.

Three MSU trustees, including former football player and MSU’s first African American trustee Blanche Martin, offered their support to the group of faculty and

24 Ibid.
25 Robert L. Green, Thomas S. Gunnings, and Joseph McMillan to Clifton R. Wharton, 15 February 1972, Clifton Wharton Papers, UA 2.1.14, Box 473, Folder 22, Michigan State University Archives and Historical Collections (hereafter, MSU Archives).
athletes. President Wharton immediately released a statement that called for “prompt attention in order to clear the air and provide a means for any necessary corrective action.” The President requested that Fuzak address these issues on behalf of MSU at the March meeting of Athletic Directors and Faculty Representatives, followed by a conference of Big Ten presidents after the meeting. Wharton added that a month earlier the university’s Committee Against Discrimination had begun a review of the athletic department to determine any patterns of discrimination. Five days later Wharton sent a letter to all Big Ten presidents to clarify that the three administrators were acting independently, “not as officials of the university.” Wharton’s actions were wholly unsatisfactory to Green, who responded, “We don’t want just a reaction from Dr. Wharton, we want him to say he agrees with our very real concerns.”

When black athletes boycotted athletics at State in 1968 many whites inside and outside of the university could not believe that college sports were discriminatory. That year, when much of the attention shifted to Duffy Daugherty, he claimed there were no race related problems on his football teams. In 1972 head basketball coach Gus Ganakas believed Green’s claims were not directed at Spartan athletics: “I do not see any problems,” Ganakas said. “It should not interfere with the MSU basketball program.”

Robert Markus, white writer from the *Chicago Tribune,*

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27 Statement Issued by President Clifton R. Wharton, Jr., 10 February 1972, Clifton Wharton Papers, UA 2.1.14, Box 473, Folder 22, MSU Archives.
28 Clifton Wharton to James Roscoe Miller (Northwestern University), 15 February 1972, Clifton Wharton Papers, UA 2.1.14, Box 473, Folder 22, MSU Archives.
30 Ibid.
wondered why a group of black administrators at Michigan State were supporting the black basketball players at Minnesota. He questioned why they were "so set on pointing up this inflammatory issue? How is it relevant?"\textsuperscript{31}

John Fuzak, President Wharton, and Robert L. Green received insulting letters from angry fans and alumni. One fan, Hebert Van Fleet recommended to Fuzak that only ten percent of coaching positions, Athletic Directors, and officials be filled by blacks since "the blacks constitute 10\% of [the] overall population. After all, that is what the school is doing with regard to admissions, and Wharton was appointed without qualifications." Van Fleet argued that black athletes should also fill a ten percent quota. He resented Daugherty playing so many African Americans. He wrote, "MSU, with Duffy leading the way, has gone too far in recruiting black boys. The white boys for the most part are ignored." Van Fleet also believed that most black athletes, like freshman track star Marshall Dill, were academically unqualified and given money. Sitting at his typewriter, he punched out his bigotry:

Your school must be very proud recruiting one like Marshall Dill. Academically qualified? No. Symbol of clean-cut youth? No. Amateur? If so, explain how a freshman, married and the father of two children, can afford to go to school and drive a car? It was the same with Bubba, and with all of the others.

In Van Fleet's eyes Minnesota "recruited black hooligans," whose object was to "beat the hell out of whitey."\textsuperscript{32} Van Fleet's letter is an example of the type of racism that permeated sports. Such racial prejudice against black athletes and African Americans in general proved to Robert L. Green that the time had come to take a stand against segregation in Big Ten athletics.

\textsuperscript{32} Herbert Van Fleet to John Fuzak, 15 February 1972, Clifton Wharton Papers, UA 2.1.14, Box 473, Folder 22, MSU Archives.
Piles of hate mail filled Robert L. Green’s mailbox. Whites from all across the country grew frustrated by claims of racism in athletics. Writing from Salem, Oregon, one white averred, “People are justifiably tired of your ridiculous and irresponsible demands.” A letter from Hammond, Indiana, read: “It is just becoming my opinion, as well as to friends and associates of mine, that black people do a lot of unnecessary crying.” A man from St. Petersburg, Florida, wrote, “I read with amusement your charge that black athletes are being persecuted. It seems to me they are getting all the breaks and big money in athletics now.”

To many whites, the success of a few prominent black athletes proved that sports did not discriminate. Most could not comprehend that Michigan State, with its tremendous record of playing African Americans on its football teams, ran a segregated athletic program.

Beyond the disturbing private letters Green received, he was publicly criticized from a number of angles. The Lansing State Journal ran an editorial contending Green’s press conference was “nothing more than a publicity stunt which used a heated controversy for a platform.”

Rick Gosselin of the State News wondered why Green only talked about the problems of black athletes at his press conference when “white athletes face identical problems.” Green pointed out that blacks were largely ignored for assistant coaching jobs, let alone head coaching positions. Gosselin wondered, “Aren’t many white coaches passed up as well?”

What Gosselin failed to recognize was that while some whites were not hired for coaching jobs, African American head coaches at predominantly white schools were

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nonexistent. The old stereotypes that blacks did not have the mental capacity to be leaders still prevented African Americans from gaining head coaching positions in sports. In fact, not until Northwestern hired Dennis Green in 1981 had an African American ever served as the head football coach at a predominantly white school.\(^{36}\)

Green did not help his cause by offering to debate those who disagreed with his stance. Green told the *State News*,

> Anyone who would like to publicly debate on this issue, tell them to name the place and time. And I am specifically referring to those who are intimately involved with sports at the moment, not the fans who have been sending hate mail, for they do not know the issues and do not have the data I have.\(^ {37}\)

Lansing’s WJIM-TV ran an editorial attacking Green’s approach, arguing that his legitimate claims were “obliterated by the style of the Green rhetoric.” However, the station did acknowledge “the general public, abetted by superficial press coverage, interpreted the actions of the three faculty members to be essentially a defense of two black University of Minnesota basketball players . . . .”\(^ {38}\) WJIM was one of the very few media outlets to recognize that Robert Green was not protesting an isolated incident, but the exploitation of the Big Ten’s black athletes.

Green’s public position caught the attention of the MSU Board of Trustees who, after three members had previously publicly supported him, officially resolved that “The Board does not endorse the recent actions of Robert Green and Associates.” Furthermore, the Board did back Commissioner Duke’s suspension of Taylor and

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\(^{38}\) Editorial, WJIM-TV, Lansing, Michigan, March 3, 1972, Clifton Wharton Papers, UA 2.1.14, Box 473, Folder 22, MSU Archives.
Behagen, and was confident this was based on "deliberate research." The Board claimed it was "not aware of similar research on the part of [Green]." Finally, the Board's statement concluded that it "recognizes the historical excellence of the administration of conference policy . . . ." The MSU chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) took issue with this last part, fearing that it undermined the serious nature of the charges raised by Green, Gunnings, and McMillan. Furthermore, the MSU-AAUP believed the Board's position could be misinterpreted as "endorsing the status quo."40

In addition to the AAUP Green did have a number of other supporters. The NAACP's Lansing branch President Vence L. Bonham sent a letter to the Board of Trustees to inform them that the NAACP supported Green and took issue with the Board's resolution.41 One local citizen wrote to Green, "In the long run, you are fighting for all of us-whites as well as blacks." Another letter stated, "It's about time that someone in a position of authority and responsibility had the initiative and the courage to speak the truth about a most pathetic situation of which all of us should be ashamed."42 State News writer Barbara Parness criticized her own paper in Green's defense. Defiantly, she wrote,

White liberals like to espouse the doctrine that we owe it to blacks to open up the avenues of opportunity so that they too can reach positions of power. Ha! As soon as a man like Green gets into power, then the white establishment (like the State News) starts cutting him down. As soon as that power is used to help solve the problems of race, he becomes the target of attack. If he

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39 Michigan State University Board of Trustees, Resolution, February 24, 1972, Clifton Wharton Papers, UA 2.1.14, Box 473, Folder 22, MSU Archives.
40 News Release, Michigan State University Chapter of the American Association of University Professors, March 6, 1972, Clifton Wharton Papers, UA 2.1.14, Box 473, Folder 22, MSU Archives.
41 Vence L. Bonham to MSU Board of Trustees, 7 March 1972, Clifton Wharton Papers, UA 2.1.14, Box 473, Folder 22, MSU Archives.
behaves politically in order to get the funds to run his program, then he’s an Uncle Tom.\(^{43}\)

Parness was willing to say what most people were unwilling to acknowledge at MSU, that for many white alumni it was all right to have black athletes, black professors, and even a black president, as long as African Americans on campus did not go screaming “racism” when confronted with discrimination.

President Wharton did not go unscathed, as critics questioned his leadership. Many whites believed the Minnesota-OSU brawl was simply a case of blacks assaulting innocent whites. Jim Stevenson of Flint, Michigan, found Wharton’s response to investigate discrimination in the Big Ten as “that of an emotional black man.” Stevenson questioned Wharton’s reaction to the fight by asking, “Where were your condemnations for this savage, racist attack?”\(^{44}\) “A Sports Fan” insisted Wharton’s interest in discussing the professors concerns revealed that “one black seems to defend the other regardless of conditions.” Like Stevenson, he expected Wharton, as President of MSU, to speak out against acts of violence by all athletes in the Big Ten, black or white. “Or can Negroes do no wrong,” he asked?\(^{45}\) Another disgruntled fan accused Wharton of exemplifying why whites did not want an African American as university president. The fan contended, Wharton’s actions were “a factor in many persons not wanting Negroes in positions of authority. When they do, they often take biased, irrational stands on issues, just to favor the Negro!”\(^{46}\) The


\(^{44}\) Jim Stevenson to Clifton Wharton, Jr., 13 February, 1972, Clifton Wharton Papers, UA 2.1.14, Box 473, Folder 22, MSU Archives.

\(^{45}\) “A Sports Fan” to Clifton Wharton, Jr., 12 February 1972, Clifton Wharton Papers, UA 2.1.14, Box 473, Folder 22, MSU Archives.

\(^{46}\) The author of this letter, dated February 21, 1972, is illegible. Clifton Wharton Papers, UA 2.1.14, Box 473, Folder 22, MSU Archives.
reaction of ignorant whites to President Wharton’s leadership reveals the extreme difficulty of being a black man in a public position of authority within a predominantly white institution. Furthermore, Wharton had the responsibility of juggling pressures from white alumni and administrators, black students and faculty, and maintaining the reputation and integrity of a nationally renowned athletic department.

Immediately after the press conference a group of State’s black athletes announced their support of the professors’ initiatives. Within the next two weeks, following the lead of the three black faculty members and the example of State’s black athletes in 1968, the group formed the Coalition of Black Athletes (CBA). The press conference and the demotion of soccer from varsity to club status were the major impetus to create the CBA. In 1970 Payton Fuller, State’s first African American head soccer coach and the only black coach of any Big Ten athletic team in 1972, was appointed as “acting head coach.” Fuller, looking back on his integrated squad, was told by the administration, “If any race problems erupt that’s the end of soccer here.” He continued, “I had many a sleepless night trying to keep the thing from blowing up.” Fuller was completely aware that as a pioneer black head coach at MSU his success or failure would be an example for other schools to follow. “If I had failed it would have supplied an excuse for those in power to say black athletes did not have the caliber to handle the responsibilities of a head coaching job.”

On February 22 the CBA held a press conference and explained their reasoning for organizing:

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47 Campbell, “Big Ten Segregated, Blacks Say,” State News (East Lansing)
In light of the trends of modern athletics, we the Black Athletes of Michigan State University, find it necessary that we unify our forces in order to insure our total athletic and academic survival. By so doing, we hope to eliminate many of the problems we feel are inherently related to our race. We recognize that all athletes face numerous problems together, but we further recognize that it is imperative that we articulate the problems of the Black Athlete.  

The establishment of the CBA in 1972 advanced State’s black athletes from a loose alliance of activists in 1968 to a formal organization that took the lead in political leadership among black athletes in the Big Ten.

Gus Ganakas must have been surprised when he learned that one of his players, Allen Smith, was the spokesman of the CBA. According to Smith, “In rap sessions we found out that most of us had the same kinds of problems, so we decided to get together.” While the boycott was led predominantly by football players in 1968, the CBA was organized into two committees—-one composed of varsity athletes, the other made up of freshmen and sophomores. To foster a greater rapport among the athletes, four athletes from different teams led the organization. In addition to Smith, Billy Joe Dupree represented the football team, Nigel Goodison spoke for the soccer team, and Flint native Herb Washington acted on behalf of the track squad. By 1972, the prominence and importance of black athletes to Michigan State had moved beyond football. Yet, it was the integration of Michigan State football that proved to other coaches on campus that recruiting African Americans could help their teams win. As a result, most of State’s teams were integrated by 1972, creating a stronger constituency to support the Coalition of Black Athletes.


The central objective of the CBA was to present and negotiate their demands. Dissatisfied with the athletic department’s failure to appoint a black academic advisor or hire more black coaches, trainers, and athletic officials as requested in 1968, the CBA had five new demands:

- Assist athletes financially after their eligibility expires
- Form a grievance board composed of black athletes, black coaches and black faculty
- Renegotiate present scholarships of Black soccer players
- Institute a medical program that covers players totally
- Appoint a black athlete to the screening committee for the new athletic director

The CBA believed that because “Michigan State University occupies the leadership in terms of black enrollment in the Big Ten, [MSU] should pioneer the quest for desegregation in the athletic arena.”51 As a result of Duffy Daugherty’s giving more black athletes an opportunity to play football when many other schools did not, in the eyes of its black players MSU had a responsibility to carry the torch of equality in all areas of athletics.

Four days later more than one hundred African American students assembled at center court of the Jenison Fieldhouse delaying State’s basketball game against Iowa for forty-five minutes. Members of the Black Coalition Council (BCC) demanded “accountability for expenditure of funds, academic quality, admissions practices and the hiring and firing practices of the university.”52 The BCC represented the black fraternities, the Black Liberation Front International, and the

Coalition of Black Athletes. Essentially, African American students wanted a greater voice at all levels of academics at MSU.

The recent attention given to MSU over the racial policies of the Big Ten transformed an MSU athletic event into a forum to call attention to university-wide concerns. Just as Robert L. Green coordinated communication among African American faculty and athletes across Big Ten schools, the black student movement also stretched beyond the East Lansing campus. Student representative Sam Riddle stated, “We are in contact with several Big Ten progressive black student organizations and it is very likely that if they (Behagen and Taylor) are not reinstated or reviewed by an impartial board . . . there won’t be any more Big Ten games taking place.”53 The actions of Green, Gunnings, McMillan and the CBA proved to MSU’s black students that the conditions of black athletes were tied to the relationship black students had with the rest of the university.

Perhaps those whites who were critical of Wharton’s response to the OSU-Minnesota brawl were more pleased when he issued a statement objecting to the interruption of the men’s basketball game against Iowa. Wharton argued that the demonstration was an “abuse” of “the principles of freedom of speech,” and that the University would not “tolerate repetition of such irresponsibility and violation of clearly established rules of conduct.”54 Wharton attended the next game against Michigan. At halftime a group of black students erected two banners at the north end of Jenison Fieldhouse. One read, “Big Ten: Open it up or we’ll shut it down.” Clearly black students believed that they had the power to determine Big Ten policies.

53 Ibid.
and practices. The second sign read, "Uncle Cliff's Cabin."\textsuperscript{55} The authors of this sign felt their black president had betrayed black students by renouncing their demonstration before the Iowa game. These students failed to recognize that Wharton symbolized what they hoped to become—an African American who had infiltrated "the system." One white student astutely observed, "It's not that he is the president of the University but that he is the black president, [nonetheless], he is the president of all the students and has to work for everyone, not just the black or white students."\textsuperscript{56} While black students tried to heap more coals on the fire, Wharton quickly extinguished any chance of a major incident by allowing the signs to remain visible.

On March 7, 1972, Professors Green, Gunnings and McMillan delivered their findings in a report entitled, "The Status of Blacks in the Big Ten Athletic Conference: Issues and Concerns," at the Big Ten annual meeting in Chicago. With the assistance of the CBA, the sources of information came from former and current black athletes, employees of the various athletic departments, university administrators, university records, athletic department publications, current and former coaches, and equal opportunity program coordinators, among others. The study covered eight of the ten schools and dealt with two main issues: discrimination in employment practices in Big Ten athletic departments and poor academic environments for black student-athletes.

The report found that "black students who happen to play sports perceive that they are seen by the establishment as being primarily athletes and not academically

\textsuperscript{55} Crispin Campbell, "Blacks protest at game," \textit{State News} (East Lansing), March 6, 1972.  
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
oriented students.” Further, Green and his partners also determined that the majority of Big Ten schools’ athletic departments’ academic counseling for athletes concentrated on athletes’ eligibility. “Typically,” the research showed, “the black athlete is advised to enroll in the curriculum taught by athletic department personnel, such as physical education,” and in some cases “black athletes are advised to take courses from certain professors who are sports fans and who give good grades to athletes.”

The Conference policy providing four years of financial support was also cited as a cause for poor graduation rates. Beth J. Shapiro’s study was cited as evidence that the majority of student athletes do not graduate in four years and white athletes graduated at a significantly higher rate than blacks.

Some of the most glaring examples of racial discrimination came in the form of hiring practices. Of the forty officials in football and thirty-six in basketball, only one in football and one in basketball were black. Green prepared a list of qualified African Americans who were interested in officiating Big Ten competition for immediate interviews. Furthermore, the report stated, “The appalling lack of black officials at Big Ten athletic events is only exceeded by the lack of black employees in Big Ten athletic departments.” At seven of the schools studied they found no black clerical employees, no black secretaries, no black sports information directors, no black team physicians, and no blacks employed in any capacity by athletic departments except for a few custodians, two trainers, and a few assistant or freshman coaches. In eight schools surveyed, only one had a black assistant athletic director.

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Many African American assistant coaches stated that they felt their primary role was to recruit blacks.\textsuperscript{59} This study clearly demonstrated that aside from the players themselves, the Big Ten was essentially run by whites.

Robert L. Green, Thomas Gunnings, and Joseph McMillan proposed a number of changes that would improve the status of African Americans in the Big Ten. They suggested:

- The hiring of black officials at every level in each sanctioned Big Ten event, especially basketball and football.
- The establishment of an Equal Opportunity Committee, with two representatives from each school, one of which should be black. The committee would be responsible for examining the hiring policies of Big Ten schools in an effort to improve employment for black secretaries, trainers, medical personnel, publicity personnel, and assistant coaches and athletic directors.
- A fifth year of financial support.
- Each athletic department should hire black academic counselors.
- That the Big Ten hire a black associate commissioner with the major responsibility of implementing the recommendations of the report.

The professors concluded that their report proved that while black athletes drew spectators and created revenues, especially in football and basketball, predominantly white athletic departments benefited at the expense of not providing employment, staff, or administrative positions to African Americans.\textsuperscript{60}

The following day, March 8, 1972, Commissioner Duke appointed a special Advisory Commission of five African Americans with a background in athletics. They were to investigate various Big Ten programs and report their findings. The conference athletic directors served as a committee to review the selection and appointment of black officials. All Big Ten schools were required to provide information on African American employees in their respective athletic departments.

\textsuperscript{59}Green, et al., "The Status of Blacks in the Big Ten Conference."

\textsuperscript{60}Ibid.
Unfortunately, no immediate action was taken for the Advisory Commission to meet, and its members soon wondered how concerned the conference athletic directors were about the serious grievances presented by Green and his colleagues. Leroy Bolden, MSU’s representative, “interpreted the delay as an absence of good faith and resigned.”

While the Big Ten moved slowly on Green’s recommendations, the CBA made real progress after spokesman Allen Smith and MSU Executive Vice President Jack Breslin announced that the University had agreed to many of the CBA’s proposals. On April 16, 1972, MSU released a statement agreeing to:

- Appoint a black academic advisor in the athletic department.
- Form a grievance board composed of black athletes, coaches, and faculty.
- Renegotiate the present tenders of all soccer players.
- Institute a medical program that covers athletes irrespective of season or place of injury.
- Two athletes, one white and one black, will be represented on the search committee for the new Athletic Director.
- More black athletic officials, varsity coaches, and trainers will be hired. MSU will actively encourage the Big Ten to hire more black officials.

The athletic department lived up to these agreements. Equally important, the CBA raised the status not just of African Americans, but of all soccer players (who had their tenders renegotiated) and all athletes (who received improved medical coverage).

After seven months, the Advisory Commission finally met in October 1972. After examining each conference school, the Commission found that their study’s results were nearly identical to Green’s. The Advisory Commission Chairman Judge A. Dickson, a former University of Minnesota graduate, presented its findings to the

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62 Shapiro, “Intercollegiate Athletics at Michigan State University,” 163.
Big Ten Joint Committee at the December Conference meeting. Dickson’s Commission identified academic problems deserving urgent attention. As with Green’s report, Dickson’s study also found that many Conference black athletes felt “dehumanized, exploited, and accepted only as an athlete.” The Advisory Commission supplied the Big Ten Joint Committee with positive steps to improve the status of black athletes:

- That content is added as a third criterion for scholastic eligibility to insure that any athlete who maintained his athletic eligibility would also be able to graduate in four to five years.
- The establishment of an office of athletic-academic counseling is established at all member institutions.
- Educational programs or seminars are created to improve the coaches’ ability to communicate with African Americans.
- That each school includes minorities in its searching and screening procedures when hiring coaches.63

Between Robert L. Green and his associates and the Dickson Commission, the Big Ten had no choice but to act on their recommendations.

The Big Ten Joint Committee strongly approved the Commission’s findings and moved to implement their proposals. The Joint Committee erected an athletic-academic counseling program at all schools, granted a fifth year of financial aid to athletes who had not yet graduated, strongly encouraged educational seminars to improve communication between coaches and black athletes, and developed a list of qualified African Americans for officiating positions. Implementing these policies fell on the shoulders of a new black Assistant Commissioner. On June 1, 1974, the Big Ten Conference appointed Dr. Charles D. Henry as Assistant Commissioner.64

In 1972 MSU hired Clarence Underwood as Assistant Athletic Director for Academics and provided him a budget for counseling and tutoring. His responsibilities included directing an expanded academic support system and coordinating all issues of academic eligibility.\textsuperscript{65} In many ways Underwood’s life and career help explain the role Michigan State’s integrated football teams played in shaping the University. In Gadsden, Alabama, where Underwood was born and raised, there were few opportunities for African Americans to go to college. On January 2, 1956, while serving the 82\textsuperscript{nd} airborne division of the U.S. Army in Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, Underwood watched as Michigan State and UCLA squared off in the Rose Bowl. Underwood’s jaw dropped when he saw the Spartans take the field with ten black players on the team. “As soon as I saw that, I knew that Michigan State was the place for me,” said Underwood.\textsuperscript{66}

Karl Perryman, like Underwood, was also from Alabama. Perryman, along with the rest of the black players, introduced to Underwood and countless other young African Americans the idea that blacks and whites could go to school together. Underwood has often thought about how Michigan State’s integrated football teams moved young African Americans. “You have to wonder how many black athletes and students were positively influenced about Michigan State watching that game.”\textsuperscript{67}

While we may never know how many African Americans enrolled at MSU because of one game in January 1956, Duffy Daugherty’s team gave one young man the inspiration to leave Alabama for Michigan. Seventeen years after that Rose Bowl

\textsuperscript{65} Seibold, \textit{Spartan Sports Encyclopedia}, 873.

\textsuperscript{66} Drew Sharp, “Michigan State’s greatest legacy in football was ‘50s integration,” \textit{Detroit Free Press}, August 30, 1996.

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
game, Underwood returned the favor by becoming the academic advisor young black football players so sorely needed. In 1998 Underwood became MSU’s first African American Athletic Director. You have to wonder if Michigan State would have hired an African American athletic director if it were not for the Coalition of Black Athletes and Robert L. Green.

In the final analysis, thanks to the efforts of the Coalition of Black Athletes and Robert L. Green, Michigan State University implemented tangible changes to improve the status of black athletes. Previous to Green’s and the CBA’s activism, the status of the black athlete at MSU and throughout the Big Ten had not improved since 1968. The coordinated, organized initiatives of Green and his colleagues produced breakthroughs for African Americans in all levels of the Big Ten. Yet, the process of desegregating the Big Ten began with the integration of Michigan State’s football team under Duffy Daugherty. The CBA believed that because MSU was a leader in affording opportunities to black athletes, the University had a responsibility to rectify institutional inequality throughout the athletic department. Thus, the integration of Michigan State football throughout the 1960s had a ripple effect towards breaking down barriers in the 1970s whereby black athletes’ civil rights activism benefited all athletes and African Americans beyond the field of play.
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

For the first half of the twentieth century, the integration of Michigan State football moved at the same slow pace of most northern schools. After recruiting dominant black players like Don Coleman and Jim Ellis, Michigan State won its first National Championship in 1952. By Biggie Munn’s last season as head football coach in 1953, Michigan State had more black athletes than any other Big Ten school. These integrated teams of the early 1950s “changed the rules, changed the game, and changed some attitudes,” Coleman asserted.\(^1\) After Biggie Munn retired, Duffy Daugherty initiated MSU’s shift as the leading integrated Big Ten team. Daugherty took integration to a whole new level in the 1960s by recruiting blacks from the South and playing more African Americans than white players on his greatest teams in 1965 and 1966.

Recruiting black football players meant more than winning football games. “I’m so thankful because Michigan State got me out of the segregated South,” Eugene Washington said looking back on his life. “I had enough of the separate drinking fountains and having to use the back door at restaurants,” he added.\(^2\) Pro football Hall of Famer Herb Adderley echoed Washington’s sentiments: “I’ll always be grateful for Duffy Daugherty and Michigan State for helping me to have a better life.”\(^3\) The migration of talented southern black athletes to Michigan State cannot be credited to Daugherty’s liberal views alone. The recruitment of southern African

\(^3\) Jerry Green, “Adderley: From MSU to Hall,” The Detroit News, May 12, 1996.
Americans was a product of social forces in both the South and the North. Social and legal factors simultaneously precipitated the movement of African Americans to Michigan State. In addition, the civil rights leadership of President John Hannah gave Daugherty the support he needed to challenge the limits of integration.

Southern black athletes came to Michigan State in the 1960s because segregation could not follow them beyond the Mason-Dixon Line. Moreover, when young African Americans saw the integrated Spartans on television, black communities and their high school coaches encouraged their athletes to play for Daugherty. With the help of southern black high school coaches and southern white college coaches Daugherty had a near monopoly on the top southern black talent. In 1966 Daugherty’s teams peaked in black talent and on-field success, the same year that Texas Western started five black players in the NCAA Championship basketball game against Kentucky. At the same time the U.S. Government threatened to withhold federal funds from schools that remained segregated, southern schools began desegregating these two high-revenue sports, but only after they had proof that African Americans could bring success and fortune to their schools. “The threat of losing,” Clarence Underwood accurately observed, “makes you swallow your prejudice.”

While Duffy Daugherty was primarily responsible for integrating Michigan State football, it was the black athletes themselves who brought equality to MSU athletics. Don Coleman who played for Munn in the early 1950s, coached for Daugherty in 1968, and taught at MSU in 1972, explained in 1973 the changing attitudes of African American athletes: “The black athlete of the 1950s would say

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4 Sharp, “Michigan State’s Greatest Legacy in Football Was ‘50s Integration.”
‘I’m doing good.’ Today’s athlete realizes his personal success does not help the community as a whole.” Coleman stated that during his playing days black athletes were more concerned with “self-survival,” whereas the black athlete of the late 1960s and early 1970s “looks at the larger perspective. He is much more aware of social issues.” During this period young African American athletes had “a new brand of hero, one who represents the concern about the plight and the future of blacks in America.”

Peyton Fuller, who played soccer from 1963 to 1965 and became the head soccer coach in 1970, recognized changing attitudes among black athletes in the late 1960s. Most black athletes of the early 1960s “tended to accept things as they were. We kept things internally,” Fuller explained, “We said to ourselves, things aren’t equal but that’s the way it is.” Fuller contended that that the Bubba Smith era marked the beginning of change in MSU’s black athletes. As Smith’s great teams made headlines and earned numerous awards, black athletes gained leverage they had not previously enjoyed. Thus, the success of Bubba Smith’s teams in 1965 and 1966 helped define a shift in the history of integrating college athletics. Michigan State’s black athletes utilized their power position to improve the status of African American athletes and created opportunities for African Americans in positions throughout the Athletic Department.

Such progress would not have been possible without the formation of the Coalition of Black Athletes who argued that because MSU was a leader in giving

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scholarships to black athletes, the University had a responsibility to demonstrate equality in all levels of athletics. Inspired by the ideas of Black Power and black student activism on campus and across the country, the CBA redefined the role of black athletes on campus by formally organizing, and negotiating real progress for African Americans. In the end, Duffy Daugherty's integrated teams of the mid-1950s and 1960s paved the way for Michigan State's integrated athletic department of the 1970s.
## APPENDIX

### BLACK FOOTBALL PLAYERS AT MICHIGAN STATE, 1913-1972

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Hometown</th>
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<td>John Lewis</td>
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<td>Clifford Roberts</td>
<td>1969-70</td>
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<td>Errol Roy</td>
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<td>New Orleans, LA</td>
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<td>Cleothar Turner</td>
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<td>1969-70</td>
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<td>1970-72</td>
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<td>Gail Clark</td>
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<td>1970</td>
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<td>1970-72</td>
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<td>Daryl Smith</td>
<td>1970-71</td>
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<td>Frank Timmons</td>
<td>1970-72</td>
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<td>Michael Holt</td>
<td>1971-72</td>
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<td>1971-72</td>
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<td>1971-72</td>
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<td>David E. Brown</td>
<td>1972</td>
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<td>1972</td>
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<td>Damond Mays</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Phoenix, AZ</td>
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<td>Clayton Montgomery</td>
<td>1972</td>
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<td>Ray Smith</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Dallas, TX</td>
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** These newspapers represent the changing names of Michigan State University’s newspaper over time

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