

**Before and After Title IX: The Persistent Entanglement of Race and Gender in Women's  
Collegiate Sport, 1892-1992**

by

**Cordelia Hope Brazile**

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This dissertation was presented

by

**Cordelia Hope Brazile**

It was defended on

May 24, 2023

and approved by

Christopher Phillips, Associate Professor, Department of History, Carnegie Mellon University

Molly Warsh, Associate Professor, Department of History

Laura Lovett, Professor, Department of History

Thesis Advisor/Dissertation Director: Robert Ruck, Professor, Department of History

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# **Before and After Title IX: The Persistent Entanglement of Race and Gender in Women's Collegiate Sport, 1892-1992**

Cordelia Hope Brazile, PhD

University of Pittsburgh, 2023

Parsing ongoing racial disparities within women's intercollegiate sport requires a deeper examination of the impact of race upon women's collegiate sport and the place of Title IX within women's collegiate sport history. This dissertation argues that despite the opportunities that Title IX has created for Black and white women, its implementation in higher education perpetuated pre-existing power dynamics that privileged white women and predominantly white institutions. The creation of women's teams, programs, and administrative units empowered white coaches to recruit Black and white women athletes, but it did not result in Black coaches or administrators entering predominantly white institutions. It was the same story that had characterized the integration of collegiate and professional men's sport. Black institutions, which had offered some opportunity for competitive collegiate women's sport in the years prior to Title IX, could not compete with the resources of predominantly white institutions post-Title IX. Though Title IX did represent a new era for women's sport in the United States, it also maintained protectionist notions of what sport meant for women's bodies. The policy of sex segregation that continues to shape women's collegiate sport can be traced directly to white supremacist ideology of the nineteenth century. Women's collegiate sport reflects the ways that ideas of race and racism have always influenced the opportunities available to women as athletes.

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## Preface

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## 1.0 Introduction

June 23, 2022 marked the fiftieth anniversary of Title IX, the landmark federal civil rights law which prohibits sex-based discrimination in federally funded educational institutions. Though Title IX addresses sex-based discrimination in a number of areas including hiring, admissions, promotion, and sexual harassment, it is primarily known for its impact on athletics. At both the high school and collegiate level, the number of girls and women participating in organized sport has risen dramatically as a result of Title IX. From 1972 to 2016, high school participation increased more than 1000% from 294,015 to 3,324,326.<sup>1</sup> In collegiate sport, from 1970 to 2016, the numbers of women playing has risen from 16,000 to 211,886.<sup>2</sup> The increasing number of girls and women exposed to sport in school has resulted in women's professional sports leagues and dominant showings by the United States in international competitions like the Olympics and FIFA World Cup. Title IX has undoubtedly been a positive force for women's sport in the United States. But Title IX failed to benefit all women equally.

Since 1992, the twentieth anniversary of Title IX, sporting organizations, media outlets, and activists have highlighted that Title IX's benefits have disproportionately helped white girls and women. These articles and reports have noted consistent themes: that Black women are mostly concentrated in basketball and track & field, sports with fewer associated costs and thus a lower

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<sup>1</sup> NCAA, *45 Years of Title IX: The Status of Women in Intercollegiate Athletics*, (Indianapolis: NCAA Publications), 16. <https://www.ncaapublications.com/productdownloads/TitleIX-45.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Vivian Acosta and Linda Jean Carpenter, "Women in Intercollegiate Sport: A Longitudinal, National Study, 1977-2014," 1. [www.acostacarpenter.org](http://www.acostacarpenter.org); NCAA, *45 Years of Title IX*, 17.

economic barrier to entry; because Black women are concentrated in a few sports, fewer Black women benefit from athletic scholarships; and that lower participation rates translate into much lower percentages of Black women in coaching and administrative roles. A 2022 Associated Press article noted that while 34% of head coaches for women's teams were white women, only 7% were women of color. For athletic directors, there was a disparity of 20% versus 4%.<sup>3</sup> For all its positive effects, Title IX's legacy must also include a reckoning with the racial inequalities it has perpetuated.

Parsing ongoing racial disparities within women's intercollegiate sport requires a deeper examination of the impact of race upon women's collegiate sport and the place of Title IX within women's collegiate sport history. This dissertation argues that despite the opportunities that Title IX has created for Black and white women, its implementation in higher education perpetuated pre-existing power dynamics that privileged white women and predominantly white institutions. The creation of women's teams, programs, and administrative units empowered white coaches to recruit Black and white women athletes, but it did not result in Black coaches or administrators

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<sup>3</sup> See Tina Sloan Green, "Recruiting Women of Color in Sports," *The Women's Sports Experience*, January-February 1993, 11-13, NCAA Library, Indianapolis, Indiana; "Women and Sports," *Congressional Quarterly* 2, no. 9 (March 1992): 206; Robertha Abney and Dorothy L. Richey, "Opportunities for Minority Women in Sport—The Impact of Title IX," *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance* (March 1992): 56-59; Jennifer Butler and Donna Lopiano, *The Women's Sports Foundation Report: Title IX and Race in Intercollegiate Sport* (East Meadow, N.Y.: Women's Sports Foundation, 2003), 10; William C. Rhoden, "Black and White Women Far From Equal Under Title IX," *New York Times*, June 11, 2012. <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/11/sports/title-ix-has-not-given-black-female-athletes-equal-opportunity.html>; Annie Ma and Cliff Brunt, "Title IX: Strides for women of color in sports lag under law," *Associated Press*, June 20, 2022.

entering predominantly white institutions. It was the same story that had characterized the integration of collegiate and professional men's sport. Black institutions, which had offered some opportunity for competitive collegiate women's sport in the years prior to Title IX, could not compete with the resources of predominantly white institutions post-Title IX. Though Title IX did represent a new era for women's sport in the United States, it also maintained protectionist notions of what sport meant for women's bodies. The policy of sex segregation that continues to shape women's collegiate sport can be traced directly to white supremacist ideology of the nineteenth century. Women's collegiate sport reflects the ways that ideas of race and racism have always influenced the opportunities available to women as athletes.

To interrogate how race has shaped the opportunities available within women's collegiate sport and the impact of Title IX upon these dynamics, this dissertation compares the sporting histories of two institutions: one predominantly white (PWI), the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, and one historically Black (HBCU), Tennessee State University, in the years before and after 1972. The University of Tennessee at Knoxville became a powerhouse in women's collegiate sport in the wake of Title IX, led by Coach Pat Summitt's women's basketball program. By the early 1980s, Summitt's teams were perennial high-achievers and by her retirement in 2012 had won eight NCAA Division I national titles. Conversely, the Tennessee State Tigerbelles, anchored by legendary coach Edward Stanley Temple, dominated women's track & field at the domestic and national level for decades. From the 1950s through the 1970s, Temple's talented runners brought home national titles and Olympic medals. But the advent of Title IX soon spelled the end of this illustrious run of achievement. I argue that a close consideration of these two universities reveals the at best paradoxical and at worst harmful effects of this landmark legislation on Black women athletes and Black institutions.

Focusing on institutions as the main subjects of a collegiate sport history illuminates a longer history of gender and race within sport than is available by centering athletes—whose roles as students are necessarily limited. Additionally, comparative analysis is uncommon in both the histories of Title IX and women’s collegiate sports history more broadly, which tend to focus on either single institutions or a much larger, national scale. By comparing two public, land-grant universities in the same state whose major difference is their racial identity, the impact of race upon both institutional politics and individual actions is thrown into sharp relief. Given that collegiate sport and Title IX are administered through the policies of a collection of institutions, each institution’s history with women’s collegiate sport and race becomes exceedingly relevant. Finally, by taking an institutional approach to women’s collegiate sport history, the history of each institution as well as its men’s collegiate sports can better contextualize what happened to women’s sport before and after Title IX. As much as developments within national sporting organizations, the daily concerns of each administration’s budget and undergraduate enrollments were formative for the expansion of participation, leadership, and funding for women’s collegiate sport.

The histories of these two institutions tell an exemplary story of women’s collegiate sports history as two of the most successful programs of the twentieth century but speak to broader trends as well. By examining Tennessee State University and the University of Tennessee, I argue that we can better understand the history of women’s collegiate sport before and after Title IX because of the chronology of each institution’s success. Tennessee State enjoyed its most noteworthy years in the two decades prior to Title IX and declined soon after its passage, while the University of Tennessee emerged as a titan in its aftermath. Though the accomplishments of each university are perhaps singular, the factors that allowed Tennessee State to rise and fall and the University of Tennessee to succeed were not unique. I argue their fates can be traced to the racial identity of

each institution, a characteristic closely tied to its financial well-being, prestige, and size, each of which plays a major role in supporting and promoting collegiate sport. Though small Black institutions were some of the only places where women could participate in competitive collegiate sport in the mid-twentieth century, women's collegiate sport has been dominated by large, public, white universities in the years since Title IX.<sup>4</sup>

Comparing the histories of the University of Tennessee and Tennessee State University demonstrates how hidden the histories of Black institutions have been within the histories of women's collegiate sport and Title IX. While exemplars like the Tennessee State Tigerbelles have received ample scholarly attention, these histories rarely extend past 1970.<sup>5</sup> Only 200 miles apart, both universities boasted world-class women's collegiate sports programs in the twentieth century. Giving weight to the decline of Tennessee State within narratives of women's collegiate sport history and Title IX demonstrates the longstanding barriers Black women and Black institutions faced in participating in sport which, if anything, were strengthened by Title IX. Scrutinizing the history of race within women's collegiate sport illuminates the legacies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that shaped women's sport in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>4</sup> Since the NCAA began offering women's championships in 1982, public universities have won 30 of 40 national championships in women's basketball and 37 of 40 in women's track and field. All have been PWIs.

<sup>5</sup> See Jennifer H. Lansbury, *A Spectacular Leap: Black Women Athletes in Twentieth-Century America* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2014); David K. Wiggins and Ryan Swanson, editors, *Separate Games: African American Sport Behind the Wall of Segregation* (Fayetteville, Ark.: University of Arkansas Press, 2016); Dwight Lewis and Susan Thomas, *A Will to Win* (Mt. Juliet, Tenn.: Cumberland Press, 1983); Rita Liberti and Maureen M. Smith, *(Re)Presenting Wilma Rudolph* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2015), which all primarily focus on the Tigerbelles' Olympic years and achievements.

Since the late nineteenth century, women's collegiate sport has been a conservatively structured pastime for women. While allowing white women the opportunity to participate was progressive for the time, the strict limits placed on their physical exertion, the racial ideology embedded in the preservation of their reproductive capacities, and the sex segregation of all levels of sport demonstrated how sport reinforced both racial and gendered norms that then prevailed. In many regards, Title IX—with its continuation of sex segregation—continued to reinforce this conservative understanding of women's biology and protectionism. What had changed from the nineteenth century was the nature of higher education and its newfound racial integration. But while Title IX did, as a byproduct of its ties to colleges and universities, racially integrate women's collegiate sport, the presence of talented Black women athletes at predominantly white institutions and the consequential decline of Black collegiate women's sport demonstrated how Title IX reinforced the gender and racial hierarchies embedded in women's collegiate sport since its inception.

What has been neglected in scholarship is the extent to which women's collegiate sports history has always been defined by race, both on its own terms and in its institutional settings. At the same time that upper-class white women began partaking in organized sport, particularly in women's colleges, demographic shifts from Reconstruction and mass immigration were stoking eugenicist theories and scientific racism. The same white women beginning to play basketball at Smith College in 1892 were under intense scrutiny for how the sport affected their capacities to reproduce white children and whether basketball would interfere with that obligation, implied by some and explicitly stated by others. Senda Berenson's modifications reduced the game's speed

and preventing jumping entirely.<sup>6</sup> Though scholars of women's sport have not connected this fear of physical harm to the racial dynamics of the late nineteenth century, the overlap of sport and racial purity defined the early days of women's collegiate sport. This fear manifested in prohibitions against competitive play and a strict enforcement of sex-segregated play. Men and women exercised in separate spheres, and this practice persisted throughout the twentieth century, bolstered by ongoing debates over women's biology.<sup>7</sup> The roots of Title IX's policy of sex-segregated women's sport trace back to the racism and enthusiasm for eugenics of the late nineteenth century.

The politics of protectionism—preserving white women's capability to reproduce—had outcomes for Black women as well. Women's collegiate sport prior to Title IX was largely segregated. But because white women were regarded as the arbiters of femininity in both the nineteenth and twentieth century, they determined what was acceptable for all women athletes. Black women's pursuit of respectability led them to imitate many of the behaviors and norms surrounding exertion and competition even if their Blackness meant that Black women athletes were never perceived to be as feminine as their white counterparts. Their exclusion from the politics of protectionism had a darker history in the exploitation of Black women's bodies since

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<sup>6</sup> Helen Lenskyj, *Out of Bounds: Women, Sport and Sexuality* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1986), 28.

<sup>7</sup> For histories of whiteness and racial policy in early women's collegiate sport see Shannon L. Walsh, *Eugenics and Physical Culture Performance in the Progressive Era: Watch Whiteness Workout* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2020); Martha H. Verbugge, *Active Bodies: A History of Women's Physical Education in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Lenskyj, *Out of Bounds*.

the earliest days of the slave trade<sup>8</sup>, but in the twentieth century it also created opportunities for Black women to compete in sports considered unacceptable for white women like track & field. As the civil rights movement advanced, Black women athletes occasionally became symbols of Black achievement, though most attention and efforts were on promoting the status of Black men in U.S. society.<sup>9</sup>

At the heart of this dissertation is the intersection of institutional efforts to develop sex-segregated collegiate sport programs while integrating racially and the consequences for both men's and women's collegiate sport. Beyond their exemplary records in sport, the histories of Tennessee State and the University of Tennessee also reflect the impact of racial integration in higher education. In 1968, both universities became central players in a decades-long, statewide lawsuit to desegregate higher education in Tennessee. The lawsuit initially centered on Nashville, where a new University of Tennessee campus direct competed with Tennessee State in its course offerings for local students. This conflict culminated in an unprecedented merger of the University

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<sup>8</sup> Kali Nicole Gross, "African American Women, Mass Incarceration, and the Politics of Protection," *Journal of American History* 102, no. 1 (June 2015): 26-27.

<sup>9</sup> For histories of Black femininity and Black women's bodies see Beverly Guy-Sheftall, "The Body Politic: Black Female Sexuality and the Nineteenth-Century Euro-American Imagination," in *Skin Deep, Spirit Strong: The Black Female Body in American Culture*, ed. Kimberly Wallace-Sanders (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002); Ronda C. Henry Anthony, *Searching for the New Black Man: Black Masculinity and Women's Bodies* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013); Deborah K. King, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousnesses: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology," *Signs* 14, no. 1 (Fall 1988): 42-72; For black women's sport in international context see Lansbury, *A Spectacular Leap*; Cat M. Ariail, *Passing the Baton: Black Women Track Stars and American Identity* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2020), Liberti and Smith, *(Re)Presenting Wilma Rudolph*.



of Tennessee at Nashville with Tennessee State, forming one integrated institution under the control of Tennessee State. Though the courts had often become involved in desegregation, the decisions in that lawsuit, *Geier v. Dunn*, were significant both for the scope of integrating two distinct universities and for integrating a PWI into an HBCU for the first time in U.S. history.<sup>10</sup> Debates around desegregation consumed both Tennessee State and the University of Tennessee in the 1970s and 1980s, and the racial composition of teams in men's basketball and football became highly symbolic of the institutions' racial identity. The universities' decisions around women's sport and Title IX cannot be understood without thorough attention to the dynamics of men's sport and the wider university landscapes.

While recent scholarship on Title IX has noted its racial inequalities in passing, no historical or legal monograph has, to date, dealt comprehensively with the relationship between race and Title IX. The earliest works on women's sports history, published in the 1990s, largely hailed Title IX as a success and had little to say about its relationship to race. Susan Cahn and Mary Jo Festle both rightly cite Title IX as a major turning point, but, as Festle recognizes, it ultimately prioritized a vision of women's sport that was white and upper-class.<sup>11</sup> These works, while essential in the field, did not grapple with how Title IX not only was grounded in whiteness but reinforced it as well.

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<sup>10</sup> Karen Fitzgerald Brown, "The Legal History of Dualism in Higher Education," *College and University Law—The Legal Environment, Continuing and Higher Education* 5410 (Summer 1979): 1.

<sup>11</sup> Susan Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Women's Sport* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) and Mary Jo Festle, *Playing Nice: Politics and Apologies in Women's Sports* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 284.

The next generation of scholarship was increasingly critical but focused upon the relationship between men's and women's sport. Eileen McDonagh and Laura Pappano's *Playing with the Boys* engages more with Title IX's connection to earlier iterations of sex segregation in their chapter "Old Norms in New Forms." While McDonagh and Pappano do explore how some eugenicist ideas did limit women's opportunities, they do so largely to debunk these claims and advocate for sex-integrated sport, rather than interrogate the racial origins of these beliefs and their effects on sport.<sup>12</sup> Like *Playing with the Boys*, Welch Suggs' critique of Title IX centers on the relationship between men's and women's sport, but instead argues that women's sport has been degraded through its incorporation into the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and negatively impacted men's sport. Suggs does acknowledge that Title IX was modeled on anti-racial discrimination legislation and the racial disparities of its benefits, but places little analytical emphasis on either.<sup>13</sup> More recently, Kelly Belanger's work on the history of Title IX at Michigan State University is a valuable example of the utility of the institutional case study approach but is focused on rhetoric rather than historical analysis.<sup>14</sup> Overall, historical scholarship on Title IX has acknowledged its whiteness but also remained focused on white women and white institutions.

Insightful scholarship on the historical relationships between Title IX, race, and sex has come from fields outside of history. Legal theorist A. Jerome Dees' work on Title IX and its impact

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<sup>12</sup> Eileen McDonagh and Laura Pappano, *Playing with the Boys: Why Separate is Not Equal in Sports* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> Welch Suggs, *A Place on the Team: The Triumph and Tragedy of Title IX* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Kelly Belanger, *Invisible Seasons: Title IX and the Fight for Equity in College Sports* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2017).

on Black women argues that in the intersection of race, sex, and Title IX, Black women have been far more affected by decisions like *Brown v. Board of Education* than Title IX. He also points to the primacy of HBCUs in assessing the history of Black women's sport both before and after Title IX.<sup>15</sup> Dees' insistence on centering race in analysis of Title IX and acknowledging the opportunities provided by HBCUs are critical interventions into the historiography of Title IX, given historians' focus on white women and white institutions. Sociologist Elizabeth Sharrow's work on Title IX and its relationship to biology, while focusing only on the 1970s, was also valuable in parsing Title IX's historical conception of sex.<sup>16</sup> Though not at all concerned with sport, Louise Michele Newman's work on the racial dimensions of feminist organizing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and its biological dimensions provided key context for the development of early women's sport.<sup>17</sup> Other legal scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw and Serena Mayeri have not directly written on Title IX but their work on intersectionality and the relationship between race and sex are both foundational to this dissertation.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> A. Jerome Dees, "Access of Interest: Why Brown Has Benefited African-American Women More Than Title IX," 76 UMKC L. Rev. 625 (2008); A. Jerome Dees, "Do the Right Thing: A Search for an Equitable Application of Title IX in Historically Black Colleges and University Athletics," 33 Cap. U.L. Rev. 219 (2004). See also Deborah L. Brake and Verna L. Williams, "*The Heart of the Game: Putting Race and Educational Equity at the Center of Title IX*," *Virginia Sports and Entertainment Law Journal* 7, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 199-236.

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Sharrow, "'Female athlete' politic: Title IX and the naturalization of sex difference in public policy," *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 5, no. 1 (2017): 46-66.

<sup>17</sup> Louise Michele Newman, *White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

<sup>18</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Policies," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 139

Scholarship on Black sport increasingly emphasizes Black women, but has made little mention of Title IX, reflecting Dees' assertion of the primacy of Brown.<sup>19</sup> Early works on Black women athletes often engaged in biography and this is still a common approach for notables like Wyomia Tyus and Wilma Rudolph.<sup>20</sup> More recently, Jessica Lansbury's 2014 book on Black women athletes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and Cat Ariail's 2020 work on Black women track stars offer crucial insights into the relationship between Black communities and women's athletics and the ways that ideas about Blackness and femininity both hindered and bolstered these athletes.<sup>21</sup> Recent historical works on segregated sport and HBCU sport, particularly Derrick E. White's *Blood, Sweat & Tears*, have also provided valuable insight into the dynamics of HBCU sport and racial integration.<sup>22</sup> However, there has been little work to date on the impact of integration on

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(1989): 139-166; Serena Mayeri, *Reasoning from Race: Feminism, Law, and the Civil Rights Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> For histories of Black sport see Harry Edwards, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete: 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017); Oania Chalk, *Black College Sport* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1976); Arthur Ashe, *A Hard Road to Glory: A History of the African-American Athlete* (New York: Warner Books, 1988); Rob Ruck, *Sandlot Seasons: Sport in Black Pittsburgh* (Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1987); David K. Wiggins, *Glory Bound: Black Athletes in a White America* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> See for example Frances Clayton Gray, *Born to Win: The Authorized Biography of Althea Gibson* (Hoboken, N.J.: John & Wiley Sons, 2004); Ann Malaspina and Eric Velaquez, *Touch the Sky: Alice Coachman, Olympic High Jumper* (Chicago, Ill: Albert Whitman, 2012); Liberti and M. Smith, *(Re)Presenting Wilma Rudolph*; Wyomia Tyus and Elizabeth Terzakis, *Tigerbelle: The Wyomia Tyus Story* (Brooklyn: Akashic Books, 2018).

<sup>21</sup> Lansbury, *A Spectacular Leap*; Cat M. Ariail, *Passing the Baton*.

<sup>22</sup> Billy Hawkins, Joseph Cooper, Akilah Carter-Francique, and J. Kenyatta Cavil, eds., *The Athletic Experience at Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Past, Present, and Persistence* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015);

Black women at HBCUs. Two chapters in a 2015 edited volume on HBCU athletics, one by Akilah Carter-Francique and F. Michelle Richardson and the other by Courtney L. Flowers, engage directly with the Black experience for women athletes at HCBUs and the ways that Title IX has created opportunities for white women at HBCUs.<sup>23</sup> However, work remains to be done on both the histories of Black women athletes at PWIs and HBCUs, as well as Black institutions and Title IX. Hopefully, this dissertation will be one of many to wrestle with these complex intersections.

In a 1998 *Journal of Sports History* article, Patricia Vertinsky and Gwendolyn Captain called for an approach to sport history that embraced Black history and women's history as well as methodologies that incorporated theoretical understandings of race, sex, and the body.<sup>24</sup> Though their work focused on representations of Black women athletes, their approach has been enormously informative in attempting to synthesize Title IX's relationship to race as a matter of not only culture, but also one grounded in biology. Borrowing from and incorporating Thomas Holt's articulation of race as a lived, everyday experience<sup>25</sup>, this dissertation has also drawn

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Wiggins and Swanson, editors, *Separate Games*; Derrick E. White, *Blood, Sweat & Tears: Jake Gaither, Florida A&M, and the History of Black College Football* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2019). A chapter in *Separate Games* does mention the impact of Title IX on the Tennessee State Tigerbelles, but does not provide much detail or supporting literature.

<sup>23</sup> Hawkins, Cooper, Carter-Francique, and J. Kenyatta Cavil, eds., *The Athletic Experience at Historically Black Colleges and Universities*.

<sup>24</sup> Patricia Vertinsky and Gwendolyn Captain, "More Myth than History: American Culture and Representations of the Black Female's Athletic Ability," *Journal of Sport History* 25, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 532.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas C. Holt, "Marking: Race, Race-Making, and the Writing of History," *American Historical Review* 100, no. 1. (1995): 1-20.

heavily from scholarship that grapples with how the body is a site of negotiation for both sex and race.<sup>26</sup> Though Title IX has been shaped by cultural perceptions of sex, gender, and race, and molded them in return, this dissertation argues that women's sports history has also been shaped by perceptions of women's biology up to and through Title IX, with their own racial dimensions as well.

The first chapter of the dissertation lays out a long history of women's collegiate sport, arguing that ideas of race, sex, and biology have been formative to women's sports from the late nineteenth century through to the late 1970s. The Title IX policy interpretations of 1978-79, which set the final regulations for implementation in intercollegiate sports, relied on biological arguments about women's physical frailty dating back to the nineteenth century in maintaining sex-segregated sport. Though the white supremacy of nineteenth-century protectionism was no longer racially segregating collegiate sport, higher education had not fully desegregated. This chapter illuminates the historical contours of race and sex that shaped the development of women's intercollegiate sport through a biological lens.

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<sup>26</sup> See Guy-Sheftall, "The Body Politic: Black Female Sexuality and the Nineteenth-Century Euro-American Imagination,"; Anthony, *Searching for the New Black*; Gwendolyn Captain, "Enter Ladies and Gentlemen of Color: Gender, Sport, and the Ideal of African American Manhood and Womanhood During the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Journal of Sport History* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 81-102; Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, (New York: Routledge, 1993); Verbugge, *Active Bodies*; Kathleen Canning, "The Body as Method? Reflections on the Place of the Body in Gender History," *Gender and History* 11, no. 3 (1999): 499-513; Jennifer Anne Boittin, "'Are You Trying to Play a White Woman?' *La Mère Patrie* and the Female Body in French West Africa," *Sage: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 40, no. 4 (2015): 841-864.

The following four chapters demonstrate how the histories of the University of Tennessee and Tennessee State University have each displayed different strands of Title IX's origins and experienced different outcomes accordingly. Chapters two and three focus on the University of Tennessee and examine the status of intercollegiate sport before and after the implementation of Title IX and desegregation. The University of Tennessee follows the typical history of a predominantly white, well-funded, Southern institution. It had a robust men's intercollegiate sports program that remained racially segregated well into the 1960s. Though it had a women's intercollegiate program in the early twentieth century, it disbanded in line with national trends in the 1920s. Collegiate sport at Tennessee reinforced traditional notions of both gender and race. The University of Tennessee's administration fiercely protected men's football from racial integration and discouraged a burgeoning intercollegiate women's sport program as overly competitive and unsuitable for white women. The passage of Title IX in 1972 revitalized white women's intercollegiate sport and bore out the ideological vision of separate but equal men's and women's sport. Women's sport did not receive equal funding, dollar for dollar, but benefitted from exponentially more administrative investment and built a racially integrated, sex-segregated athletics program. But even as the racial integration of both men's and women's sport did represent significant change from the segregation of the previous hundred years, it did not result in changes to the whiteness of authority figures or administrative structures within the university, in athletics or beyond.

Chapters four and five explore the history of Tennessee State and the social significance of its collegiate sports programs to the Black community and the country. Like many other HBCUs, Tennessee State prioritized the establishment of a talented men's football and later basketball team to demonstrate the capacity of Black men for masculine endeavors, talent, and leadership. While

Black women were not discouraged by athletic and medical organizations from participating in sport in the same way as white women, the opportunities available to them were still much more limited than those available to men and strictly bound by concerns of respectability. Black women had to remain somewhat accountable to the same femininity that restrained white women. Unlike many universities, Black and white, Tennessee State had funded competitive women's intercollegiate sport prior to Title IX, but the administration's support was nominal at best and did not equal the men's team in resources or privileges. Even after Title IX, the university doubled down on its investments in men's sport in the 1970s while providing the bare minimum to women's sport. When Tennessee State felt its Blackness was under threat by the integration with the University of Tennessee at Nashville, men's sport became a potent symbol of racial identity to the university and outside observers. The neglect of Tennessee State's women athletes points to the dual legacies of protectionism, which had historically not extended to Black women because of their race, and a cultural focus on uplifting Black men to promote racial equality. The combination of desegregation and Title IX at other universities also had a negative effect on Tennessee State's ability to recruit talented Black women athletes, who now had more options than ever before. The migration of talented Black women athletes to predominantly white institutions like the University of Tennessee hastened the dissolution of Tennessee State's once legendary program.

Though many women, both Black and white, have benefited from Title IX in a collective sense, the legacy of Title IX has its pitfalls as well. The extent to which whiteness and racial segregation shaped the early decades of women's collegiate sport has been underappreciated and underestimated in the subsequent emergence of Title IX. While progress towards racial equality in U.S. society and higher education has thus filtered through to collegiate sport, the whiteness of women's collegiate sport at the individual and institutional level remains largely undisturbed. The



presence of Black women as coaches and athletes at high-profile universities—all predominantly white—underscores how Title IX created opportunities for Black women at the expense of Black institutions. The divergent histories of women’s collegiate sport at a predominantly white university and an historically Black university demonstrates how Title IX and women’s collegiate sport history offer a rich ground for interrogating complex ideas of race, sex, and biology, and demonstrates how closely they intertwine in the lives of athletes and institutions.

## **2.0 A History of Protectionism: How Biology Ordered Women's Collegiate Sport, 1892-1978**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Since the late nineteenth century, both men's and women's collegiate sport have evolved into a commercialized spectacle, nearly professionalized at the highest echelons of competition. In terms of participation rules, organizational structure, and scale, collegiate sport is almost unrecognizable from its roots. Today with the advent of branding and sponsorship deals in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), under the name, image, and likeness rules, even the lines of amateur status—once the definitive hallmark of collegiate sport—have become blurred. What remains intact as one of the major organizing principles of collegiate sport is sex segregation. This classification obviously extends beyond collegiate sport, to all levels of sport involving post-pubescent athletes, but is not inherent to sporting activities. It has been intentionally maintained and strengthened in collegiate sport, men's and women's, for decades. By centering sex segregation within the history of women's collegiate sport as its fundamental organizing principle, the place of Title IX within this history begins to look different.

This chapter argues that from the nineteenth century to the late 1970s, sex segregation has remained a defining characteristic of sport and various actors have used biological arguments to exert control over women's sport. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, male medical authorities and some women suffragists used concerns over reproduction and respectability to keep girls and women limited to noncompetitive “play days” or intramural competitions. In the mid-twentieth century, Black and white women physical educators argued that their innate

understanding of women's biology better prepared them to administer women's sport as opposed to their male counterparts. And in the 1970s, feminist advocates for Title IX again returned to biological arguments to keep women in control of women's collegiate sport, now framed as a progressive measure to encourage more opportunities for women.

This chapter synthesizes scholarship from a number of subfields within women's history to reframe Title IX. To date, no work on women's collegiate sport history has connected Title IX to the origins of women's collegiate sport history in its nineteenth-century context, nor recognized the historical continuities of using biology as a mechanism for authority within women's collegiate sport. This project of synthesis bridges a number of gaps: it brings women's sport into conversations regarding the debates surrounding women's bodies and equality in the movement for women's suffrage in the late-nineteenth century; it juxtaposes the racial politics of late-nineteenth century women's activists with the origins of women's collegiate sport class among upper-class, white, educated women. By maintaining biology—and its racial implications for both Black and white women—as a common thread, the history of women's physical education in the mid-twentieth century becomes a bridge instead of a lacuna in women's collegiate sport between the early twentieth century and Title IX. With this historical weight, my interpretation of Title IX through a lens of its relationship to ideas of race and racism, as well as biology and gender equality, thus demonstrates how Title IX was as much a continuity within the history of women's collegiate sport as a departure.

Paying close attention to the role that women's biology and bodies have played in the organization of sport brings this dissertation into conversation with scholars of women's history and feminist theory. Major feminist debates of the 1960s and 1970s on reproductive rights and the Equal Rights Amendment—specifically, the maintenance of sex-specific protective legislation—

generated substantial work from scholars like Joan W. Scott and Judith Butler on the relationships among sex, gender, and physical form.<sup>27</sup> Later generations of Black intellectuals have offered their own criticisms of how race affected these same relationships.<sup>28</sup> I argue that women's collegiate sport, with its inherent physicality, has been missing from these conversations. While some historians of women's sport have questioned the ongoing sex-segregation of sport in the twenty-first century, they have paid little attention to the longer history of biology that has been hiding in plain sight.<sup>29</sup>

This chapter examines the evolution of women's collegiate sport from the late nineteenth century through the 1970s and the passage of Title IX, with a focus on racial politics and biology. Though organized women's sport at the turn of the twentieth century was limited to a small group of affluent white women, its perceived impact on women's bodies touched on major debates within the emerging women's movement and reflected the burgeoning influence of eugenics. The chapter then explores how the philosophy of sex and racial segregation shaped the development of

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<sup>27</sup> See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); Linda Nicholson, "Interpreting Gender," *Signs* 20, no. 1 (September 1994): 79-105; Butler, *Bodies That Matter*; Canning, "The Body as Method? Reflections on the Place of the Body in Gender History."

<sup>28</sup> See Oyeronke Oyewumi, *Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Gross, "African American Women"; Boittin, "'Are You Trying to Play a White Woman?' *La Mère Patrie* and the Female Body in French West Africa,"; Guy-Sheftall, "The Body Politic"; King, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousnesses."

<sup>29</sup> As previously mentioned both McDonagh and Pappano and Suggs in their works on Title IX both question the relationship between men's and women's sport, but with little historical depth to their arguments.

women's collegiate programs at white and Black colleges and universities. Just as fears of damaging women's bodies through sport helped to segregate the emergence of women's sport, Jim Crow and the principle of "separate but equal" determined Black education and sporting opportunities. Even as the push against racial backlash began to coalesce, both Black and white leaders in women's sport emphasized biological differences to maintain control of women's sport.

Finally, the women's movement of the 1960s reexamined the question of whether women could achieve full political equality through a definition of equality that demanded identical treatment between men and women or one that made allowances for physical differences, as pursued by feminist labor activists throughout the twentieth century. Title IX encompassed the tension between both branches of thought, as the language of the law required the absence of differential treatment between men and women, while its athletic interpretation advocated for differential treatment on the basis of biology. The chapter concludes with analysis of the intercollegiate athletic policy interpretation for Title IX, first proposed in 1978 and finalized in 1979. Though President Nixon signed Title IX into law in 1972, the debates over regulations and implementation as well as delays for compliance meant it was not enforceable until the end of the decade. By 1978, the biological rationale for segregating women's sport remained a foundational element to Title IX, but rhetoric surrounding Title IX focused instead on how sex segregation created more opportunities for women or potentially harmed men's sport. By prioritizing women's physical safety and drawing comparisons with pregnancy, Title IX put a new spin on the same arguments that had defined women's sport for the previous 75 years.

## 2.2 The Racial Politics of Early Women's Sport

Though the emergence of women's sport has been widely studied within sports history, its relationship to the racial politics of the late nineteenth century has been neglected. This approach reflects a close attention to issues of sex and gender regarding what was appropriate and possible for women in the early decades of sport, but lack of attention to how these issues intersected with ideas of race and biology in the post-Civil War era.

Historian Susan Cahn's seminal work on women's sport history *Coming on Strong* encapsulates this absence perfectly. She begins her history of women's athletics in the nineteenth century with the movement for moderate exercise in the 1830s and then more organized physical activity in the 1880s. As Cahn documents, nineteenth century medical science characterized women as "the physiologically inferior sex, weakened and ruled by their reproductive systems." The caution of medical professionals in recommending exercise for women aligned neatly with the political agenda of a certain subset of women active in reformist circles and with the emerging women's physical education profession. Cahn asserts that the biological arguments underpinning the development of sex segregation as a method of empowering women protected them from the aggression of masculinity and competitiveness. Within the realm of physical activity and sport, this philosophy manifested as "athletic moderation." Cahn also acknowledges that in addition to clear ideas about gender, this attitude also betrayed clear class connotations: "The medical notion of the frail, nonphysical female with a delicate sensibility could only describe middle- and upper-class women who did not have to work at hard physical labor or contend with the harsh life of the

streets.”<sup>30</sup> Cahn’s scholarship paints a clear portrait of the biological dimensions of early women’s sport, but with little attention to race beyond the implicit understanding that upper-class women in the early nineteenth century were almost entirely white.

In fairness, Cahn’s work, while foundational, is also approaching thirty years since publication and its title advises readers of a focus on the intersection of gender and sexuality, rather than race. However, I would also argue that the ideological formation of the “new woman” athlete in the twentieth century was inextricable from racial politics of the late nineteenth century. While Cahn acknowledges that this small group of upper-class women was almost exclusively white through the beginning of the twentieth century, their whiteness was perhaps the most crucial element of these new ideas about femininity and gender. By borrowing from the excellent scholarship of historian Louise Michele Newman on the racial origins of feminism, the racial dimensions of early women’s sport are brought into sharp relief.

In her work on the evolution of the women’s suffrage movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Louise Michele Newman emphasizes the hierarchical interconnections between race and gender that white women activists purposefully cultivated in order to advance their pursuit of equal rights. Many white women felt that the alliances previously established with Black men on the basis of shared disenfranchisement had been disrupted, or even betrayed, by the passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. Instead, white women began advocating for their right to the franchise because of their cultural and biological superiority to other races, as the

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<sup>30</sup> Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 12, 24-27.

radical possibilities of Reconstruction faded, and mass immigration shifted the country's demographics.<sup>31</sup>

Through emphasizing their whiteness, women wanted to appeal to a shared racial identity with white men, but also carve out a separate sphere for their sex. Biology played a crucial role in constructing both axes of their identities. In the 1880s, the emergence of new evolutionist theories elevated the place of white women in U.S. society. Advocates of social evolutionary theories derived from Charles Darwin's and Herbert Spencer's works "connected societal change with individual change, equated advanced civilizations with white racial superiority, and anchored both of these in sexual difference." Social Darwinists—not Darwin himself—directly linked sexual difference with racial progress: the greater degree of separation between men's and women's spheres, the more advanced the civilization. The obvious implication was the ability of white affluent families to keep women at home, while most non-white women had to work, just as non-white men did. Another crucial development was race's mutability when it had previously been considered a stable characteristic. Now, evolutionist theories warned against the dangers of race degeneration, specifically focused on the possibility of white women losing their reproductive capacities or reproducing with non-white men.<sup>32</sup> The emphasis on sex and fear of damaging or losing control of women's biology put women's bodies squarely in the center of debates about women's place in society.

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<sup>31</sup> Newman, *White Women's Rights*, 4-8. The neglect of race is also present in otherwise excellent scholarship on late-nineteenth-century feminism: see Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987).

<sup>32</sup> Newman, *White Women's Rights*, 29, 39.



By the late nineteenth century, white women suffragists had accepted that their bodies were relevant to debates on their rights by allying with Social Darwinists and accepting a compromise that men and women must occupy different roles. White women had allied with white men, not seeking to challenge their authority or spheres of influence, but to establish their own. Newman terms this willingness to still submit to white men's authority a "politics of protection." But Newman also identifies a paradox operating at the heart of politics of protection, where women both rejected and embraced protectionism depending on the political outcomes they sought.<sup>33</sup> In both of her examples, the perceived deficiencies of women's bodies produced contested policy outcomes.

To understand the paradox of sexual difference and protectionism, Newman examines debates in the 1870s over coeducation and protective labor legislation. In 1872, Dr. Edward Clarke, a retired faculty member of the Harvard Medical School, gave a lecture to the New England Women's Club of Boston, warning that enrolling at men's colleges and universities could potentially harm women's health because of their differing physiology. The consequences for the white race were potentially devastating. Clarke's argument was not new and had in fact been used to argue for the establishment of separate women's colleges. But Newman observes that over the course of the 1870s, the percentage of women attending coeducational institutions rose from 4.6% to 25% of women in higher education. The birthrate for white women had also been dropping since 1800, but by the 1870s, conservatives instead claimed the decline could instead be pinpointed to 1860 and blamed it upon the increasing number of women in higher education. These factors combined to alarm women that their gains in education and their path to some measures of

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<sup>33</sup> Newman, *White Women's Rights*, 86-87.

independence were at risk. The challenge was that Clarke had charged the women's movement with advocating a similarity with men through coeducation and thus disrupted its own appeals to independence via sexual difference.<sup>34</sup> Though Clarke's work did not cause the number of women in higher education to decrease, it did lead to higher levels of scrutiny for women's bodies in college and university.

However, in the case of labor, women were more eager to embrace the politics of protection and emphasize the biological differences between men and women. To illustrate this point, Louise Michele Newman examines the 1875 publication *Sex in Industry: A Plea for the Working-Girl*. Its author, Azel Ames, was a special commissioner of investigation for the Massachusetts State Bureau of Statistics of Labor and it documented the harsh working conditions for women workers. For both progressives and conservatives, the solution to industrial abuse was not improving conditions, but enabling women to return to the home, either through a family wage or minimum wage laws with fewer hours for women. The focus was on returning women to domesticity as much as possible and thus preserving the sexual difference that would lead to enfranchisement. Newman notes that the courts supported these efforts with a series of decisions from the 1870s through 1890s that agreed the state could regulate women's employment and even restrict their freedom of contract in order to preserve their ability to "bear adequate numbers of children in the future." This legal consensus was a marked contrast to the judicial attitude towards male workers at the time, which prioritized freedom of contract above all for fear of infringing upon workers' manhood and equality.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Newman, *White Women's Rights*, 87-91. In 1880, 40,000 women were in postsecondary education.

<sup>35</sup> Newman, *White Women's Rights*, 95-99.

Both cases demonstrate is that in the late nineteenth century, the bodies and reproductive capacities of white women were under intense scrutiny, particularly in higher education. This scrutiny was not merely about protecting white women from physical harm but maintaining a white race and white supremacy. With this context in mind, the emergence of women's sport and athletics at the turn of the century took on a critical racial dimension. The class, gender, and race of early women athletes was crucial to the development of policies governing competition. The debates of the nineteenth century's movement also previewed major arguments in twentieth-century sport and in society. Could women achieve equality through separate institutions and special, sometimes protective, treatment or legislation? Or was the path to equality through equal access and similar treatment to men, such as in coeducational environments?

As more and more women entered the workforce and education, these questions played out in a variety of fields. But in the development of women's sport through the 1960s, specifically in colleges and universities, attention to women's bodies and biology remained central in establishing rules of and authority over competition. After the 1920s, race suicide and eugenics were less of motivation in legislating women's bodies, but racism and white supremacy were still potent forces shaping U.S. society. In collegiate sport, these concerns coalesced, and all parties, Black and white, men and women, fought to determine how and when women could participate in a sporting life.

### **2.3 Competing Claims to Authority in Women's Sport**

Over the course of the twentieth century, discussions of women's biology remained an avenue for educators and administrators to make claims to authority within women's sport. Renewed concerns about women's physical capabilities led women's organizations to call for a

curbing of women's sport at the end of the 1920s. But some physical educators used the hysteria over protecting women's bodies to establish their own professional authority. As more girls and women began participating in sport in the 1920s, the arrival of Black women athletes challenged ideas about gender and race and offered alternatives to the monolithic standard of the white woman athlete.

In the early days of women's collegiate sport, male doctors and medical professionals used women's biology to assert their authority over women's sport by insisting sport was at odds with their physical abilities. Historian Helen Lenskyj details how these doctors assigned moral obligation to women's "unique" physiology in the late nineteenth century: "Women had a moral duty to preserve their vital energy for childbearing and to cultivate personality traits suited to the wife-and-mother role. Sport wasted vital force, strained female bodies and fostered traits unbecoming to 'true womanhood.'" Vital force referred to the philosophy of vitalism, which theorized that all human organisms operated on a limited and non-renewable vital force which should thus only be expended in service of "family, god, or country." Vitalist theory also argued that women's reproductive development sapped energy. Therefore, both reproduction and sport were seen as detrimental to women's health. Lenskyj notes that vitalism fell out of usage in medical journals by the early 1900s, but that it remained in popular usage well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A reference even appeared in the American Medical Association's journal *Hygeia* in 1935, warning against the dangers of girls' basketball.<sup>36</sup> Though Lenskyj's work does not explore the explicit racial elements of this policing of women's bodies, as analyzed by Louise Michele Newman, its application to women's sport was determinative in the early decades of women's sport.

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<sup>36</sup> Lenskyj, *Out of Bounds*, 18-20.

Moving into the 1910s and the 1920s, women's sport developed beyond the white, elite groups who had first participated in its earliest days in women's colleges. Historian Martha Verbugge points to World War I as a major turning point as physical fitness and culture became socially celebrated as part of war efforts. This new enthusiasm for physical activity led to a major expansion of physical education training programs in colleges and universities, from 24 in 1914 to 81 in 1921. These new physical education programs both embedded physical education into higher education and trained a new cohort of physical education teachers to enter elementary and secondary schools across the country. White women made up 75% of trainees in coeducational physical education training programs at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) prior to the 1920s. Some Black women also attended these predominantly white programs, as historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) did not generally offer courses until the 1930s.<sup>37</sup>

Though moderation still governed women's sport, the relaxed cultural attitude towards women's exercise during the 1920s, the growing number of opportunities in school sport, and the emerging profession for physical education created the ideal circumstances for a major explosion in women's sport in the 1920s. Where before women's sport had previously been monitored in higher education and elite enclaves like social and athletic clubs, grassroots alternatives began to materialize in the 1920s. Sports like basketball and track & field emerged as popular pastimes in community leagues, public schools, industrial leagues, and normal schools. It was also in the 1920s that sport became widely accessible to Black Americans through both community and professional competitions. Though some Black men had attended university at northern PWIs and enjoyed the

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<sup>37</sup> Verbugge, *Active Bodies*, 15-21. Both Verbugge and Lenskyj's works also interrogate the role that homosexuality played in the shaping of women's sport.

chance to compete, these were not opportunities available to most, and certainly not Black women. Susan Cahn writes that sport for Black men and women became a crucial tool for developing Black communities in the wake of wartime and northern migrations. Tennis, previously a game reserved for elite white athletic clubs, became quite popular among the Black middle class on the east coast. However, Cahn observes that the growth for women's sport occurred along segregated lines.<sup>38</sup> But despite these major gains for women's sport, including a Women's Olympic Games held in Paris in 1922, a conservative attitude towards women's bodies remained influential, particularly among physical educators.

By the end of the 1920s, competitive sport for white women had again been repressed by many of the same forces that had helped facilitate its growth. Women's physical educators looked with alarm at the growing popularity of track & field, a taxing sport they perceived as masculine. Its presence at the 1922 women's games seemed a dire sign that white women were losing their femininity and endangering themselves. These physical educators also feared the new signs of interest from male sporting organizations like the International Olympic Committee and the Amateur Athletic Union. In the 1920s, women physical educators took control of women's sport in several ways. Over the past few decades, white women physical educators and activists had formed several professional organizations to govern women's sport. In 1923, the National Amateur Athletic Federation founded a Women's Division and out of the American Physical Education

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<sup>38</sup> Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 36-41.

Association came the National Section of Women's Athletics in 1927. These organizations were white and united in the opinion that women's sport should be noncompetitive.<sup>39</sup>

The insistence on keeping women's sport noncompetitive was no longer coming primarily from men in the medical profession but white women physical educators and bureaucrats. While earlier generations had found these kinds of arguments to be regressive coming from doctors like Edward Clarke, who argued against coeducation, they found new life in the 1920s. Martha Verbugge tracks how these physical educators began leveraging their gender to claim authority over women's bodies from 1900 to 1940. Verbugge argues that women physical educators were clearly prioritizing reproductive health over physical activity, cautioning women to restrict any activity that included jumping, kicking or hurdling during their menstrual cycles. She concludes that "Women physical educators chose ideas and policies that enhanced their authority. By asserting that the exercise-and-menstruation question was up for grabs and then grabbing it, gym teachers positioned themselves as arbiters of active womanhood."<sup>40</sup> There were also clear racial and class dimensions to this assertion of authority over womanhood and athletics.

The ideal female athlete of the 1920s—who physical educators wanted to preserve and promote—was white, middle-class, and feminine. As Martha Verbugge writes, "Just as new representations of manhood connected male power to virile, civilized whiteness, the wholesome Athletic Girl and New Woman symbolized white, middle-class heterosexual femininity." The threats that sports like track & field posed to this ideal woman was in masculinizing her and

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<sup>39</sup> Joan S. Hult, "Women's Struggle for Governance in U.S. Amateur Athletics," *International Review for Sociology of Sport* 24, no. 3 (1989): 250.

<sup>40</sup> Verbugge, *Active Bodies*, 73-76.

betraying the logic of sex difference that underpinned women's participation in athletics. Women could exercise and compete, physical educators argued, but only to the extent they did not harm their bodies and thus ability to reproduce.<sup>41</sup> Educators and those organizing sport had philosophical justifications as well, arguing that a more noncompetitive athletics model would allow more women to participate rather than the most talented minority. But their ultimate goal was maintaining of control by women of women's sport and an organizational model that reinforced physical limitations for women.

By the end of the 1920s, a new template had been set that influenced the next few decades of women's physical education programs. It was, in large part, a return to the earliest days of women's sport. Women could participate in noncompetitive play days and sports days, but not exert themselves or endanger themselves. The protectionism that had shaped women's lives in the late nineteenth century was no longer solely coming from white patriarchs of family and society, but even more so from the professional organizations established by white women. These attitudes still reflected a patriarchal view of women, but with other white women more firmly in control. The whiteness of participants, which intersected with their gender and class to create physical and social standards for participation, was the biggest determinant of white women's experience in sport. Though the panic over race suicide had diminished by the 1920s, the legacy of concern about white women's reproductive capabilities remained firmly entrenched in women's sport.

However, the focus on white women's bodies and the creation of norms to govern them created opportunities for black women. Historians Jennifer H. Lansbury and Rita Liberti have written extensively on the complex dynamics in which Black women athletes were situated in the

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<sup>41</sup> Verbugge, *Active Bodies*, 50-53.



mid-twentieth century. While the double jeopardy of being both Black and women was a disadvantage in most other realms of life in the United States, the racial preoccupations and segregation of women's sport meant that Black women did not always face the same restrictions as white women in sport. The biological arguments against participation in sport did not apply to Black women whose bodies had historically been commodified, abused, and dehumanized.<sup>42</sup> The 1930s, when white women were strictly limited to noncompetitive sport in colleges and universities, proved a fruitful time for Black women athletes.

Unlike white institutions, some Black colleges continued to offer competitive women's sport into the 1930s and Black sports organizations maintained the competitive sporting infrastructure established in the 1920s. In particular, track & field became a popular sport among Black communities in the 1920s and became enshrined in Black sporting life for men and women through HBCUs. The famed Tuskegee Institute began hosting relays for Black high schools and colleges in 1927 and included women's events in 1929. By 1933, the Tuskegee Relays included a full slate of women's events and had been established as a semifinal Olympic trial. In 1942, the Black newspaper *The Chicago Defender* called it a national meet.<sup>43</sup> Track & field had been one of the most controversial for white women to compete in but in the Black community, it was celebrated and opened new paths for Black women in international competition.

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<sup>42</sup> Lansbury, *A Spectacular Leap*; Rita Liberti, "'We Were Ladies, We Just Played Basketball Like Boys': African American Womanhood and Competitive Basketball at Bennett College, 1928-1942," *Journal of Sport History* 26, no. 3 (Fall 1999): 567-584; Gross, "African American Women," 27. Gross discusses the historical legacy of racial exclusions from protectionism and their roots in the legalization of slavery in early America.

<sup>43</sup> Lansbury, *A Spectacular Leap*, 53-56.

The racialized notions of femininity worked in the favor of Black women athletes in the mid-twentieth century because they were unburdened by the restrictions of whiteness. In 1936, Tidy White became the first Black woman to compete for the U.S. Olympic team in the 80-meter hurdles, and she was the first in a prestigious lineage of Black women track & field athletes. From the 1940s through the 1960s, HBCUs like the Tuskegee Institute and Tennessee State University became incubators for talented women athletes in track & field. These Olympians undoubtedly benefitted from the differing attitude towards white and Black women's bodies and the permissibility of competitive women's sport. However, HBCUs were not a monolith, and the Black community had its own debates over the appropriate degree of competition for Black women. Institutions like Howard University discouraged any competition for women at all. Hampton College took a more moderate path, encouraging programs in dance and more recreational activities. Tuskegee and Tennessee State, with their highly competitive programs for men and women, and Bennett College, an HBCU for women, were a clear indication of their coaches' philosophical divide from white physical educators.<sup>44</sup>

Basketball, though still subjected to concerns about respectability, became another arena for Black women to demonstrate their greater degree of freedom in physical activity. Like track and field, basketball had become a popular sport among the Black community in the 1920s. Though basketball was in fact the first sport codified by white women in the late nineteenth century, it had grown increasingly competitive in the following decades and thus fell out of favor with physical educators at PWIs. Like PWIs, many HBCUs sponsored competitive women's basketball in the 1920s but disbanded or redirected these programs into intramural competition in

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<sup>44</sup> Lansbury, *A Spectacular Leap*, 59.

the 1930s. Bennett College, however, maintained a competitive women's basketball program into the 1940s. Rita Liberti's article on the Bennett basketball team "'We Were Ladies, We Just Played Basketball Like Boys'" analyzes the relationship between race, class, and gender for the Black community and the participants. She argues that "The view of female physicality in the black community, which did not necessarily preclude being a woman and a participant in athletic competition, translated into different participation patterns for black and white women enrolled in colleges in the South." Bennett College's ethos was very much one of racial uplift, focused on upholding "middle-class standards of refinement and respectability among its students in part to counter lingering stereotypes of African Americans as immoral and uncivilized."<sup>45</sup> For a brief moment, that included competitive athletics for Black women.

Liberti's work on Bennett College women's basketball and Black femininity echoes the work of Black feminist scholars considering the complex ties between race, class, and gender for Black women. Bonnie Thornton Dill writes cuttingly on how Black women fare in a predominantly white society, as "A dominant image of black women as 'beasts of burden' stands in direct contrast to American ideals of womanhood: fragile, white, and not too bright." Ula Taylor also critiques the Black club women—major figures of the Black community in the early twentieth century—"who tainted their myriad of uplifting activities with condescending middle-class values and ideas."<sup>46</sup> Bennett College basketball players stood in the intersection of all these pressures—

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<sup>45</sup> Liberti, "'We Were Ladies,'" 568-570.

<sup>46</sup> Bonnie Thornton Dill, "The Dialectics of Black Womanhood," *Signs* 4, no. 3 (Spring 1979): 553; Ula Taylor, "The Historical Evolution of Black Feminist Theory and Praxis," *Journal of Black Studies* 29, no. 2 (Nov 1998): 238.

liberated to play sport by virtue of their race, but still subject to the restrictions of class-dictated standards of respectability as members of the educated Black middle class.

Though Bennett College's women's basketball team competed through the early 1940s and modeled a femininity that could coexist with athleticism, it was not immune to the same pressures that had dismantled white women's competitive sport. Black women were largely not subject to the same protectionist attitudes as white women regarding their bodies, but Black educational and community leaders worried about the respectability and femininity of Black women competing when white women were not. This divide again points to the relevance of class differences within women's sport writ large and the middle-class community of HBCUs. Additional pressure came from the National Association of Colored Women, which spoke out against intercollegiate competition for black women first in 1929 and again in 1940. By 1942, Bennett College had withdrawn from intercollegiate completely in favor of sports days and intramurals.<sup>47</sup> Some Black women were able to benefit from a lack of scrutiny regarding their reproductive capabilities and thrived in competitive sport in the 1930s, when those opportunities were not available for white women. But the societal standard for femininity set by white women—itsself dictated by racial politics—still exerted pressure on Black women caught in the long fight for respect and rights for their race.

The athletic opportunities available at the majority of PWIs and HBCUs between the 1920s and the return of competitive collegiate sport in the 1970s came in the form of the moderate, noncompetitive model offered by physical education departments. Women could compete in noncompetitive intramural activities with the occasional intercollegiate event that emphasized

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<sup>47</sup> Liberti, "We Were Ladies," 570, 575-578.

community rather than competition. Within the world of collegiate physical education programs, the logic of sex segregation was alive and well and vital for women looking to maintain control of their programs. In her work on American physical education in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Martha Verbugge compares the women's physical education programs at the University of Nebraska and Howard University in the mid-twentieth century. Verbugge argues that the leaders in both departments struggled with similar issues of funding, particularly compared to the men's department and athletics programs, and used similar logics of sexual difference to justify the separation of programs and maintain control. At both Nebraska and Howard, noncompetitive sport and physical education courses were used to reinforce a white, middle-class, and feminine vision of the athlete. The continued emphasis on physical differences between the sexes granted women authority but also undermined it on a larger, institutional scale as it justified differential and unequal treatment and funding.<sup>48</sup>

By the mid-twentieth century, the status of women's collegiate sport was not far removed from its earliest days in the late nineteenth century. Over the intervening decades, the fixation on white women's reproductive capacities had continually become a tool to limit women's competitive opportunities, by both male medical professional and women physical educators. While Black women were not subject to the same scrutiny over reproductive capacity, the racial dynamics of twentieth-century U.S. society still subjected them to similar standards of class and gender performance in the name of respectability that prevented the majority of Black women from participating in highly competitive sport. Some opportunities existed for competitive women's

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<sup>48</sup> Verbugge, *Active Bodies*, 78-101.

sport at HBCUs, but by and large the Black community focused on men's sport, as did white communities did white men's sport.

With the advent of the women's liberation movement in the late 1960s, the questions of equality through sameness or difference that suffragists had grappled with in the fight for the franchise again surfaced. This new generation of feminists had to decide how to pursue the full political equality their forbears had not secured and determine whether special protections or full formal equality was the better approach. Once again, women's bodies became the center of these debates and dilemmas.

#### **2.4 Re-Engaging Biology in 1960s Feminist Activism**

Though her work only covers the fight for suffrage from 1870 to 1920, at the conclusion of her chapter on suffragism and antisuffragism, Louise Michele Newman previews how the debates in the late nineteenth century over special protections became central to another major topic of debate in feminist politics, the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). The Equal Rights Amendment was first proposed in 1923 by Alice Paul, a critical leader in the suffrage movement. But it proved divisive within the community of former suffragists in the 1920s. The ERA was a straightforward constitutional amendment that declared men and women to have equal rights in the United States. As Newman writes, opponents denounced the ERA because "...they believed the latter would jeopardize sex-specific, special protective labor legislation. They too now were confronting a tension between 'difference' and 'equality' that antisuffragists had identified a

generation previously.”<sup>49</sup> The amendment was active from 1923 forward and introduced in every session of Congress, but it never progressed beyond the legislature until 1972. Though both sides agreed that women deserved equality, ideological debates over defining and achieving equality came to an impasse in deciding whether biology should play a role.

In the wake of the Nineteenth Amendment, women’s activists had turned to a strategy that depended on acknowledging physical difference as a precursor to protection. In the subsequent decades of the twentieth century, labor feminists secured a number of gains for women in the workplace regarding hours, wage, and working conditions. Their approach to addressing inequality was informed by the physical, social, and psychological differences they saw between men and women at work. Special protections for women in the workplace dated back to the nineteenth century, as Louise Michele Newman noted, but in the wake of World War II and women’s transition into industrial work, labor feminists pursued additional protections. Activists advocated for women to receive not only equal pay, but also recognition that the domestic labor women performed, that men did not, deserved compensation and accommodations as well. Labor feminists recognized and emphasized the physical differences that separated men and women. While they did not want biology to automatically justify making distinctions between the sexes, they did want to account for pregnancy and motherhood.<sup>50</sup> However, proponents of the Equal Rights Amendment viewed these kinds of protections as retrograde. As legal historian Serena Mayeri writes, pro-ERA advocates felt that maximum hour laws and weight-lifting regulations did not

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<sup>49</sup> Newman, *White Women’s Rights*, 84-85.

<sup>50</sup> Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 67.

protect women but prevented them “from meaningful advancement in traditionally male occupations.”<sup>51</sup>

But until the 1960s and its reckoning for both racial and sex-based equality, little progress was made in passing national legislation on gender equality. In 1961, the Civil and Political Rights Committee of the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women asked legal theorist Pauli Murray to find a viable legal strategy to mediate the dispute over protectionist legislation. Murray’s proposed solution lay in the race-sex analogy, which draws comparisons between racial and sex-based inequalities to secure discrimination protections for women. These protections worked from the framework created by Black activists to prevent discrimination in education, employment, and beyond. Murray also advocated for a sex-based rights campaign styled upon the work of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). More than her rhetorical comparisons, Murray wanted to establish new legal precedents under the Fourteenth Amendment and revise the Brandeis briefs. The Brandeis briefs had been written in the early twentieth century in defense of protective labor laws, and “marshaled evidence about women’s particular physiological and social needs.” In the updated version, Murray believed that women’s activists could document how “social, economic, and technological transformations in women’s lives rendered obsolete older legal doctrines that emphasized women’s physical weakness and underwrote their political inferiority.” Murray’s approach through the Fourteenth Amendment’s equal protection clause satisfied opponents of the ERA because it pursued remedies on a case-by-case basis, rather than the ERA’s sweeping approach to discrimination.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Mayeri, *Reasoning from Race*, 12.

<sup>52</sup> Mayeri, *Reasoning from Race*, 12, 17.



Pauli Murray's advocacy for the race-sex analogy and equality through the Fourteenth Amendment became popular practice among feminist advocates in the 1960s and 70s, but questions of biology remained a stumbling block in issues like pregnancy and abortion. In congressional debate on the ERA in 1970, proponents of the amendment repeatedly referenced racial equality and its legislative remedies to advocate for addressing sex-based inequalities. However, there were clear limits to how far the race-sex analogy could be pushed. Even ERA supporters had to admit there were areas where sex-neutral laws would be impractical, such as childbearing or sperm donation. Another major topic of debate in the women's movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s was abortion. Mayeri argues that "Women's 'unique physical characteristics' later seemed to have doomed feminist efforts to reason from race because reproductive differences between men and women had no clear racial analogue." The ERA eventually failed to pass state ratification by the 1982 deadline, but due in larger part to the increasingly conservative cultural and judicial climate. However, Serena Mayeri argues that the failure of the ERA was not a tragedy, as feminists were no longer stuck reconciling an elimination of sex-based treatment with the need for sex-specific accommodations regarding pregnancy and abortion, for example.<sup>53</sup>

This brief history of the Equal Rights Amendment again highlights the complex relationship between the pursuit of equality and the material reality of women's lives, rooted in their bodies. It also continues the century-long debate over how to achieve sex-based equality. Though the ERA was not ratified, the passage of Title IX and other similar laws during the same

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<sup>53</sup> Mayeri, *Reasoning from Race*, 38, 220.

period opened up new arenas for debating the path to equality and the role that women's bodies should play in justifying sex-specific policies.

## **2.5 The Racial Underpinnings of Title IX**

Since the late nineteenth century, ideas about race and the body had shaped the emergence of women's sport in the United States. Initially, this relationship was grounded in fears of exercise damaging white women's reproductive capabilities. Sport was thus highly supervised and moderated. A belief in the significance of biological differences persisted and became a key justification in maintaining sex segregation in collegiate athletics. Women in sports leadership leveraged sex segregation to maintain their authority over women's sport, on the belief that women had different physical and social needs that could not be satisfied by competitive sport. While the white supremacy of the late nineteenth century no longer manifested through explicit biological arguments about sex segregation in sport, racial segregation still shaped women's sport through the segregation of higher education. In the wake of the 1960s, ideas about race were formative and inseparable from the development of sex-based protections like Title IX due to shared legal strategies between Black and women's activists. The protectionism that eventually emerged from Title IX's intercollegiate athletics interpretation had its own relationship to race that will be explored later, but no aspect of Title IX is truly free from the influence of ideas about race and racism in terms of its intellectual conception or implementation within colleges and universities.

Though Title IX was crafted to address sex-based discrimination, its proponents owed a great debt to race-based legislation. The similarities between the treatment of women and Black people in the United States had been recognized since the nineteenth century in the abolition and

suffrage movements but had never been integrated into a cohesive political ideology.<sup>54</sup> Academics began writing more seriously about the relationship between race and sex in the 1940s and 1950s and these works became the basis for Pauli Murray's formulation of the race-sex analogy in the 1960s. Her analysis was grounded in Black Americans' and women's common ground— aspersions of intellectual inferiority, confinement to certain social roles, and a lack of access to many areas of employment. Feminist activists and legal scholars used the race-sex analogy to translate these intellectual claims into legal precedents and protections in the 1960s.<sup>55</sup> These precedents became the groundwork for Title IX's passage in 1972.

The first major anti-sex discrimination provision came in 1964 and though it reflected the similarities between race and sex as social identifiers, it also defined them as parallel rather than intersecting characteristics. In February 1964, Rep. Howard W. Smith of Virginia proposed adding sex to the list of characteristics protected against employment discrimination in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. The list already included race, color, national origin, and religion. The proposed inclusion of sex was controversial at the time, out of fear that employing women, Black or white, would come directly at the cost of Black men. Serena Mayeri describes how leaders from the National Urban League, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and Congress on Racial equality all tentatively supported Murray's work on sex equality but qualified their support with concerns about the stability of Black families or doubts that sexism was really a widespread issue. The prioritization of Black men stemmed from a desire for racial equality, but also promoted a

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<sup>54</sup> Taylor, "The Historical Evolution," 235-236; Daina Ramey Berry and Kali Nicole Gross, *A Black Women's History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2020), 106-107.

<sup>55</sup> Mayeri, *Reasoning from Race*, 9-10.

traditional family structure with a male breadwinner. Pauli Murray successfully argued that failing to include Black women in employment provisions, by excluding sex, would undermine efforts toward racial equality.<sup>56</sup> The passage of Title VII and the successful strategy of copying racial discrimination remedies thus paved a path for the advancement of gender discrimination remedies.

After the initial victory with the passage of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the women's movement quickly mobilized, creating new organizations with progressive missions, again modeled on the tactics used to pursue racial equality. In 1966, a coalition of Black and white woman established the National Organization for Women. Its founders modeled its practices and agendas on the work of the NAACP, and just as the NAACP focused on racial segregation in public schools with the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case, women's organizations followed suit by pursuing sex discrimination in higher education. In January 1970, the Women's Equity Action League (WEAL), a more conservative offshoot of NOW founded to battle educational and employment discrimination, filed a class action lawsuit against all colleges and universities in the United States, alleging a pattern of discrimination against women in admissions, hiring, and promotion. Its campaign against sex discrimination in higher education rested on President Lyndon B. Johnson's Executive Order 11246, which prohibited discrimination by federal government contractor and subcontractors on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. WEAL's suit capitalized on the close connection between the federal government and higher education that had grown in the wake of World War II. The federal government contracted with colleges and universities to undertake research projects in the service of national defense during the Cold War. This relationship expanded, and by the 1970s many major research

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<sup>56</sup> Mayeri, *Reasoning from Race*, 21-23. See quotes from Whitney Young, James Forman, and James Farmer.

universities were dependent on federal funding. It left these institutions more susceptible to greater oversight from the federal government than ever before.

The federal government's involvement in the push against discrimination in education provided the authority and attention necessary to implement systemic solutions. As a result of the Women's Equity Action League lawsuit, the federal Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) began investigating educational institutions across the country. WEAL filed suits against several hundred of them and sparked a national conversation about sex discrimination on campus. In June 1970, Rep. Edith Green held the first hearings concerning discrimination against women in higher education, which became the basis for a number of legislative remedies.<sup>57</sup> Rep. Green's Special Committee on Education considered simply amending Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited discrimination in entities receiving federal funding. Along the lines of how Title VII was written, the committee would simply sex to the list of protected characteristics. But the testimony before the committee demonstrated how pervasive sex discrimination was in higher education and persuaded a majority of the committee to pursue education-specific legislation.<sup>58</sup>

In the various pieces of legislation passed, the federal government replicated racial discrimination strategies to eliminate gender discrimination in higher education. The 92<sup>nd</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Bernice Sandler, "Affirmative Action on the Campus: Progress, Problems, and Perplexity," Paper presented at U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Consultation on Affirmative Action, September 10, 1975, Susan Fratkin Papers, Box 5, Affirmative Action, Schlesinger Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

<sup>58</sup> "Report on the Civil Rights Act of 1984," 98<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2d session, June 7, 1984, Margaret Dunkle Papers, Box 4, Folder 10, Schlesinger.

Congress, in session from January 3, 1971 to January 3, 1973 enacted the following remedies: it extended Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to include education, amended the Equal Pay Act of 1963 to cover executive, administrative, and professional employment, added sex discrimination to the jurisdiction of the United States Commission on Civil Rights, and enacted Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972.<sup>59</sup> Title IX mirrored the language of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title VI read that “No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” Title IX read that “No person in the United States shall, based on sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” Based on remedies to address racial discrimination, Title IX became a powerful tool for combating sex discrimination in higher education.

The text of Title IX also fit neatly into the intellectual project of the women’s movement in the early 1970s. As the debates over the ERA had proven, there was a powerful lobby within the women’s movement and organizations such as NOW that believed formal equality, not equality through differing treatment, was the path to political equality with men. This approach also fell in line with the women’s movement’s imitation of the civil rights movement, which advocated for formal equality under the law, regardless of race. However, both the logic of formal equality and the race-sex analogy fell apart in one particular area: women’s biology and physiology. Within higher education, Title IX had an unforeseen impact on collegiate sport and as athletics became

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<sup>59</sup> Sandler, “Affirmative Action on the Campus.”

Title IX's defining issue, tensions over biology and equality thus became a major battleground for feminist debate.

Though athletics has defined Title IX in the American popular imagination in the fifty years since 1972, it was not the central issue for sex discrimination prior to passage. Rep. Edith Green's hearings on discrimination on campuses were not focused on the inferior opportunities for women to compete on courts and fields. In a 2010 interview with Bernice Sandler, a key figure in the campaign for Title IX, she recalled how few people understood the impact Title IX would have on athletics. She described that "...there were five or six people who knew Title IX would cover athletics, but those individuals originally involved in getting Title IX on the agenda had no idea of the *impact* Title IX would have on athletics. They had no real understanding of women and sport." The link between Title IX and athletics was Margot Polivy, who served as Rep. Bella Abzug's assistant in the early 1970s and then became the counsel for the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, a women's intercollegiate sports organization founded in 1971. In a 2010 interview, Polivy argued that athletics became such a touchstone for gender discrimination because it was visible in sport in a way that stereotypes were not in daily life.<sup>60</sup>

The National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) passionate opposition to Title IX focused legislative and popular attention on athletics. Prior to 1972, the NCAA had little interest in regulating or supporting women's collegiate athletics. That was matched by the desire of women's physical education departments to remain in control of women's sport. However, as the impact of Title IX became clear, the NCAA began worrying about its financial liability. In a 1971

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<sup>60</sup> Amanda Ross Edwards, "Why Sport? The Development of Sport as a Policy Issue in Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972," *Journal of Policy History* 22, no. 3 (2010): 304.

memo to the NCAA Executive Committee, NCAA President Walter Byers wrote that the organization's legal counsel had warned him that the NCAA was liable under the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment for failing to provide sporting opportunities for women. The memo concluded, however, that there was no need for action until a lawsuit was filed.<sup>61</sup> Of greater concern to the NCAA was the potential costs of Title IX.

The NCAA's central concern regarding Title IX's potential athletics regulations was that the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare would require institutions to spend equal amounts on men's and women's sport to eliminate sex discrimination. The NCAA believed men's collegiate sport, specifically football, to be unique. It was also expensive. For colleges and universities in the NCAA's most competitive conferences, that would mean finding millions of dollars in budgets already at risk due to flagging enrollment and the stagnant economy of the 1970s. Fortunately for the NCAA, its allies in Congress were willing to propose legislation to define what sex-based equality would look like in collegiate sport.

Though discussion on Title IX had barely mentioned athletics prior to its passage, the major Congressional debates after its passage hinged on defining financial equity in collegiate sport. These debates again returned to the theme of whether formal equality—a dollar for dollar expenditure for men's and women's sport—or difference-based equality—allowing for differences inherent to the different sports—would win. The two major amendments introduced in the interim between Title IX's passage in 1972 and the formulation of the final athletic regulations in 1978 were the Tower and Javits amendments. The Tower amendment was proposed by Sen. John Tower

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<sup>61</sup> Memo from Walter Byers to NCAA Executive Committee, February 26, 1971, Title IX and the NCAA (Vol. I), NCAA Library, Indianapolis, Indiana.



in May 1974 to exempt revenue-producing sports from tabulation when determining Title IX compliance. The Tower amendment faced tremendous opposition from women's activist groups including NOW, WEAL, and the Intercollegiate Association of Women Students. Sen. Birch Bayh, one of the original sponsors of Title IX, came out in opposition on the grounds that it fundamentally undermined the purpose of Title IX.<sup>62</sup> The Tower amendment was rejected in favor of the Javits amendment, proposed by Sen. Jacob Javits in July 1974. The Javits amendment stipulated that HEW issue Title IX regulations with reasonable provisions for intercollegiate athletics, considering the nature of certain sports' costs. Already, the formal equality construction of Title IX was compromised, given that men's and women's sport could receive disproportionate funding and still be considered equal.

The hints in 1974 that athletics was going to be an exception within the larger project of battling sex-based discrimination can also be found in Title IX's congressional record. As Bernice Sandler affirmed, no one involved with writing Title IX had any conception of the impact it would have upon women's collegiate sport. But given the high-profile nature of collegiate sport, it came up in discussions about what Title IX would mean for schools. In debates on both Title IX and Title VI, Sen. Peter Dominick raised the question of which "programs or activities" would be implicated in the legislation and specifically mentioned athletics as an area vulnerable to change. Dominick asked whether Title IX would result in the sex integration of athletic teams. Sen. Birch Bayh assured him that he did not "...feel [Title IX] mandates the desegregation of football fields. What we are trying to do is provide equal access for women and men students to the educational

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<sup>62</sup> Birch Bayh, Testimony on S.2106, September 16, 1975, 1-2, Margaret Dunkle Papers, Box 2, Folder 15, Schlesinger Library.

process and the extracurricular activities in a school, where there is not such a unique facet as football. We are not requiring that intercollegiate football be desegregated, nor that the men's locker room be desegregated." Dominick replied, "If I may say so, I would have had much more fun playing college football if it had been integrated."<sup>63</sup> Bayh and Dominick's conversation indicated there was an explicit understanding that the realm of intercollegiate athletics was subject to a different standard of equality than the rest of Title IX's domains.

Debates on Title IX revealed that the push for women's equality and integration into male spaces changed when women's bodies became a factor. In 1972, Sen. Bayh went beyond his 1971 comments to Sen. Dominick on the uniqueness of men's collegiate football. He stated that special dispensation for sex would be made only when "absolutely necessary to the success of the program—such as in classes for pregnant girls or emotionally disturbed students, in sports facilities, or other instances where privacy must be preserved."<sup>64</sup> Historian Elizabeth Sharrow characterizes Bayh's comments as reifying the sex binary, "suggesting that biologic difference was relevant for policymakers puzzling over incorporating women into male enclaves." Sharrow argues that by coupling together pregnancy and sport, athletics remained segregated by sex, a male domain with a separate category for women.<sup>65</sup> Title IX became a method for legislators and activists both to assert the relevance of biology to defining sex-based equality and thus promoting an equality based on difference.

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<sup>63</sup> Senator Bayh and Senator Dominick, speaking on S.569, on August 6, 1971, 92<sup>nd</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 117, pt. 23:30407.

<sup>64</sup> 118 U.S. Congressional Record 5807, 28 February 1972.

<sup>65</sup> Sharrow, "'Female athlete' politic," 53.

The feminist organizations advocating for adequate athletic guidelines for Title IX also reinforced a policy of attaining equality through acknowledging difference. NOW, a staunch champion of formal equality, initially took a position advocating for sex-integrated athletics. A memorandum from the Center for National Policy argued on behalf of NOW and the NOW Legal Defense Fund that keeping sport segregated deprived women of the opportunity to compete equally with men and that accepting segregation implies that “sex is an immutable trait which has thrust women into an inferior status without regard to their individual capabilities or characteristics and which serves to place on women a stigma of second-class citizenship similar to that suffered by racial minorities.”<sup>66</sup> But by the mid-1970s, its stance had changed. NOW, the Project on the Status and Education of Women, and the National Coalition for Girls and Women in Education all advocated for a difference-based approach to sport, for fear that pushing for integration would both fail politically and prove stereotypes about women’s physical inferiority to be true.<sup>67</sup> The fight to determine what equality meant for women in sport, a high-profile area, demonstrated that reconciling ideology and biology could cause feminist organizations to adjust their strategies. The priority was keeping women in sport, not a strict fidelity to formal equality of the sexes.

The emergence of a women-led collegiate sport organization combined second-wave feminist ideology with the historic tradition of women-controlled athletics stemming from the early twentieth century. The Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women was the women’s collegiate sport counterpart to the NCAA. Founded in 1971, it sought to preserve

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<sup>66</sup> Validity of the ‘Separate But Equal’ Policy of the Title IX Regulation on Athletics,” 3, Center for National Policy Review, October 14, 1974, PEER Records, Box 20, Folder 9, Schlesinger Library.

<sup>67</sup> Sharrow, “‘Female athletic politics,’” 55.

women's control of women's sport, and it soon became the foremost advocate of sex-segregated sport. The AIAW emerged from a lineage of non-competitive women's sport organizations. What began as the Committee on Women's Athletics of the American Physical Education Association in 1917 evolved into the Commission for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women in the 1960s and then the AIAW. Though the tradition of moderate sport for women had become flexible enough to countenance intercollegiate sport for women, the AIAW was firm in pursuing a different path for women's sport than men's collegiate sport. The AIAW eschewed scholarships and emphasized the importance of education over athletics.<sup>68</sup> Though the AIAW fiercely guarded women's collegiate sport from the NCAA's interest, it had set itself a difficult task in pursuing equality in higher education institutions while maintaining sex-segregated programs.

In 1972, Title IX emerged as the latest sex-discrimination remedy shaped by the ideology and strategy of the fight for racial equality in the United States. But the adoption of race-based strategies for gender equality became increasingly impossible as women's collegiate athletics emerged as the defining issue for Title IX, an aspect of the law that was inseparable from reconciling biology and equality through women's athletics. Thus, within the larger pursuit of formal equality for women in higher education, which used racial discrimination remedies as the model, women's organizations adopted a strategy that allowed for sex-based differences in collegiate sport and prioritized their ongoing control of women's sport. Though biology was no longer the major motivating factor for sex segregation in collegiate sport, Title IX continued a nearly century-long practice of segregating collegiate sport by sex in the interest of preserving the

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<sup>68</sup> Ying Wushanley, *Playing Nice and Losing: The Struggle for Control of Women's Intercollegiate Athletics, 1960-2000* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 17, 48, 57.

Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women's control of how women should play sport. Though this strategy did create opportunities for women to compete and for some to coach and administer women's sport, its history does not point to empowering women through sport, but for various actors to dictate what women's sport could or could not look like.

## **2.6 Illuminating the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Title IX's 1978-79 Policy Interpretation**

In the 1978-79 policy interpretation, which ended years of debate over precisely what Title IX required of institutions of higher education, nineteenth-century notions of gender and biology remained an implicit justification for sex-segregation in collegiate sport. However, these biological arguments were now being reframed as opportunities for women to compete without interference from men, instead of concerns about the decline of the white race. Though some court cases indicate that the legal underpinnings which supported sex-segregation as non-discriminatory were perhaps vulnerable to reinterpretation, by the end of the 1970s it was clear that the future of collegiate sport would be strictly segregated.

Though biology never disappeared completely from arguments surrounding women's collegiate sport, over the course of the 1970s it receded from prominence. In 1973, *Sports Illustrated* published a three-part series documenting the discrimination and disadvantages girls and women experienced in all levels of sport, from elementary school students to Billie Jean King. In the second part, "Are You Being Two-Faced?" authors Bil Gilbert and Nancy Williamson debunked a series of myths surrounding women in sport, including damage to their reproductive systems. Gilbert and Williamson reported that the uterus was actually one of the body's most shock-resistant organs, particularly compared to men's external genitalia. They also marshaled

research from a variety of medical professionals arguing that coeducational—sex-integrated—sport may not pose physical danger to girls and women, as it was supposed for decades. Their summary of opposition to women’s sport included three main reasons: physical harm, women’s inferior athletic abilities, and women’s lack of interest. After refuting all three of those claims, Gilbert and Williamson conclude that women should receive equal funding at all levels and that even if this did lead to fewer funds for men’s sport, it was the preferable outcome for all.<sup>69</sup> Their dismissal of biological logic and focus on the fiscal discrepancies between men’s and women’s sport portended debate in the remainder of the decade.

Because neither men’s nor women’s organizations were seriously advocating for coeducational collegiate sport, the role that biological protectionism played in Title IX’s regulations was more implicit than explicit. In 1975, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare published draft Title IX regulations that unilaterally implemented sex segregation in contact sports. In noncontact sports, women had to be permitted to try out for a men’s team if it was the only one available.<sup>70</sup> In a letter responding to the draft regulations, NCAA President John Fuzak referred to how the regulations made exceptions for discrimination in the case of “classifications based on health and safety.”<sup>71</sup> Both the regulations and Fuzak’s comment indicated that keeping men and women in segregated competitions emerged from the lineage of women’s sport history that emphasized the protection of women’s bodies from physical harm, in this case

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<sup>69</sup> Bil Gilbert and Nancy Williamson, “Are You Being Two-Faced?,” *Sports Illustrated*, June 4, 1973, 45-47.

<sup>70</sup> “Major Provisions of the February 28 Draft Title IX Regulations,” March 7, 1975, 1, PEER Records, Box 20, Folder 3, Schlesinger Library.

<sup>71</sup> Fuzak to Ford, May 9, 1975, 3, Earl Ramer Papers, Box 13, Folder 4, University of Tennessee Libraries, Knoxville, Special Collections. Henceforth referred to as UTK.

from men instead of their own exertion. In the 1978-79 version of the athletics regulations, the implicit understanding that men and women could not compete with each other remained intact. The section on contact sports simply stated that an institution must provide teams for members of both sexes if it exists for one and there is evidence of limited opportunity and sufficient interest by the other.<sup>72</sup> In 1979, biological protectionism was enshrined in intercollegiate athletics through Title IX, a legacy from the late nineteenth century.

The reason that women's rights activists and organizations did not protest sex segregation—which was clearly rooted in women's biology—stemmed from their desire to maintain control of women's sport. Organizations like NOW and the AIAW wanted to keep women in charge of administering women's sport and continue to promote opportunities for women to play, coach, and lead. This goal replicated that of women physical educators in the twentieth century. Then, women physical educators creating professional authority through their insights into women's reproductive health and preserving athletes' femininity through a strict curriculum. Now, leaders in the AIAW were framing sex segregation as increasing the ability of women to participate in sports without competing against men for time or chances. A series of court cases from the 1970s demonstrates the transition from biology to ideology in the justification of sex segregation in sport.

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<sup>72</sup> “A Policy Interpretation: Title IX and Intercollegiate Athletics,” Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, December 11, 1979. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/t9interp.html#:~:text=Title%20IX%20requires%20that%20%22an,cost%20of%20football%20programs%20have.>

Though biological protectionism and sex segregation were established policy within intercollegiate sport by the late 1970s, there is some evidence that their legal precedents were beginning to erode. In the protective labor legislation established in the early twentieth century by the Brandeis Briefs, the Supreme Court had relied on an assumption that women were physically incapable of the same work as men and granted them protections and accommodations accordingly. These accommodations had then been at the heart of debate over the Equal Rights Amendment and within the women's liberation movement. In the late 1970s, several judges made rulings regarding coeducational sport for elementary and secondary school students. Some of these cases addressed noncontact sports, where the integration of a girl into a boys' team was in line with practice at the collegiate level. Some, however, addressed contact sports, which had been universally segregated within Title IX regulations.

The first, *Hoover v. Meiklejohn* (1977), considered the case of Donna Hoover, a high school junior in Colorado. In 1976, she joined the boys' junior varsity soccer team as there was no girls' team. She participated in matches, practices, and conditioning and, outside of one collision, suffered no injuries. However, the principal of her high school removed her from the team because the Colorado High School Activities Association classified soccer as a sport for males only, citing that the risk of injury could jeopardize the health and safety of girls. In his ruling, Judge Richard Paul Matsch did not entirely dismiss the physiological differences between the sexes which could lead to physical harm. But he did point out that "...while males as a class tend to have an advantage in strength and speed over females as a class, the range of differences among individuals in both sexes is greater than the average differences between the sexes...Accordingly any male of any size and weight has the opportunity to be on an interscholastic team..." Judge Matsch argued that if



any male could participate regardless of potential physical harm due to his size or weight, then there was no legal standing to apply the same logic of safety to the other sex.<sup>73</sup>

The second case was more complex and directly contradicted Title IX's definition of equality in athletics. In *Yellow Springs Exempted Village School District Board of Education v. Ohio High School Athletic Association* (1978), two girls tried out for and received spots on a boys' basketball team. Because this was in violation of the Ohio High School Athletic Association's rules for mixed sport, the school created a separate girls' basketball team. This solution fell in line with Title IX's policy interpretation. Though girls were denied the chance to play with boys on the ground of protecting their safety, they formed their own team, which created more opportunities for girls' sport. For the presiding judge, Carl B. Rubin, neither of these rationales or solutions were constitutionally compelling. Though acknowledging that "Both are palpably legitimate goals," Rubin also argued that "To achieve these goals, however, the State must assume without qualification that girls are uniformly physically inferior to boys. The exclusionary rule, as it relates to the objective of preventing injury, creates a conclusive presumption that girls are physically weaker than boys." He also addressed the second half: "The rule, as it relates to the objective maximization of female opportunities, creates an equally conclusive presumption that girls are less proficient athletes than boys. However, these presumptions are in fact indistinguishable since both posit that girls are somehow athletically inferior to boys solely because of their gender."<sup>74</sup>

The *Washington Post*'s reporting on Rubin's decision confirmed that his definition of equality did not match the agenda of women's sports activists. The *Washington Post* reached out

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<sup>73</sup> Hoover v. Meiklejohn, 430 F. Supp. 164 (D.Colo. 1977).

<sup>74</sup> Yellow Sp. Exempted Vil. Sch. Dist. v. Ohio H. Sch., Etc. 443 F. Supp. 753 (S.D. Ohio 1978).

to the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women for comment, as members of the organization gathered in Atlanta for a conference. Dr. June Davis, women's athletic director at the University of Nebraska, had the following reply: "Female athletes, at all levels, should have the opportunity to participate in competitive athletics...But it should be, particularly in the area of contact sports, with members of their own sex."<sup>75</sup> Dr. June Davis' comments, representative of the AIAW's approach to sex-integrated sport, prioritized sex segregation in the realm of athletics, even if Judge Rubin's logic may have reflected a push for formal equality between men and women.

By the end of the 1970s, protectionism was still a potent force in intercollegiate athletics, but women's organizations were more interested in protecting women's intercollegiate sport from interference from men's organizations and preserving their mandate to administer women's sport. The women running these organizations were no longer concerned with damage to reproductive organs or femininity but used biology as a pretext for maintaining a status quo that kept women in charge of women's sport. This outlook was understandable as the NCAA was spending its considerable resources trying to lessen Title IX's ability to transform collegiate sport and more and more institutions were putting men in charge of women's sports programs previously administered and coached by women. But in preserving a sex-segregated vision for women's intercollegiate sport, the government and women's activists not only enshrined women's biology as the most essential factor, but also an implicit interpretation of inferiority.

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<sup>75</sup> "Judge Rules Schoolgirls: Football Included, Says Ohio Court," *Washington Post*, January 11, 1978.

## 2.7 Conclusion

In the conclusion of the *Hoover v. Meiklejohn*, Judge Matsch, unlike Judge Rubin in Ohio, actually advocated for the maintenance of separate but equal programs for women's sport. He addressed the obvious parallels with racial segregation: "The doctrine was rejected for education in *Brown, supra*, upon the conclusion that racial separation was inherently unequal because it involved a stigmatizing inferiority for the minority race. No such effect is conceivable for a separation of athletic teams by sex."<sup>76</sup> The history of women's intercollegiate sport tells a different story. Biology was a foundational element in proscribing women as subordinate athletes, whether in the interest of preserving reproductive capacity, physical safety, or creating opportunities for women. By the late 1970s, women's biology had become the implicit justification for sex segregation in sport even as the contours of debates over women's collegiate sport justified segregation ideologically.

In this chapter I have argued that the emergence of Title IX as a defining piece of legislation for gender equality reflected a legacy from the nineteenth century in centering women's bodies in debates over equality in collegiate sport. Just as the pursuit of abortion protections and the failure of the Equal Rights Amendment indicated a trend towards sex-based protections in the early 1970s, so did Title IX's athletic policy, amidst the law's larger project of formal equality. I have also argued that the history of women's collegiate sport history broadly and Title IX specifically has been shaped by ideas about race—from the preservation of white women's reproductive capacities in the late nineteenth century to the replication of racial discrimination remedies in the 1960s and

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<sup>76</sup> *Hoover v. Meiklejohn*, 430 F. Supp. 164 (D.Colo. 1977).

1970s. In the mid-twentieth century this manifested as segregated institutions of higher education. By 1972, the racial integration of higher education had reached even the most conservative and segregated schools and their men's collegiate sports programs, paving the way for the integration of women's collegiate sport as well.

Major national organizations attempted to define Title IX, but its true impact was mediated through individual institutions of higher education. Their responses to Title IX, in the constellation of challenges facing higher education in the 1970s and 1980s, were shaped by each school's history, identity, and priorities. The following four chapters parse the complex intertwining of race, sex, and sport at two universities in Tennessee. The following chapter begins with the history of collegiate sport at the University of Tennessee prior to Title IX. Just as this chapter argued that Title IX cannot be understood outside of its roots in the nineteenth century and the segregation of women's collegiate sport, the following chapter argues that the University of Tennessee's response to Title IX must be rooted in its own history with sport prior to 1972.

### **3.0 The Volunteer State: Collegiate Sport and the Maintenance of Racial & Gender Hierarchies at the University of Tennessee, 1892-1972**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The University of Tennessee at Knoxville has been the prototypical subject in histories of sport and higher education both. It is a large, well-funded, predominantly white four-year public university with a popular and competitive collegiate sports program. Its history has also hewed close to the national narratives of collegiate sport in the United States. The University of Tennessee was a founding member of the powerhouse Southeastern Conference (SEC) in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and its women's program bloomed in the aftermath of Title IX in 1972, winning a national reputation through the efforts of Hall of Fame and Medal of Honor recipient women's basketball coach Pat Summitt. But we cannot fully understand the University of Tennessee's prestige and history of success without examining how its status as a predominantly white university conveyed corresponding privileges.

This chapter argues that in the years prior to 1972, which marked both the passage of Title IX and the presence of a sizable population of Black student athletes on campus for the first time, collegiate sport at the University of Tennessee was defined by its adherence to sport's racial and gendered hierarchies. University administration was staffed by white men who deeply cherished the athletic abilities of young, white male athletes to promote the university's southern, segregated identity. Like its peer institutions, men's sports—specifically football—defined the university's identity and drove its decision-making in the twentieth century. As those athletes participating in collegiate sport at the university diversified, racially at first and later by gender, struggles ensued

between students, administrators, and national organizations over who would administer sport and determine policy.

This chapter examines the University of Tennessee at Knoxville's collegiate sports programs in the years prior to 1972, when collegiate sport began to undergo major transformations in participation and leadership, both at the institution and nationally. These early years saw collegiate sport transition from a pastime enjoyed by students to a university-controlled extracurricular. As university administrators seized control over collegiate sport at the institution, regional and national bodies of sport emerged to coordinate policy and, in the case of the University of Tennessee, more deeply intertwine collegiate sport and southern identity. The symbolic value of sports like men's football and the university's policy of segregation came under intense pressure as racial integration began to affect collegiate conferences outside of the South. The integration of men's collegiate sport at the university took so long because of how foundational segregation was to the university's identity but was hastened by the desire to recruit talented players and bolster teams' success. But as Black players arrived on campus, their attempts to change policy and hire Black coaches reflected how little racial integration had penetrated beyond the participants.

This chapter also examines the brief history of early women's collegiate sport at the University of Tennessee. Like many other predominantly white institutions, the university began offering women's collegiate sport in the late nineteenth century with the introduction of coeducation. Throughout the first several decades of the twentieth century, women's sport grew, and athletes expressed a desire for greater inclusion in men's athletic organizations within the university. However, national women's sporting organizations which disapproved of the physical and social repercussions of competitive sport for women—a protectionist philosophy—persuaded

the men in charge of the University of Tennessee to disband women's sport. Some opportunities for women to engage in physical activity remained available through physical education or intramural sports. But these opportunities did not allow for competitive, intercollegiate sport anywhere near what men enjoyed. Some determined women administrators began to organize more intercollegiate competitions in the 1960s and it was these women who became the first custodians of Title IX at the University of Tennessee and would face the challenge of building a fully-fledged intercollegiate program.

This history of the University of Tennessee echoes the numerous histories of what historian Ronald Smith calls "big-time" college athletics, reflecting the dominance of large universities on the field as well as in popular media and academic scholarship.<sup>77</sup> But while the contours of the university's relationship to racial integration and women's athletics in the decades prior to 1972 falls in line with national trends, this chapter adopts historian Ryan Swanson's argument that prior to the late twentieth century, the more significant community for collegiate athletic programs was

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<sup>77</sup> For histories of the NCAA and big-time college athletics see Ronald A. Smith, *Sports and Freedom: The Rise of Big-Time College Athletics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Ronald A. Smith, *Pay For Play: A History of Big-Time College Athletic Reform* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2011); James E. Odenkirk, "Intercollegiate Athletics: Big Business or Sport?" *Academe* 67, no. 2 (April 1981): 62-66; Murray Sperber, "College Sports Inc.: The Athletic Department vs. the University," *The Phi Delta Kappan* 72, no. 2 (Oct 1990): K1-K12; James V. Koch and Wilbert M. Leonard, "The NCAA: A Socio-Economic Analysis: The Development of the College Sports Cartel from Social Movement to Formal Organization," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 38, no. 2 (July 1978): 225-239.

the athletic conference.<sup>78</sup> By tracing the development of the Southeastern Conference in the late nineteenth century, highlighting the context of southern identity in the Jim Crow era becomes vital.<sup>79</sup> This chapter contributes to a robust scholarship on integrating collegiate football, and particularly southern football.<sup>80</sup> Though the Southeastern Conference was the last conference to integrate, the University of Tennessee was one of its first members to do so. Previous scholarship has neglected the activism of Black athletes within the university.<sup>81</sup> The marriage of southern

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<sup>78</sup> Ryan Swanson, "Establishing Proper 'Athletic Relations': The Nascent SEC and the Formation of College Athletic Conference," *The Alabama Review* 68, no. 2 (April 2015): 168-188. See also Christopher J. Walsh, *Where Football is King: A History of the SEC* (Lanham, Md.: Taylor Trade Pub., 2006) for a history of the SEC.

<sup>79</sup> The work of Patrick B. Miller on college sport in the New South intersects neatly with scholarship on whiteness and masculinity that identifies how higher education contributed to the project of making postbellum southern states "modern." Patrick B. Miller, "The Manly, the Moral, and the Proficient: College Sport in the New South," *Journal of Sport History* 24, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 285-316.

<sup>80</sup> For histories of integrating collegiate football see Donald Spivey, "The Black Athlete in Big-Time Intercollegiate Sports, 1941-1968," *Phylon* 44, no. 2 (2nd Qtr., 1983): 116-125; Billy Hawkins, *The New Plantation: Black Athletes, College Sports, and Predominantly White NCAA Institutions* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010); Joan Paul, Richard V. McGhee and Helen Fant, "The Arrival and Ascendance of Black Athletes in the Southeastern Conference, 1966-1980," *Phylon* 45, no. 4 (1984): 284-297; Simon Henderson, *Sidelined: How American Sports Challenged the Black Freedom Struggle* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013); Charles H. Martin, "Hold That (Color) Line!: Black Exclusion and Southeastern Conference Football," in *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement: White Supremacy, Black Southerners and College Campuses*, ed. Peter Wallenstein (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 2008).

<sup>81</sup> Henderson, *Sidelined*, 150-174. Henderson pays close attention to the regional dynamics of college football, but paints with a bit of a broad brush in the South. There were athletes in Tennessee agitating for change even as he dismisses Dixie as lacking any revolt.



identity and collegiate sport also influenced the brief period of collegiate women's sport as well, as the racial norms developed among suffragists reflected the same desire of white southern women to maintain the health and propriety of middle-class, educated women.<sup>82</sup> Overall, the establishment of collegiate sports programs at the University of Tennessee reinforced ideals of race and gender grounded within the remaking of the South after the Civil War.

The chapter begins with a brief history of the University of Tennessee and a discussion of how southern identity and men's collegiate sport evolved along parallel lines during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As control of sport shifted from students to administrators, sport became the province of the highest levels of decisionmakers at the university and thus indicative of their priorities. It then explores the development of intercollegiate women's sport prior to the 1920s and how it aligned with national trends that developed and then dismantled competitive women's sport. It concludes with the long process of integrating the university and the role that men's athletics played in both encouraging and hindering this process, in the context of the national civil rights and Black Power movements.

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<sup>82</sup> For work on southern identity and collegiate football see Miller, "The Manly, the Moral, and the Proficient." For work on racial norms in the era of early women's sport see Walsh, *Eugenics and Physical Culture Performance in the Progressive Era*; Cahn, *Coming on Strong*; Verbugge, *Active Bodies*; Newman, *White Women's Rights*. For scholarship on gender and the New South see Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2010); Rebecca Montgomery, "Women in the New South," in *Interpreting American History: The New South*, edited by James S. Humphreys (Ashland: The Kent State University Press, 2018), 112-130.

### 3.2 The Centrality of Whiteness to Tennessee Football

The development of a collegiate football culture at the University of Tennessee went hand-in-hand with the construction of the New South identity in the wake of the Civil War. As historian Patrick B. Miller argues, athletics became an integral process in the building of “‘manly character’ and the strengthening of regional pride.”<sup>83</sup> Though the Confederacy had lost the Civil War, Radical Reconstruction of the South was a brief effort quickly repudiated. In its wake, southern states reimposed white supremacy in the wake of 1877. Historian Grace Elizabeth Hale argues that aftermath of the Civil War and rapid economic transformations required new social hierarchies in the North and South. For the North, citizenship became tied to the nationalization of the economy and the deepening, gendered divisions between public and private spheres. But Hale writes that “it was racial identity that became the paramount spatial mediation of modernity,” particularly in the South.<sup>84</sup> For affluent young white men, the would-be inheritors of this supremacy, collegiate football proved to be a popular and productive method of training to inherit this authority.

The development of men’s collegiate sport, specifically football, allowed both students and faculty to develop a new southern identity in the late nineteenth century. For southern male college students, it married the ideals of the Old South in terms of masculinity and physicality. Sport also facilitated the emergence of a new southern mentality, even though it first emerged from the North and was still grounded in the elite universities of the Northeast. However, southern values could be furthered through the sport in other ways. As much as collegiate sport could train young men

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<sup>83</sup> Patrick B. Miller, “The Manly, the Moral, and the Proficient,” 286.

<sup>84</sup> Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 4-6.

in their masculinity and as future leaders of the region, it could also reinforce their sense of pride as white men. Patrick Miller writes that the codification of sport and the emphasis on adhering to rules felt reminiscent of the desire to reimpose and maintain racial hierarchy in the South.<sup>85</sup> Thus, the development of collegiate sport in the South took on racial meaning and emphasized white superiority, in addition to reinforcing traditional gender roles.

The ideological project of marrying sport and southern identity soon moved from the student body to the institution itself, at the university and nationwide. As college students began using sport as a new testing ground, it did not take long for university administrators to become concerned and get involved. Initially their involvement stemmed from a concern over the professionalization of sports within a university setting and the amount of time students were devoting to an extracurricular activity. Universities were also motivated to involve themselves in collegiate sport because of their popularity, particularly with alumni. Though the future of the sport lay in conferences and in national organizations, the early decades of collegiate sport in the 1890s and 1900s were defined by universities seeking to retain institutional control of sport. Collective reform only brought universities together in times of crisis. A crisis over the deaths of several players in the early twentieth century prompted the formation of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in 1905.<sup>86</sup> With the formation of the NCAA, whose membership was composed of faculty rather than student representatives, the transfer of power from students to administrators was largely complete.

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<sup>85</sup> Miller, "The Manly, the Moral," 286, 289.

<sup>86</sup> Smith, *Pay For Play*, 20, 25, 38, 47.

But historian Ryan Swanson argues that scholars have paid too much attention to the NCAA in its early years and not enough to intercollegiate cooperation and organizing at the conference level prior to 1940.<sup>87</sup> Swanson's emphasis on the history of collegiate sport conference formation in the twentieth century offers a transition between what Ronald A. Smith defines as the institutional, individualistic years of the nineteenth century and the eventual dominance of the NCAA in the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Adopting Swanson's focus on the importance of conferences also illuminates how racial politics shaped not only institutional relationships to collegiate sport but also conference decisions about race. As the University of Tennessee became aligned with other southern institutions, their shared policy of racial segregation came to define the conference in opposition to conferences gradually beginning to integrate in other parts of the country.

The University of Tennessee's engagement with sport and racial politics was articulated through its membership in a conference defined by regional affiliation—the South. The University of Tennessee was an early member of the Southeastern Conference's (SEC) antecedent, the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association, founded in 1894. In its evolution from the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association to the Southern Intercollegiate Conference in 1915 and finally the Southeastern Conference in 1932, the conference declared it was concerned with the “purification of college athletics through the South.”<sup>88</sup> Its membership fluctuated over time but comprised of colleges and universities from the former Confederacy. As much as their regional location and identity, these institutions were bound together by their commitment to segregation.

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<sup>87</sup> Swanson, “Establishing Proper ‘Athletic Relations,’” 170.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

And as the conference developed in terms of its priorities and regulations, its commitment to maintaining segregation deepened. And until the 1930s, the southern insistence on segregation remained the norm, even as some northern universities had Black players on the rosters. It was not until the middle of the century that northern universities began to object to the segregation of matches outside of the South.<sup>89</sup> While few Black players participated in collegiate sport at white universities in the first half of the century, those who did were still subject to hardline segregation when southern schools were involved.

As the Southeastern Conference codified its rules and regulations, the interweaving of athletics and racial ideology became more deeply embedded in southern collegiate sport. What eventually prompted the emergence of the Southeastern Conference was a division among members regarding freshmen eligibility rules. The regulation banning freshmen participation was intended to prevent students from moving from university to university to compete and encourage a greater emphasis on education. Larger universities, including the University of Tennessee, favored this rule while smaller colleges and universities, with smaller student bodies and a smaller pool of athletic talent, opposed it. But as Ryan Swanson argues, the fact that historically Black colleges and universities were also smaller schools and thus aligned against the freshmen ban gave large, southern universities yet another way to inscribe segregation into their athletic regulations. Swanson concludes that “Racial segregation and eligibility rules were intertwined; both figured prominently into the agendas of early athletic conferences in the United States.”<sup>90</sup> The

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<sup>89</sup> Charles H. Martin, *Benching Jim Crow: The Rise and Fall of the Color Line in Southern College Sports, 1890-1980* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), xvi-xvii.

<sup>90</sup> Swanson, “Establishing Proper Athletic Relations,” 170-172, 183-184.

Southeastern Conference formed in Knoxville in 1932 from thirteen members of the Southern Intercollegiate Conference located west and south of the Appalachian Mountains. The founding members still active in the conference include the University of Alabama, Auburn University, the University of Florida, the University of Georgia, the University of Kentucky, Louisiana State University, the University of Mississippi, Mississippi State University, the University of Tennessee, and Vanderbilt University. The University of the South, the Georgia Institute of Technology, and Tulane University were founding members but left the conference between 1940 and 1966.

Even as the National Collegiate Athletic Association gradually gained power and centralized authority within collegiate sport during the twentieth century, the SEC and other collegiate conferences remained critical interlocutors for university administrators. The history of collegiate sport at the University of Tennessee must be understood in the context of how its conference, the SEC, decided policies regarding amateurism, eligibility, and more. And the history and functioning of the SEC was closely tied up with the maintenance of racial segregation and white supremacy in the south. As collegiate sport became increasingly popular and profitable in the twentieth century, the decisions of individual institutions like the University of Tennessee regarding collegiate sport must be weighed in the context of its allegiance to the Southeastern Conference as well as southern identity.

The history of collegiate football at the University of Tennessee also reflects a national trend that married masculinity, athletics, and religion in the late nineteenth century. As the University of Tennessee underwent institutional changes, sport became a larger part of its public identity in terms of the values it projected. As Ronald A. Smith wrote in his seminal work on collegiate athletics *Sports and Freedom*, the visibility and popularity of college sports became a

vital recruiting tool for colleges and universities in the late nineteenth century.<sup>91</sup> The University of Tennessee was first established as Blount College in 1794. The college was originally chartered as a non-sectarian institution, but after accusations of being “godless” in the 1880s and 1890s, founded a campus Young Men’s Christian Association to encourage a healthy moral tone.<sup>92</sup> Not coincidentally, the first year that the University of Tennessee fielded a collegiate football team was in 1891. Beyond the growing popularity of men’s collegiate sport as a training ground for a new southern mentality, there was a national crisis of masculinity over the shift to white-collar work that influenced the development of both amateur and professional sport. For many, the turn towards athletic took on a distinctly religious overtone and created a movement called muscular Christianity.<sup>93</sup> The movement originated in England and migrated to the United States and one of the major organizations involved was the YMCA. Though the University of Tennessee’s football program did not emerge directly from the YMCA’s presence on campus, students were likely influenced by an overall push for physical activity, framed with overtones of virtue and masculinity.

Though football’s roots lay outside of the South, the University of Tennessee soon embraced it as its own. Collegiate football at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, like at many other southern institutions, migrated from the elite colleges of the northeast. The earliest known sports played by University of Tennessee students were intramural field day activities,

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<sup>91</sup> Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, viii.

<sup>92</sup> Long Range Strategic Plan for Affirmative Action, University of Tennessee, 1980, 1, Commission for Women Collection, Box 5, Folder 15, UTK.

<sup>93</sup> Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 2-4.

baseball, and rugby-style football in the 1880s. As early as 1888, students established an athletic association for the purpose of building interest in sports on campus, supervising finances, and systematizing rules.<sup>94</sup> The first football match UT played took place on November 21, 1891, when a squad of 46 players traveled to Chattanooga and lost to Sewanee. A few days later, on November 26, Tennessee played its first home match against nearby Harriman. Both games, losses, were organized by Henry K. Denlinger, a former Princeton football player who came to Knoxville to teach at the Knoxville Classical School. When the YMCA building on UT's campus was completed in 1891, Denlinger joined the faculty as a physical culture instructor. Denlinger's arrival had been primed by a local Knoxville boy's own journey with football. Thomas McClung, Knoxville native, first learned the game while attending the Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire and then matriculated at Yale University in 1888, where he played under the legendary football coach Walter Camp.<sup>95</sup> As the university developed administrative structures to support collegiate athletics, sport necessarily reflected the university's values.

One of the defining ways that the University of Tennessee gave football its southern character was through segregation. In 1869, an act of the Tennessee General Assembly established UT as the state's land-grant college, specifying "...that no citizen of the state, otherwise qualified shall be excluded from the privileges of said university by reason of his race or color..." However, the act also allowed trustees to make provisions for any black student to receive instruction at

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<sup>94</sup> Adam Hornbuckle, "Women's Sports and Physical Education at the University of Tennessee, 1899-1939," (M.A. Thesis, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1983), 45-46.

<sup>95</sup> Milton M. Klein, *Volunteer Moments: Vignettes of the History of the University of Tennessee, 1794-1994* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee, 1996), 90.



another institution. A year later in 1870, the Tennessee state constitution explicitly banned integrated public institutions.<sup>96</sup> The SEC's stance on segregation was a natural byproduct of its member institutions' dedication to maintaining the color line in all aspects of higher education, now including athletics.

Despite the football team's lack of on-field success in the early decades of the program, the university community rallied around the team and ties between sport and the institution deepened. This enthusiasm was represented in a number of ways: the continuing participation in the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association; the arrival of football's first cheerleader in 1907; and the writing of numerous school songs and chants, including the still-used "Rocky Top."<sup>97</sup> In the early 1900s, faculty members joined the athletic association, but did not yet assume control of it.<sup>98</sup> The ascendancy of the Tennessee Volunteers, the men's football team, came in the 1920s and the university developed new institutional control mechanisms for sport. Beyond the student-run athletic association, the university had a faculty-led athletic council, which hired coaches and set policies for the teams. The Tennessee Club, an alumni booster club, also emerged. In 1921, the university finished construction of its first regulation football field, Shield-Watkins Field, and in 1925, General Robert Neyland joined the coaching staff. As head coach, he revolutionized the team's strategy and won multiple conference and national titles. His impact upon the program is reflected in the renaming of the football stadium in his honor in 1972.

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<sup>96</sup> Long Range Strategic Plan, 1980, 1, UTK.

<sup>97</sup> Klein, *Volunteer Moments*, 96, 105.

<sup>98</sup> Hornbuckle, "Women's Sports," 46.

In its first four decades, men's collegiate football at the University of Tennessee grew from an amateur, student-led pastime to a university-controlled, competitive venture with high public visibility that became a financial draw for fans and alumni. The latter decades of the twentieth century made men's collegiate sports, particularly basketball and football, even more valuable to the university as the rise of television facilitated lucrative deals.<sup>99</sup> Men's football was tightly tied to the highest level of authority within the university and a public symbol of its values. Both the University of Tennessee and the Southeastern Conference were committed to the continued integration of higher education and men's football. But by the 1960s, athletics played a crucial role in both resisting and promulgating racial integration, as administrators resisted the symbolic statement of integration but also desired the talented Black players other schools had already begun recruiting. Until the 1970s, collegiate sport at the University of Tennessee reinforced the idea that sport was the realm of white male athletes.

### **3.3 Negotiating Femininity in Early Women's Collegiate Sport**

Though men's and women's collegiate sport emerged in parallel during the late nineteenth century, sex segregation resulted in divergent paths regarding funding, institutional support, and support from larger sporting organizations. In the same decades that its male students embraced

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<sup>99</sup> See Smith, *Pay For Play*; White, *Blood, Sweat & Tears*; Koch and Leonard, "The NCAA: A Socio-Economic Analysis"; Joe Nocera and Ben Strauss, *Indentured: The Inside Story of the Rebellion Against the NCAA* (New York: Penguin, 2016) for a discussion of the impact of television contracts upon the NCAA and collegiate football.

athletics, the University of Tennessee began admitting women and they too became passionate advocates for physical activity. Women took physical education classes and gradually began forming their own teams. However, their opportunities for competition were still subject to sport's association with masculinity. The desire to maintain the propriety and femininity of its women students eventually prompted administrators at the University of Tennessee to end women's intercollegiate competition by the end of the 1920s. That decision was in line with national trends for women's sport, which were returning to intramural and recreational sport.

Women's physical education at the University of Tennessee had nearly as long a history as that of women at the university. From its founding in 1794, the university was single sex until 1892, when women were first admitted on a trial basis. The following year, the university was fully coeducational, and women were admitted on a regular basis. In 1899, the University of Tennessee created two key institutions: a Dean of Women position and a women's physical education department.<sup>100</sup> The creation of administrative positions both embedded women in the university administration and created new avenues for funding support. The history of men's collegiate sport in the twentieth century and the later iteration of women's sport at the university after 1972 demonstrate that access to the university administration and its money was key.

Though segmented into separate departments, the earliest years of physical education at the University of Tennessee varied little by gender. The faculty sought to instill fitness to develop healthy minds in their students, men and women alike. Reflecting social trends of the late nineteenth century, the earliest women's sports were more recreational than competitive, with

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<sup>100</sup> Debby Schriver, *In the Footsteps of Champions: The University of Tennessee Lady Volunteers, the First Three Decades* (Knoxville, Tenn.: University of Tennessee Press, 2008), xxii.

women participating in croquet, archery, tennis, bicycling, boating, swimming, and golf. However, it did not take long for women to begin participating in competitive sports as well. The first varsity women's sport at the university was basketball and the team played local competitors at Maryville College, University of Chattanooga, Carson-Newman College, and Martha Washington College in the early 1900s.<sup>101</sup> Though little archival evidence remains of the early years of this program, the team continued to compete over the next two decades.

By 1920, despite little funding and limits on the broader acceptability of women athletes, the women of the University of Tennessee expressed a clear desire to bolster competitive sports. At a public meeting on March 16, 1920, UT women athletes demanded equal treatment with their male counterparts and for the existing student athletic association to admit women.<sup>102</sup> The athletic association, which dated back to 1888, only had jurisdiction over men's sports but indicated university support through the participation of faculty members. It was this systematic cooperation that women wanted to access.

The women athletes were successful in securing some of their demands in 1920. The demands had included the formation of a single athletic association for men and women, varsity letters for women athletes, and the addition of a women's representative to the athletic council. The women won their first two concessions and women varsity competition expanded to track, swimming, and tennis. The women's basketball team continued to develop and even played the powerhouse women's team at the University of Cincinnati. The team concluded the 1924 season

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<sup>101</sup> Schriver, *In the Footsteps of Champions*, xxii.

<sup>102</sup> Hornbuckle, "Women's Sports," 46-47.

with a 5-2 record.<sup>103</sup> But these trends in UT's varsity sports increasingly diverged from the philosophy of women's physical education instructors at a national level.

The dissolution of women's varsity athletics at the University of Tennessee by the end of the 1920s was not the result of direct interference from national women's organizations but reflected the dominance of their belief in amateur, noncompetitive sport. These women's sporting organizations in the early twentieth century, and later the NCAA and Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, coordinated and guided policy decisions for colleges and universities in sport. In the 1920s, three different organizations competed to oversee women's amateur athletics: the Women's Athletic Committee, the Women's Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation, and the American Athletic Union. Adam Hornbuckle's thesis on the early years of UT's women's sports programs particularly notes the influence of the Women's Division on the administration at the University of Tennessee. In contrast to the evolution of women's intercollegiate sports and varsity teams at UT, the Women's Division advocated for mass participation and rejected any competitive ethos.<sup>104</sup> The notion of selecting only a few women to compete on an elite team, as UT had done, was its antithesis.

Though no record remains of precisely why the University of Tennessee decided to end the women's basketball program, the 1926 season was its last one. Evidently administrators at the University of Tennessee were persuaded by the Women's Division's dire warnings of the dangers of elitism and exclusion ruining the virtue and character of women's sport.<sup>105</sup> Hornbuckle points

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<sup>103</sup> Schriver, *In the Footsteps of Champions*, xxii.

<sup>104</sup> Hult, "Women's Struggle for Governance in U.S. Amateur Athletics," 250-251.

<sup>105</sup> Schriver, *In the Footsteps of Champions*, xxii.

to another possible factor: that many of Tennessee's local competitors also abolished their varsity women's program, depriving UT women of opponents. Regardless, it seems that this decision came from the administration, as faculty members involved with intercollegiate sport on the athletic council and coaching found it "perplexing."<sup>106</sup> With this decision, the other varsity sports programs came to quick ends and by the late 1920s, intercollegiate competition for women ended at UT.

In the following decades, intramural sport became the only option for women at the University of Tennessee. Intramural sport and occasional play days were comparable with the Women's Division's philosophy of "a girl for every sport and a sport for every girl," emphasizing wide participation over competitive edge. The maintenance of a separate women's philosophy of athletics was key to the future of women's sport at the university and reflected trends at the national level as well. Women's athletic and physical education organizations observed the transformation of men's collegiate sport into an increasingly commercial and hypercompetitive model, and they rejected it. National organizations like the Women's Division and the Department for Girls and Women's Sport maintained this status quo until the late 1960s, when the possibility of legislation affecting women's athletics emerged. The maintenance of a women's model of collegiate sport continually reinforced the same traditional gender roles that rejected competitive sport as masculine and thus inappropriate for women.

Despite the philosophical leanings of national organizations, women's intercollegiate sport did not entirely disappear from the University of Tennessee. Play days and sports days still provided opportunities to meet and compete with women from outside the university. In 1959,

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<sup>106</sup> Hornbuckle, "Women's Sports," 81.

Eastern Tennessee State University went as far as to host a volleyball tournament. The University of Tennessee not only participated but brought home a trophy. However, the administration still clung to the fear of women's sport reaching "an unacceptable professional level and exclusivity," and ended the play days and sports days which had been the last refuge for inter-university competition in the late 1950s.<sup>107</sup> The end of the largely recreational play days and sports days proved to be more of an inspiration than a setback.

Individual women were able to fill the vacuum in providing sporting opportunities in the lead up to the passage of Title IX, but they were limited by budget and scope in what they could accomplish without institutional support. In 1960, Nancy Lay, a graduate student from the University of Richmond, reinstated the women's basketball program at the University of Tennessee. In 1963, she also brought back tennis and, along with physical education instructor Jo Hobson, coached all three sports without compensation. These teams played nearby Carson-Newman College, Maryville College, and East Tennessee State University, much like they had in the 1920s.<sup>108</sup> However, unlike the previous teams, these women's teams were not supervised by the athletic association nor eligible for varsity letters. These women's teams, which defined women's sport at UT until the advent of Title IX, were labors of love. The coaches were paid almost nothing and had no institutional support for travel, equipment, uniforms, or training. One student from the 1967-68 volleyball team recalled practicing in the gym, pooling gas money for tournaments, and staying in whatever accommodations they could find—often dorms. But she also remembered this time fondly: "We got together for the fun of it—for the camaraderie—just to

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<sup>107</sup> Schriver, *In the Footsteps*, xxii.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

play. There were no scholarships, of course. It was all about fun.” This version of women’s intercollegiate sport was largely in line with the Women’s Division philosophy that had ended the program back in 1926 and was the total opposite of the men’s program which had developed under the auspices of the SEC and the NCAA.

These early years of a renewed women’s intercollegiate program, while not competitive ones, laid important groundwork for the developments that came with Title IX in the 1970s. At the University of Tennessee, there were dedicated coaches and administrators who were invested in providing their students with opportunities to play. A national push for increased opportunities for recreational sports also motivated the administration to offer more support. In 1968, the women’s basketball, tennis, and volleyball programs were transferred from the women’s physical education department to the Division of Student Affairs. Though still coached by the same women, being housed in Student Affairs and under the label of club sports meant access to funding in the form of student activity fees, another critical development for the future. There also seemed to be a fair amount of support from the student body for women’s athletics. In February 1972, prior to the passage of Title IX, the Student Senate proposed a student recreation board to investigate developing women’s athletics to a comparable level with men’s athletics.<sup>109</sup> This proposition did not come to pass but foreshadowed President Nixon’s signing Title IX into effect only a few months later.

The history of women’s collegiate sport at the University of Tennessee prior to 1972 and the passage of Title IX reflects the ways that groups of women athletes and coaches pushed to advance the cause of women’s sport but consistently met resistance from university administrators

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid, xxxiv.



who did not value or support competitive women's sport. The women's teams in the 1920s and the 1970s demonstrated how administrators imposed limits on sport to prevent perceived impropriety and how gradually women's sport integrated into university infrastructure. In the decades after Title IX, the evolution of both of those practices defined the new era for women's intercollegiate sport. Another aspect of women's sport that changed in its reemergence post-Title IX was the racial composition of its teams. Like the men's teams, women's collegiate athletics was racially segregated in the years prior to 1972 by virtue of the university's color line. But after 1972, there was no battle to desegregate women's collegiate sport. That war had already been fought on highly contested terrain in the battle over the SEC and the University of Tennessee's men's football program.

### **3.4 Integrating Tennessee Football and the Challenges to Racial Hierarchies**

The desegregation of the University of Tennessee was a battle waged over decades by students and activists and athletics became a vital site of assessing and debating racial equality in the university. Though the first Black students enrolled at the university in the 1950s, the first Black athlete did not enroll until 1969. Historian Charles H. Martin argues that the integration of SEC football teams marked the beginning of meaningful integration in southern universities, as black athletes became "an asset to be voluntarily sought out, rather than a liability forced upon the school by the federal government."<sup>110</sup> The end to racial segregation in football indicated the team's symbolic value, both in the amount of time it took to integrate and in how the desire to remain

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<sup>110</sup> Martin, "Hold That (Color) Line," 169.

competitive eventually compelled the administration to act. The racial integration of the Volunteers altered the racial restrictions which had defined UT's collegiate sport since the nineteenth century. But the small number of Black players and absence of Black coaches also indicates that integration did not penetrate the policies and administration of collegiate sport.

The battle to integrate the University of Tennessee was fought for decades prior to the advent of the mass civil rights movement of the 1950s and speaks to the deeply ingrained nature of segregation in southern higher education. Black applicants first attempted to integrate the University of Tennessee in the 1930s. These early attempts were rejected by administrators on the grounds that they violated university policy; appeals were similarly rejected by the state judiciary. Even as the United States Supreme Court began ordering the integration of graduate programs in Texas, Oklahoma, and Missouri, the University of Tennessee's top administrators remained reluctant to follow suit. The trustees cited their fear of upsetting the public. Raised in an era of segregation, they chose to maintain separate facilities and continually reinforced the university's commitment to segregation as a core aspect of its southern identity.<sup>111</sup> But the institution's federal contracts became a consideration in the 1950s, when Black applicants made another attempt to enroll. Fearing that the federal government's ban on racial discrimination by its contractors could endanger their relationship, the university relented. Despite initially rejecting the applications of four Black students, university president Cloide E. Brehm announced that Gene Gray, one of them, would be the first Black graduate student to attend the University of Tennessee in 1952. Between the changing legal precedents established by the judiciary and the federal government's policies

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<sup>111</sup> Klein, *Volunteer Moments*, 68-69.

on discrimination, the University of Tennessee slowly began to desegregate and demonstrated that change was possible, with the right leverage and incentives.

Though Black graduate students were now legally permitted to enroll, administrators were still not fully committed to a project of integration. As university historian Milton Klein wrote to mark the school's bicentennial, "The general policy of the administration and of the trustees was to avoid bold innovative measures and to move only when directed by the legislature or the courts." This strategy took the form of denying admission to Black graduate applicants not pursuing a degree, Black applicants to any graduate program which was duplicated at an HBCU, and all Black undergraduate applicants. Even after the *Brown* decision in 1954, the university still resisted implementation and appeals by local Black attorneys. In June 1955, the Tennessee Board of Education, which supervised all public colleges and universities outside the UT system, adopted a desegregation policy to achieve open admissions by the 1959-1960 schoolyear. It was not until a Tennessee Supreme Court decision in October 1956 invalidated all state laws on segregation that the university began to shift its operations.<sup>112</sup> The university slowly opened its graduate admissions, but there was still no movement on its undergraduate population until a local student from Knoxville took matters into his own hands.

Integrating the university's undergraduate program fell to an individual Black student who could apply sufficient legal leverage to incentivize administrators that integration was less perilous than obstinacy. Theotis Robinson Jr., inspired by Jackie Robinson, had been planning on attending the local HBCU, Knoxville College, until a local civil rights organization made him aware of UT's ongoing segregation of its undergraduate program. This information neatly intersected with

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<sup>112</sup> Klein, *Volunteer Moments*, 69-70.

Robinson's desire to study political science, which was a degree not offered at Knoxville College. In the summer of 1960, he wrote a letter to the university stating his interest, with no mention of his race, and received a reply that the university did not admit Black undergraduate students. He recalled wondering how the university even knew his race, considering he lived in a mixed neighborhood. Robinson and his parents scheduled an appointment with the university's president, Dr. Andy Holt. Holt held firm in reiterating the university's racial policy and informed the Robinsons that only the University of Tennessee Board of Trustees could change the policy. The Robinsons made clear that they wanted this matter presented to the board and the university could expect a lawsuit otherwise.

Whether by national sporting organizations, judicial pressure, or individual action, the University of Tennessee administration demonstrated that it was susceptible to pressure. Legal precedent confirmed that the university would not win a lawsuit, particularly as a publicly funded institution. When the matter was brought before the Board of Trustees in the fall of 1960, the policy was unceremoniously changed. Robinson and two other Black undergraduates officially enrolled in January 1961. Robinson did credit the administration and the board for making the decision. "They chose the path of conciliation, they chose the path of cooperativeness as opposed to one of obstruction, which we did see in other parts of the country." He was referring to the University of Alabama, Tennessee's fellow SEC member, where Alabama Governor George Wallace physically blocked students from entering the auditorium door to register. After admission, Robinson's experience at the University of Tennessee was uneventful, unmarked by the riots that beset the University of Mississippi and University of Georgia when Black students

entered.<sup>113</sup> But while the university's change of policy and Robinson's day-to-day experiences were not marred by violence, the influence of segregation lingered throughout the 1960s, particularly in athletics.

The University of Tennessee's response to racial discrimination and desegregation demonstrated both its susceptibility to external forces and its fundamentally conservative nature. University officials admitted Black students because local activists used federal policy and court decisions to force their hands, but UT was not proactive in enacting these changes. Its participation in the Southeastern Conference embodied its continued alignment with southern responses to racial equality. Charles H. Martin contends that one of the defining early policies of the SEC was its insistence upon maintaining the color line by refusing to compete against integrated opponents in the 1940s. While the segregation of SEC football was uncontroversial at the time, it demonstrated the politicized nature of sport. With the dawning of the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, and as northern universities began insisting upon integrated competition, the SEC's defiance fell in line with the South's strategy of massive resistance.

One of the most prominent examples of this strategy was the Louisiana state legislature's passage of a ban on integrated athletic competitions after Georgia Tech agreed to play the integrated University of Pittsburgh squad in the 1956 Sugar Bowl. SEC administrators, however, gradually abandoned this strategy and scheduled games against intersectional, integrated opponents. They feared that not participating in those games would not only harm their

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<sup>113</sup> Peter Wallenstein, ed., *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement: White Supremacy, Black Southerners, and College Campuses* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 2008), 275-279.

universities' reputations, but also the bottom line of their athletic department budgets.<sup>114</sup> At a UT Athletics Board meeting in May 1963, the football coach Bowden Wyatt raised the question of Black players: "He said that if they are enrolled in school, they are certainly entitled to be on our teams. If they are on the teams, however, we cannot play them in some Southeastern Conference games because of restrictions imposed by the other institutions." Wyatt reported that four Black students had tried out for UT teams, but he had discouraged them because they would only be eligible to play in a handful of games. The alumni representative on the board, Charles Guthrie, responded that "...it might be smart to agree to play a team that has Negro players. This would not be taking the lead but would be moving into a solution on a gradual basis." The conclusion of the meeting was a motion to follow the Southeastern Conference's policy in these matters and play integrated teams without integrating their own squads.<sup>115</sup> While the university was not as resistant to integration as some of its peer institutions, it was also unwilling to be a leader within the SEC when it came to ending segregated athletics.

The administration's exclusion of sport from its broader racial policies aligned it with the SEC's commitment to segregation, the symbolic value of football as an icon of the university, and deep-seated resistance to altering the racial character of such a fundamental piece of the university's image. Though the University of Tennessee finally integrated the undergraduate population in 1961, it did not sign its first Black athlete until the 1969-70 season. Theotis Robinson Jr. recalled one particular figure who was a likely proponent of that de facto segregation: General Robert R. Neyland. Neyland remains a huge figure in the university's history, as the namesake of

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<sup>114</sup> Martin, "Hold That (Color) Line!", 168-169.

<sup>115</sup> Athletics Board Meeting minutes, May 4, 1963, 7-8, Earl Ramer Papers, Box 2, Folder 20, UTK.

the university's football stadium as well as the road leading up to it. Robinson argued that "So much of the tradition within the football program springs from the days when Neyland was the football coach. But Neyland was a racist. And had a real problem with the idea of blacks and whites playing on the same athletic teams..." By the 1960s, Neyland was no longer actively coaching, but still served as the athletic director that made him even more powerful. Robinson remembered one track meet, held in either 1961 or 1962, where an integrated team was supposed to attend. When Neyland heard the news, he ordered his track coach to approach the integrated team's coach and ask him to sit his Black players. The opposing coach refused and Neyland canceled the meet, because of potential "trouble." To Robinson, this was an absurd claim, considering that "Nobody attended a track meet. The guys' girlfriends didn't even go to a track meet, you know?" He believed that these low-profile events were canceled for Neyland's fear that they would lead to calls for integration on a much more public stage: the university's football or basketball teams.

Robinson recalled one of his friends, Avon Rollins, who tried out for the all-white basketball team in the fall of 1961. By this point, the entire university was integrated, at least in policy. But when Neyland found out about Rollins, he was determined to intervene. Robinson reported that Neyland "cussed Avon out, cussed the coach out, and ran Avon out of the gym..." Neyland died a year later in 1962, ending his decades-long career at the University of Tennessee.<sup>116</sup> That Neyland's name remains so prominently linked to the university's history and public-facing image reveals how profoundly the University of Tennessee married itself to white supremacy in its segregationist policies. Though these policies have long since been revoked, they remain tacitly endorsed in how large Neyland's legacy looms in his namesakes. The project of racial integration

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<sup>116</sup> Wallenstein, ed., *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement*, 275-279.

at the university only went so far. And while athletics affected only a small portion of the student population directly, its importance to the school's reputation and visibility as a symbol of the university's racial politics made intercollegiate competition one of the highest profile and highest stakes areas for administration. And just as the university hesitated in the face of *Brown*, the athletic administration showed similar caution in the 1960s.

Only after other SEC schools showed a willingness to integrate did the University of Tennessee follow suit. The University of Kentucky was the first SEC university to integrate its football squad. The University of Kentucky was fairly unique in the SEC and more progressive than other members, within the relative comparison of southern states. Though the university was initially as reluctant to integrate as other southern universities, Black students integrated the student body in 1954, and without the overt violence which characterized the experience of James Meredith at Mississippi in 1962. The University of Kentucky was also operating in a different educational context; by the late 1950s, the desegregation of Kentucky's public school system had led to integrated high school basketball competitions. The university itself had even hosted integrated basketball and football matches since the late 1940s. It was no surprise, then, that Kentucky became the first SEC member to propose integrating the conference in 1961. University of Kentucky President Frank G. Dickey received private support from administrators at Vanderbilt, Tennessee, Georgia Tech, and Tulane, but opposition from those at Ole Miss, Mississippi State, Alabama, and Auburn.<sup>117</sup> While Kentucky seemed to support integration on principle, as evidenced by school records and student newspaper headlines, it also became a matter of on-field competition.

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<sup>117</sup> Martin, "Hold That (Color) Line!", 170-172.



For the Southeastern Conference, fielding the most competitive team proved a compelling enough form of leverage to push integration forward. The University of Kentucky was one of the weakest competitors in the Southeastern Conference during the mid-1960s. Their last string of successes came in the late 1940s and early 1950s, under the supervision of the legendary coach Paul “Bear” Bryant. Thus, Charles H. Martin argued the integration of their squad was as much about gaining a competitive advantage over their fellow SEC rivals as anything else. The arrival of a new president in 1963 and concentrated recruiting efforts finally produced the SEC’s first Black athlete: Nathaniel Northington, signed December 19, 1965. It took until 1971 for the final SEC member, the University of Mississippi, to sign its first Black player, and fully integrate the conference.<sup>118</sup>

Though the University of Tennessee was not the first to integrate SEC athletics, it was the second, which spoke to its particular political positioning in the Upper South and an administration which could respond to persistent pressure. By the mid-1960s, after the passing of Gen. Neyland and with the hiring of a new coach to lead the football program, the university was ready to take its next step towards integration. Doug Dickey, the new head football coach, began coaching the Volunteers in 1964. While serving in the U.S. Army during World War II, Dickey had coached an integrated military football team. Though Dickey was not hired to integrate collegiate athletics, his previous position indicated his willingness to work with Black players. In 1967 under Dickey, the Volunteers signed their first Black recruits. The first, a running back from Alcoa High School named Albert Davis, was considered one of the top recruits in the state. The second was a halfback named Lester McClain. Though both were signed to scholarships, Davis never attended the

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<sup>118</sup> Martin, “Hold That (Color) Line!,” 172-173, 190.

university and thus, Lester McClain became the first Black athlete at the University of Tennessee. McClain's presence on the squad was no coincidence. After learning that the university was interested in integrating their squad, McClain transferred from the predominantly Black Haynes High to Antioch High, which was in a predominantly white neighborhood of Nashville, to better prepare himself for college football. After redshirting his first season, McClain officially broke the color barrier at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville in 1968.<sup>119</sup>

The University of Tennessee administration's first steps towards integration were neither fast-moving nor particularly progressive. The university was guided by its institutional affiliations and wary of moving too far from the middle ground of public opinion. However, Tennessee did not face the same opposition as some of its peers from students, administrators, or local communities. Black activists like Theotis Robinson and Lester McClain used this space to successfully integrate the university. In fact, at an Athletics Board meeting in 1969, a Board member claimed that Lester McClain had been the first Black player to receive a grant-in-aid in the SEC. Though incorrect, this fact was included under "reasons to be proud of the program."<sup>120</sup> That integrating athletics took nearly a decade longer than the general student body indicates both the conservative trend of the Southeastern Conference and the importance of intercollegiate athletics to the university.

From its earliest days, the University of Tennessee had been defined by the whiteness of its student body, faculty, and administration. Its southern identity was symbolized and reinforced on the football field. The progression from segregation to integration was slow and externally

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<sup>119</sup> Klein, *Volunteer Moments*, 99.

<sup>120</sup> Athletics Board Meeting minutes, November 8, 1969, Earl Ramer Papers, Box 2, Folder 34, UTK.

motivated, but resulted in the peaceful, gradual integration of its student body. However, as more Black students arrived on campus, athletes and otherwise, they lived as minorities. With an era of Black Power dawning, they began making demands of the administration and pursuing institutional changes to the historically and predominantly white university.

### **3.5 Black Power, Black Athletes, and the Challenge of Integration**

In the late 1960s, the pursuit of racial equality shifted towards radicalism nationally and came under increasing scrutiny in Tennessee higher education. From 1966 onwards, some civil rights groups—most notably the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee—moved towards Black nationalism, Black separatism, and Black Power as their guiding ideology for racial justice. Black Power advocates sought not simply legal rights and respectability, but a celebration of Black pride, beauty, art, culture, and history. One critical expression of Black Power was its veneration of HBCUs, which also served as incubators for student activism. Beyond HBCUs, a movement among Black students on white campuses swept the nation, demanding Black studies departments, more open admissions policies, and greater community engagement by colleges and universities.<sup>121</sup> These changing currents swept Tennessee as well, and athletics became a focal point for these new conversations.

Though all of higher education in Tennessee faced accusations of ongoing segregation, the University of Tennessee became one of the central parties to *Geier v. Dunn*, a complaint filed in

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<sup>121</sup> See Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

1968. Four plaintiffs initiated a desegregation lawsuit against all public institutions of higher education in Tennessee that did not conclude until 2006. But the initial suit centered on two competing universities in Nashville, the University of Tennessee’s new branch campus and Tennessee State University, the only public HBCU in the state. The University of Tennessee, which first established an educational extension center in Nashville in 1947 began expanding the center and offering more classes in 1968. While Black students attended Tennessee State, UT was able to attract a white, working student population to its new night classes. But the four plaintiffs at the heart of *Geier v. Dunn* alleged that UT’s new campus duplicated courses that were currently offered at Tennessee State and thus perpetuated racial segregation in Tennessee. The University of Tennessee objected to this characterization and argued that its courses in no ways duplicated the offerings at Tennessee State. But as the University of Tennessee transitioned the Nashville campus from a night school into a full-fledged branch campus, this argument weakened. In 1970, the Tennessee State Legislature passed a bill allowing the University of Tennessee-Nashville to begin granting its own four-year degree.<sup>122</sup> This decision undermined UT’s arguments about the different purposes of the Nashville center and Tennessee State. But the university’s priority in this case was not advancing integration in Nashville but addressing a forecasted decline in university enrollment—and thus finances—in the 1970s.

Throughout coming decades, the University of Tennessee, like all other public institutions of higher education in the state, had to comply with court-ordered mandates regarding racial composition and other efforts to increase the racial diversity across both Black and white

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<sup>122</sup> Andrew P. Torrence, “Blacks in the Educational System, University of Denver Lecture Series: Blacks in the System,” April 23, 1973, 16, Andrew P. Torrence Collection, Box 2, Folder 30, TSU.

institutions. But the burden of integration, as will be explored in later chapters, fell much more heavily on Tennessee State. For the University of Tennessee, the push to integrate mostly fell in line with administrators' strategic plan to continue attracting undergraduates and their tuition dollars. The only student group that the university felt some pressure to not only attract but appease were its student-athletes. At a particular moment in the university's history, with the external pressures to integrate pressing and a cultural moment of Black Power, the University of Tennessee's Black male student-athletes advocated for more substantive changes to university policies and the racial integration of its decisionmakers.

Black undergraduates were important agitators of institutional change on campuses and Black male college athletes emerged as key vectors for these ideals. Most prominently Harry Edwards, a sociologist at San Jose State College, founded the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR) in 1967. As part of its mission to demand action from the U.S. government on racial equality, the OPHR threatened a Black athlete boycott of the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City. While the boycott did not come to fruition as some prominent Black athletes chose not to partake, OPHR participants Tommie Smith and John Carlos did raise their fists on the podium for the 200-meter race as a symbol of protest and solidarity for Black power and other liberation struggles.<sup>123</sup> At colleges and universities across the country, Black college athletes used their visibility to demand racial reforms and highlight inequalities in higher education.

Historian Simon Henderson, who focused on such incidents at institutions like Marquette University in Wisconsin, the University of California at Berkeley, and the University of Kansas,

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<sup>123</sup> For accounts of the 1968 Olympic Games see Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph But the Struggle* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002) and Edwards, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete*.

argued that these kinds of protests were absent in the South due to its deep-seated racism. Henderson opens the chapter—“Dixie and the Absence of a Black Athletic Revolt”—with an anecdote from the University of Tennessee football team and racist chants its Black athletes endured while playing at the University of Mississippi.<sup>124</sup> He rightly recognizes the discrimination Black players at the University of Tennessee experienced and the conservative political stance of the institution. But Henderson also overlooked the steps Black athletes at UT undertook as they advocated for racial equality.

The increase in the number of Black athletes and the growing number of Black undergraduate students provided the foundation for activism. Like many other colleges and universities, the University of Tennessee experienced a major increase in Black enrollment after 1968. From 1964 to 1975, the number of Black students on campus climbed almost tenfold, from 142 to nearly 1,000.<sup>125</sup> Nationally, college enrollment for Black students rose by 56% from 1970 to 1974, compared to a 15% increase for white students. The combination of the civil rights movement and federal legislation like the GI Bill and Title VI had created new opportunities, backed by mandates, particularly for lower income and Black families to send their children to college.<sup>126</sup> Outside of Black athletes, the Black student population of the University of Tennessee made its own demands, in line with national activism on other white campuses.

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<sup>124</sup> Henderson, *Sidelined*, ch. 6.

<sup>125</sup> Black Student Enrollment, University of Tennessee Knoxville, 1976, Office of the University President Papers, Box 4, Folder 14, UTK.

<sup>126</sup> Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus*, 3-5.

Administrators at the University of Tennessee counted themselves lucky that the student and anti-war movements had not significantly disrupted their normal operations. In a 1970 letter, athletic director Bob Woodruff wrote to incoming student-athletes that "...the University of Tennessee has not been plagued by a great deal of dissension and disruption." However, he warned, "...any campus is vulnerable to disorder and disruption at any time."<sup>127</sup> The previous spring had seen students from across the country participate in strikes against the expansion of the Vietnam War into Cambodia. The protests became even more contentious after four students at Kent State were shot by National Guardsmen. Much like in Theotis Robinson's pursuit of undergraduate integration, the university's willingness to meet demands probably prevented escalation, as well.

In the 1968-69 academic year, Black students at UT-Knoxville began advocating for institutional changes. Like many of their peers on other campuses, these students sought the establishment of courses on Black history and a Black Studies program.<sup>128</sup> Within the next year, courses such as "Black History" and "The Afro-American Family" were introduced to the course catalog, with additional entries by the Religious Studies and English departments in 1969-1970. These new courses were combined with existing offerings to create a Black Studies academic minor in the College of Liberal Arts in September 1969. The administration then appointed a new faculty-student committee to supervise this program, deemed "controversial" by the university community.<sup>129</sup> Despite whatever resistance existed on campus or in administration, the

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<sup>127</sup> Bob Woodruff to Incoming Student-Athletes, July 28, 1970, Office of the President Records, Box 15, Folder 11, UTK.

<sup>128</sup> See Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus* for more on the establishment of Black and ethnic studies departments.

<sup>129</sup> Black Studies Information Guide, 1-4, Small Collections, Box 1, Folder 1, UTK.

establishment of a Black Studies program demonstrated the university's willingness to accommodate its Black students to a certain extent. These measures were also in line with the national response to Black student activism.

Though the university dealt with the concerns of the Black student population as presented by the Black Student Union and the Afro American Student Liberation Force, there was another significant group of Black students on campus with grievances to air. In May 1971, a group of Black athletes, led by trailblazer Lester McClain, now in his senior year, wrote a letter to the University of Tennessee athletic department with a list of "absolutely necessary" changes to improve conditions in the department. The letter emphasized their collective approach, stating they did "not wish to be approached as individuals," and they would not tolerate any repercussions from drafting the letter. Their seven demands covered recruiting regulations and practices, the dress code, and housing conditions and focused on their own experience of the university. But looking to the future, this group also sought the recruitment of more Black athletes in sports other than basketball and football, and the hiring of a Black coach and/or advisor. Their reasoning was simple: "...[W]e feel that no white person, no matter how liberal, can understand and relate to black problems." They alluded to the mental strain of living as Black students on a predominantly white campus, saying that without a Black coach who could understand their minds were "working on problems other than those ever present on the Athletic Field."<sup>130</sup> Their activism expanded beyond themselves to the wider university.

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<sup>130</sup> Black Athletes Letter to UT Athletic Department, May 1971, Task Force for Blacks Collection, Box 1, Folder 12, UTK.



The Black student-athletes who authored this letter felt singled out for their racial identity and isolated from their community. Item 4, “Dress Code,” demanded “an end to the absurd idea of no facial hair or the length of a person’s hair and restrictions against types of clothing.” They felt scrutinized on the basis of their race and argued that these personal choices had no bearing on athletic performance. However, the repeated references to recruitment also spoke to their desire to feel like less of a minority on campus, even while taking pride in their race and Black culture. Items 1, 3, 5, and 7 requested changing regulations regarding recruitment or grooming and the commitment of funds to bring more Black players in a wider variety of sports to campus. Beyond athletics, Item 7 called for the athletic department’s support in increasing minority enrollment on campus overall. The students stated that the university “owes” this to minority groups including “Blacks, American Indians, and other minority group present in the State of Tennessee.” In the 1970 census, Tennessee’s population was 83.9% white, 15.8% Black, and .003% other races.<sup>131</sup> Their suggested method to increase minority enrollment was to use athletic funding to support minority scholarships.<sup>132</sup>

The Black student-athletes’ push to increase Black enrollment on campus was a notable gesture across the divide that typically characterized athletics’ relationship to the broader university community. As collegiate sport evolved in the twentieth century, criticisms of the NCAA’s actions have centered on how the emphasis on athletic success professionalized what was supposed to be an amateur competition and jeopardized the educational mission of higher

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<sup>131</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Population of States by Sex, Race, Urban-Rural Residence, and Age: 1790-1970.

<sup>132</sup> Black Athletes Letter to UT Athletic Department, May 1971, Task Force for Blacks Collection, Box 1, Folder 12, UTK.

education. NCAA President Walter Byers' coining of the phrase "student-athlete" in 1955 rhetorically encapsulated that athletics were embedded into higher education but, in reality, often venerated above it.<sup>133</sup> This dynamic was further complicated by the racial dynamics of Black athletes in a majority-white environment. Scholar Billy Hawkins describes this relationship as a "new plantation" system, where Black laborers create profit for white benefactors while receiving negligible benefits personally. For Hawkins, Black athletes participate in this system in the hope of developing athletically or educationally to achieve social mobility with either a professional career or a degree.<sup>134</sup> However, the letter by the Black athletes of UT demonstrates that they, in an era of Black Power, felt emboldened to demand more accommodations from their institutions and sought to upset traditional power dynamics between athletics and education.

While no record remains of the eventual resolution reached between the Black athletes, the student government, and the administration, athletic or otherwise, the interplay of these three groups highlights how the introduction of Black students on campus presented challenges to the traditional power structures of athletics but could not alter them. These problems continued to surface in the athletics department, which had a disproportionate number of Black students compared to the general student body. In 1972, the year following the letter from the Black athletes and Charles Huddleston's statement of support, Chancellor Archie Dykes, a member of the athletic board's executive committee, wrote to Bob Woodruff. He said that Black students had again

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<sup>133</sup> Nocera and Strauss, *Indentured*, 76.

<sup>134</sup> Hawkins, *The New Plantation*, 45.

approached him about hiring a Black coach or advisor for athletes and wondered if this could be discussed.<sup>135</sup> Evidently, the Black athletes' list of demands had not been addressed in full.

In 1974, Black athletes again raised the issue of coaching in interviews with university officials. The Task Force for Blacks was created to assess the status of Black members of the Knoxville campus and offer recommendations to the Chancellor to improve their quality of life. In a Task Force interview with the Black members of the basketball team, the four players reiterated their desire for a Black coach "who they could relate to and someone who could intercede on their behalf with Coach Mears," the current head coach. While the white players saw Coach Mears as having made a "tremendous" change in his coaching style and was willing to accept new hair and facial hair styles, the Black players felt that Mears did not really understand what it meant to be Black.<sup>136</sup> Coaching remained an urgent issue throughout the decade, and the administration's unwillingness to accommodate this request revealed the limits of their willingness to accommodate new minority members of the university community.

As Black students and athletes arrived on campus in the late 1960s, they won a number of concessions from the University of Tennessee. University administrators, a majority of whom were white, created new courses, programs, and guidelines that reflected the realities of Black life. For Black athletes, the athletic department was willing to loosen restrictions on personal grooming and did not retaliate against them for their demands. Other universities had responded to similar

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<sup>135</sup> Archie Dykes to Bob Woodruff, November 3, 1972, Earl Ramer Papers, Box 3, Folder 37, UTK.

<sup>136</sup> Marvin Peek to Task Force on Blacks, December 3, 1974, 2, Task Force for Blacks Collection, Box 1, Folder 12, UTK.

demands with suspensions.<sup>137</sup> But Black athletes also found the limits of their ability to leverage their status when it came to coaching. The administration, in recognition of the political power of Black activism, adjusted policy on matters relating to the athletes personally. But resistance remained to demands that would allow integration of the university and athletic power structures. Racial integration was an important step to achieve racial equality at the University of Tennessee and the symbolic value of Black athletes competing on once-segregated SEC teams was significant. But in terms of real power within the administration and faculty, the University of Tennessee's whiteness and racial hierarchy remained intact.

### 3.6 Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, the history of both men's and women's collegiate sport at the University of Tennessee reflected the negotiation between students and the administration on who should participate and govern athletics, with the administration clearly dominant. In the case of men's athletics, the concurrent establishment of collegiate sports and the modernization of the university in the late nineteenth century created close ties between sport and university identity, grounded in segregation. This conferred men's football a high degree of prestige and institutional support, but in alignment with regional attitudes regarding integration, prevented radical changes to its personnel and structure. When Black athletes did successfully cross the color barrier and integrate men's sports, their efforts to advocate for Black coaches and administrators or a greater

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<sup>137</sup> Lane Demas, *Integrating the Gridiron: Black Civil Rights and American College Football* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 111.

Black undergraduate population were rejected by the administration. In this way, men's collegiate athletics, even when racially integrated by students, still remained in the power of white administrators.

And prior to 1972, the gender hierarchy at the University of Tennessee remained largely undisturbed from its earliest years in the late nineteenth century. At various moments in the twentieth century, groups of women, as both students and coaches, attempted to push for competitive sport but at best received minimal support from the administration and at worst, an end to the program, which is what happened in the 1920s. As intercollegiate women's sport reemerged in the 1960s, women like Nancy Lay supplied their own time and money where the university would not. A general trend towards health and athleticism, partially motivated by the Cold War, persuaded university administrators to incorporate this nascent women's program into its administrative structure with slightly more financial support. But it was not until the passage of Title IX in 1972 that the university administration had to confront the women determined to shape the new era of women's sport and determine its responsibilities to them.

## **4.0 Integrating and Segregating: Navigating Racial and Sex-Based Transformations at the University of Tennessee, 1972-1992**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Title IX was a turning point within the history of collegiate sport, but its impact lay more in determining who would administer women's sport and how its competitive norms would shift than a departure from women's sport's past. Sport for women in both the 1920s and 1970s featured women who wanted to participate in competitive matches and sought access to men's organizations for validation. Where the University of Tennessee had ultimately dismissed the women of the 1920s who wanted to compete and participate in a single athletic association, Title IX now empowered the women of the 1970s. What had changed was the cultural acceptability of women athletes and educational institutions' willingness—though federally required—to financially support these teams and programs. The implementation of Title IX at the University of Tennessee reflects how the logic of protectionism from the nineteenth century lived on in the continued sex-segregation of women's collegiate sport, with a women's model of sport that diverged from the philosophy of men's sport. Though no longer framed in terms of racism or concern about reproductive capabilities, the belief that collegiate sport should remain wholly divided created new administrative units at institutions, new women's sport organizations nationally and culminated in an ideological and administrative battle over control of women's collegiate sport.

In the wake of 1972, the establishment of a women's intercollegiate sports program at the University of Tennessee prompted new discussions about how women's sport would operate and

who would control and fund it. Unlike other institutions, the University of Tennessee was content to let women administer and coach their own sports, separate from the men's athletic organization. But at the national level, the battle between the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics (AIAW) for Women and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) to determine what Title IX—and thus women's sport—would mean for colleges and universities had further implications. The AIAW's desire to forge a different path for women's sport emerged from the long history of women's sport organizations de-emphasizing competition and prioritizing women as leaders of women's sport. The NCAA, as the major force in men's collegiate sport, feared any intrusion on their highly profitable men's competitions and challenges to their authority. The passage of Title IX dismantled the separatist philosophy that had kept women's sports outside of the purview of the NCAA and discouraged competitive, intercollegiate matches. The ideological divide that characterized the AIAW and NCAA began to blur in the 1970s as the realities of women athletes competing and administrators operating in close contact with men's collegiate sport created a desire for similar treatment and funding, rather than a determination to commit to a different model of sport. By the early 1980s, sex segregation kept men's and women's sport separated in administration, but they were all but unified in terms of ideology.

In this chapter I argue that what was transformative about Title IX was that it put competitive women's sport back into white colleges and universities and that through this renewed relationship between women's sport administrators and major university decisionmakers, women's collegiate sport came under the influence of men's sporting philosophies and its major organizations. At the University of Tennessee, women remained in charge of women's sport as administrators and coaches but folded into the pre-existing structure for athletic funding and governance for men's sport, at the institutional, regional, and national level. The result was that

the same men who had controlled and governed collegiate football remained in their positions of authority over the entirety of the institution's collegiate sport program. Just as the racial integration of men's sport in the late 1960s had diversified participation but not authority, so did the inclusion of women leave white men as ultimate authorities on collegiate sport. The incorporation of women's sport into the university also meant that women's sport at UT racially integrated as both men's collegiate sport and the broader university had already integrated. The inclusion of talented Black women athletes gave the fledgling university program a competitive advantage, in addition to the funding and support of a major public university. But another incident involving demands by Black students and faculty for Black coaches to be hired in men's collegiate sport prompted new discussions about the extent to which the university was committed to racial equality and affirmative action and demonstrated again how men's collegiate athletics was tightly controlled and protected by the highest levels of authority in the university.

This chapter will explore the changes that Title IX brought to the University of Tennessee in the wake of 1972, as well as the limits of its impact. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the relationship between the NCAA and AIAW prior to Title IX and their respective responses to Title IX. It then explores how Title IX unfolded at the University of Tennessee in terms of building an athletic program with the ideological impulses of the AIAW within a university administration aligned with the NCAA. The chapter then assesses the state of men's college athletics and how the importance of men's football shaped university responses to Title IX. Finally, it explores the transition from a women's model of sport to a men's model and how the University of Tennessee reflected the ultimately conservative nature of Title IX as a piece of legislation.



## 4.2 Tennessee and Competing Gendered Models of Collegiate Sport

Title IX was the catalyst for the restoration of competitive women's intercollegiate athletics at the University of Tennessee and colleges across the country, requiring universities to provide support, funding, and oversight. Throughout the twentieth century, the sex segregation of men's and women's collegiate sport had resulted in very different models of competition. For the men's athletic department, the pursuit of revenue and television contracts created profitable, semi-professionalized teams, led by the NCAA. Lacking institutional assistance or funding, the women's physical education department was mainly driven by passionate individual effort. At UT, the tension lay between students and coaches who wanted to pursue competitive, intercollegiate sport and leaders at the university and national level set on avoiding that commercialized and competitive model of men's sport. Once Title IX became law, its interpretation at various levels became the battleground where women's sport was defined—would it persist in its non-commercialized form or grow to resemble and even combine leadership with men's collegiate sport. In debates between the AIAW and NCAA, Title IX's nineteenth-century rationalization of sex segregation—the harm to women's bodies—re-emerged as an argument for women to remain in control of women's sport.

The passage of Title IX both deepened the gendered segregation of collegiate sport and began to undermine it. Because Title IX mandated that colleges and universities fund women's sport, the initial result was that these institutions would support the current departments, and organizations responsible for women's sport, which were overwhelmingly run by women. The defining organization of woman-led sport was the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW). However, the major organization in men's collegiate sport—the NCAA—soon

involved itself not only in legislating what Title IX would mean for men's collegiate sport but also in the administration of women's collegiate sport.

Initially, it appeared that women would remain in control of women's intercollegiate sport, as they had since the rise of national anticompetitive organizations in the 1920s. Approximately one month after President Nixon signed Title IX into law, the Committee on Intercollegiate Athletics for Women reorganized into the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, the organization which defined women's collegiate sport in the 1970s. On July 1, 1972, approximately 260 institutions signed the AIAW's charter, including the University of Tennessee.<sup>138</sup> The AIAW was the latest iteration of the anti-competitive organizations which had administered women's sport since the 1920s. However, this version was explicitly tasked with administering women's intercollegiate sport and embracing a more competitive approach to sport. But the AIAW still clearly envisioned a different future for women's collegiate sport than the NCAA's vision for men's collegiate sport. The AIAW's educational model emphasized studies over sport and banned athletic scholarships. The AIAW believed the purpose of collegiate sport was to enrich students' educational experiences and regarded the immense money in men's collegiate sport as disincentivizing education.<sup>139</sup> Its initial repudiation of the commercial model maintained the historically gendered segregation of collegiate sport.

Though the NCAA had never previously administered women's collegiate sport, Title IX sparked the interest of NCAA executives—themselves administrators at various universities—and challenged the clear philosophical and organizational segregation of men's and women's sport

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<sup>138</sup> Schriver, *In the Footsteps*, xxviii.

<sup>139</sup> Wushanley, *Playing Nice and Losing*, 62.

which had existed for decades. However, this interference was consistent with the NCAA's desire to consolidate power over amateur athletics, particularly in opposition to the Amateur Athletic Union, another organization with influence over amateur athletes. Historian Ying Wushanley argues that women's intercollegiate sport became a critical pawn in this decades-long conflict. Though the NCAA was primarily concerned with collegiate sport, it resented that the AAU shared jurisdiction over its players for international competitions. Their escalating competition reached a highpoint in the 1960s, when President John F. Kennedy and Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy finally intervened in the run-up to the 1964 Olympic Games. In 1962, the NCAA had begun encouraging individual sports to form their own governing bodies. This was an alternative to the AAU serving as an umbrella organization for all sports in the U.S. By then, the Cold War context had changed the context for women's sports, and the development of medal-winning women athletes, became critical.<sup>140</sup> The Committee on Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, the CIAW's predecessor, emerged out of the federation movement to protect the traditional segregation of women's sport from the NCAA, AAU, and men's control, in midst of these tensions.

Gradually in the 1960s, women's organizations found themselves opponents, not partners with the NCAA. One of the CIAW's priorities had been explicitly guaranteeing the NCAA's lack of authority over women's sports. In 1964, the Division for Girls and Women's Sport, the CIAW's parent organization, requested that the NCAA clarify its bylaws about whether women could participate in their events. At their request, the NCAA Executive Committee amended regulations to state that participation would be limited to "male student athletes." The NCAA also established a Committee on Women's Competition to both advise women's sport leaders and serve as liaison

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<sup>140</sup> Wushanley, *Playing Nice and Losing*, 20-31.

with any relevant parties.<sup>141</sup> But by 1967, as the NCAA continued to maneuver in response to the AAU and the CIAW solidified its control of women's sport, the NCAA indicated it had more than a passing or advisory interest. At its annual meeting, the NCAA Executive Council voted to appoint a committee to explore "the feasibility of the NCAA establishing appropriate machinery to provide for the control and supervision of women's intercollegiate athletics."<sup>142</sup> At its next meeting six months later, the NCAA reported that the CIAW had inquired why the NCAA was investigating the subject considering their prior agreement. The NCAA argued that intercollegiate sport as a whole should be administered from an institutional perspective, rather than by a professional organization like the AIAW.<sup>143</sup> The NCAA concluded that individual institutions should decide how women's sport should operate rather than following policy set by the AIAW. Whereas women's sport had previously been a pawn in the NCAA's battle for control against the AAU over amateur sport, the CIAW and AIAW had become opponents to the NCAA's desire to control collegiate sport.

The passage of Title IX established that women's sport would be an integral new component of collegiate sport in the United States and thus a vital battleground for sporting organizations. Accordingly, both the NCAA and the AIAW were deeply concerned with deliberations over Title IX's interpretation and regulations. For the AIAW, the outcomes would shape their ability to administer these programs and potentially expand them. For the NCAA, member institutions now faced new budget concerns and it feared a negative impact on men's

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<sup>141</sup> "Ladies Locked Out As NCAA Remains Strictly for Men," *NCAA News*, May 1964.

<sup>142</sup> Minutes of the NCAA Executive Council, May 5-7, 1967, 13, Earl Ramer Papers, Box 6, Folder 11, UTK.

<sup>143</sup> Minutes of the NCAA Executive Council, October 23-25, 1967, 7, Earl Ramer Papers, Box 6, Folder 13, UTK.

football and basketball. As the U.S. Congress deliberated over what Title IX would mean for collegiate sport, both organizations jockeyed to influence the outcome, with real stakes for their member institutions—which, as in the case of University of Tennessee, overlapped.

In the mid-1970s, the NCAA launched a series of legislative attacks against Title IX to limit how much universities would have to invest in women's sport and protect men's sport from consequently losing funding. In 1974, NCAA ally Senator John Tower of Texas introduced an amendment to Title IX which exempted any revenue-producing sports from consideration when defining equal funding for women's sports. For universities like Tennessee, the Tower amendment meant that their two-million-dollar football budget would not count towards requirements for women's sport—which in 1974 was budgeted \$20,000 to fund seven teams. The AIAW and their allies staunchly opposed the Tower amendment, and one of Title IX's original sponsors, Senator Birch Bayh, publicly testified against it.<sup>144</sup> The Tower amendment did not pass and was instead replaced by the Javits amendment, which required the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to issue clear guidelines on Title IX compliance in athletics with "reasonable provisions considering the nature of the particular sport."<sup>145</sup> But these proposals had stakes beyond legal interpretation in Congress—they very directly correlated to the daily operations of university athletic departments across the country.

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<sup>144</sup> Birch Bayh, Testimony on S.2106, September 16, 1975, 1-2, Margaret Dunkle Papers, Box 2, Folder 15, Schlesinger Library.

<sup>145</sup> F. Peter Libassi to Secretary Caspar Weinberger, April 18, 1978, 3, Margaret Dunkle Papers, Box 2, Folder 1, Schlesinger Library.

As the AIAW and NCAA fought over control of women's sport, their debates touched on longstanding questions over how to define equality between men and women within sport. To many women in intercollegiate sport administration, it was logical that just as men's athletics had the NCAA, so should women have the AIAW. The NCAA did not agree. While the NCAA's dispute with the AAU had centered on the issue of international competition, Title IX struck much closer to home. From the NCAA's perspective, it was the expert on intercollegiate sport and if it was being played at one of their member institutions, the NCAA should be involved. As the executive committee wrote in a document detailing its involvement with women's sport in 1974: "It appears abundantly clear that society expects NCAA member institutions to provide equal opportunity for female and male student-athletes to compete in varsity intercollegiate athletics." The NCAA concluded that "The pressure of society's attitude, implementation of Civil Rights legislation, and the needs of the female student-athletes dictate NCAA action with or without AIAW cooperation."<sup>146</sup> The NCAA interpreted these factors as ongoing support for their historical dominance of collegiate sport. The NCAA's interpretation of equality as a singular organization providing the same opportunities for men and women stood in contradiction to how strictly collegiate sport had been segregated by sex since the late nineteenth century.

Though the teams themselves would always remain sex-segregated, there was lessening opposition to the idea of integrating men's and women's athletic administrations. There was a fair amount of support among NCAA member institutions—whose representatives were universally men—to consolidate operations between men's and women's athletics under the authority of male

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<sup>146</sup> "NCAA and Women's Intercollegiate Athletics," NCAA, December 21, 1974, 2, 5, Earl Ramer papers, Box 13, Folder 5, UTK.

administrators. Indeed, one of the major complaints about mandates like Title IX and affirmative action plans across the nation was their extraordinary costs to implement and monitor, particularly in the era of 1970s stagflation.<sup>147</sup> The NCAA even correctly identified that many women athletes competing in the AIAW resented that they could not earn scholarships as their male counterparts did, which emerged as one of the first issues to push the AIAW towards a commercial model of sport. However, the NCAA's position contradicted the core assumption of Title IX: that men and women, in the realm of sport, were fundamentally, biologically different. This core assumption, rooted in the nineteenth century and still alive in the twentieth, kept athletics segregated by gender. It was upon this defining principle that the AIAW launched their rebuttals.

In its defense of women-led women's athletics, the AIAW had to position itself as the champion of a principle of "separate but equal." The principle of "separate but equal" had been legalized when the Supreme Court interpreted the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which guaranteed all citizens the equal protection of the law, to allow for separate public accommodations on the basis of race in the case *Plessy v. Ferguson*. In the *Brown v. Board* decision in 1954, the Supreme Court reinterpreted the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment to refute the constitutionality of separate but equal. The NCAA argued that the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, specifically the Equal Protection Clause, required that they provide men and women the same opportunities for sport. The AIAW rebutted that the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment simply required that women receive "substantially equal intercollegiate athletic opportunities," and that this aim could be achieved through separate organizations. As justification,

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<sup>147</sup> "If You Had 15 Minutes With President Carter, What Would You Tell Him About Your Priorities for Higher Education?" *Change* (September 1977): 54-55, Frederick S. Humphries Collection, Box 3, Folder 30, Tennessee State University Special Collections, Nashville, Tennessee. Henceforth referred to as TSU.

the AIAW argued that “There can be no doubt that women are not at the same stage of athletic development as men—whether as the result of past limitation of opportunity or inherent physiological difference.” By emphasizing the “inherent physiological difference,” the AIAW concluded that men and women had different programmatic needs for athletics and thus equality of opportunity should not be determined by duplicating operations under one organization.<sup>148</sup> The AIAW’s appeal to physiological difference demonstrates that the biological determinism of women’s sport in the late nineteenth century was still alive and well for Title IX.

Despite its advocacy for a women-centric model of sport, signs had already begun to appear that the AIAW could not preserve its philosophy as strictly as it intended. One of the core disagreements between the NCAA and AIAW was on the subject of athletic scholarships: the AIAW believed that they incentivized students to prioritize athletics over their education while the NCAA saw their value to students and believed they improved on-field performances. But by 1973, only a year into operations, the AIAW was forced to revise this rule. Fern “Peachy” Kellmeyer, director of physical education at Marymount College, led a group of women in filing a suit against the AIAW’s policy of prohibiting scholarship-recipients from participating in AIAW-sanctioned events. Arguing on the basis of the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment, Kellmeyer’s party claimed that women were denied an opportunity to earn scholarships that men already possessed, thus depriving them of the equal protection of the law. Historian Ying Wushanley characterizes the AIAW’s decision to concede the battle and offer scholarships a prioritization of control over ideology, a strategy which defined their actions through the rest of the decade. The AIAW

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<sup>148</sup> Margaret Polivy and Katrina Renouf to AIAW Executive Board, December 29, 1975, 1-5, Earl Ramer Papers, Box 13, Folder 5, UTK.



additionally began to pursue television broadcast deals, sponsorships, approved transfer rules, and the naming of “All American” athletes.<sup>149</sup> The clear philosophical divide that had once characterized the NCAA vs. AIAW battle and was reflected in the separate men’s and women’s athletic departments at institutions like the University of Tennessee was no longer so well-defined. The evolution of the University of Tennessee-Knoxville Lady Volunteers echoed these conflicting impulses.

By the mid-1970s, the battle lines over what Title IX would mean for higher education in the United States had become clear. Despite earlier promises to stay out of women’s sport, the NCAA was determined to maintain total control of intercollegiate sport at its member institutions and advocated for men and women to participate in a sex-integrated athletic structure in its commercialized model. The AIAW wanted to continue the tradition of women-led women’s athletics and develop an education model for women’s intercollegiate sport. It relied on nineteenth-century framings of women’s bodies to justify its ideology and twentieth-century traditions of women’s organizations to administer its model. But as its capitulation on scholarships demonstrated, the AIAW was increasingly accepting some of the features of the NCAA’s model of sport. The University of Tennessee offers insight into the way these conflicting impulses intersected as it was a member of both organizations, with a sex segregated athletic administration, but a determination to build a winning program in the tradition of its men’s teams.

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<sup>149</sup> Wushanley, *Playing Nice and Losing*, 63, 66, 73-75.

### **4.3 Ideological Transformations in Women's Collegiate Sport at Tennessee**

The struggle over how the women's athletic department would promote women's athletics at the University of Tennessee reflected national conversations regarding men's and women's models of collegiate sport. These conversations no longer explicitly revolved around the social propriety of women as elite competitors or the physical damage of competition. Instead, the gap between men's and women's sport was pinned on ideological differences as expressed in the commercial approach of the NCAA and the prioritization of education over sport within the AIAW. But a clear division between men's and women's sport still existed. As the University of Tennessee Lady Volunteers evolved throughout the 1970s in response to the demands of their athletes and their subordination within an administration aligned with the NCAA, the ideological boundaries blurred but sex segregation remained.

At the University of Tennessee, separate men's and women's athletic departments persisted in the wake of Title IX and did not formally merge until 2011. But just as the AIAW shifted to a commercial model throughout the 1970s, so did the Lady Volunteers in their attempts to not just establish women's sports but become national champions. The women's athletic administrators benefitted from both sex segregation and racial integration in their efforts. Sex segregation in athletics allowed them to build their own budget, maintain control of hiring decisions, and negotiate their own vision of collegiate athletics. And by the 1970s, the women's athletic department also benefitted from previous decades of effort to achieve racial integration. The Lady Volunteers could immediately recruit both Black and white women to form the most competitive teams possible. But it was its growing similarity to men's sport that granted the women's program the funding and access to administrative authority necessary to succeed.

Where on the national level the NCAA and AIAW were battling for control of women's athletics, at the University of Tennessee matters were more ambivalent. The men's athletic department had less interest in controlling women's athletics than ensuring that its operations would not interfere with the football or basketball programs. When the NCAA launched its campaign to pass the Tower amendment, UT athletic director Bob Woodruff wrote to both of Tennessee's senators in 1975, Howard H. Baker Jr. and William E. Brock III, to plead his case: "All that we can ask for in intercollegiate athletics is that the revenue produced by these sports be exempt from Title IX regulations and not the sports themselves, since we all want to field both men's and women's teams."<sup>150</sup> Thus, for both the men's and women's department, the crucial matter of dealing with Title IX was how to fund women's sports.

The first years of women's athletic funding from the university did not come from a dedicated budget and reflected the precarious position of women's athletics within the larger university ecosystem. In 1974, the department's entire budget was \$20,000 from "unrestricted gifts to the university."<sup>151</sup> This amount increased to \$32,000 in 1974-75 and \$45,000 in 1975-76.<sup>152</sup> Looking at the multi-million-dollar men's athletic budget, it was not sustainable to fund women's athletics out of university donations, but it was not clear where additional money could be found. At a 1974 meeting of the men's athletics board, board members wanted clarify that their concerns about supporting women's sport was not out of opposition to its existence, but that the guidelines

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<sup>150</sup> Bob Woodruff to Sens. Howard H. Baker, Jr. and William E. Brock III, September 17, 1975, Earl Ramer Papers, Box 13, Folder 3, UTK.

<sup>151</sup> UTK News Bureau, August 10, 1973, 1, Office of the University Historian, Box 28, Folder 9, UTK.

<sup>152</sup> Schriver, *In the Footsteps*, xxxiv.

“may have been drafted by individuals who were not acquainted with the nature of funding intercollegiate athletics programs.”<sup>153</sup> In private memos, athletic director Bob Woodruff fretted about the fiscal realities of supporting women’s athletics: “It seems that it is the institutions’ responsibility to provide sufficient revenue to create equal opportunity in women’s athletics programs. Where will the revenue come from? Nearly all schools are financed up to the hilt now.”<sup>154</sup> Woodruff was particularly aggrieved by this matter as the university was one of two public universities in the state whose men’s athletic department was entirely self-supporting.<sup>155</sup> Woodruff’s frustration with the new mandate for funding indicates how the institutional mechanism for implementing Title IX put enormous pressure on university administrations now juggling multiple athletic departments with potentially opposing needs.

One of the major problems for the women’s athletics program was that it lacked the administrators and organizational bodies which were working so hard to protect the men’s program. Whereas the men’s program had the University of Tennessee Knoxville Athletic Board, staffed by the president and members of the board of trustees, the women’s program’s closest equivalent was the Commission for Women and a single woman, Ann Furrow, on the University of Tennessee Knoxville Athletic Board. While Furrow agitated for the Athletic Board to pay the women’s department attention, as long as women’s sport was part of neither the NCAA nor the

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<sup>153</sup> Charles E. Smith to Edward Boling, February 28, 1974, 2, Office of the University President, Box 14, Folder 13, UTK.

<sup>154</sup> Bob Woodruff to Executive Committee, July 29, 1974, Earl Ramer Papers, Box 3, Folder 41, UTK.

<sup>155</sup> Charles E. Smith to UTK Athletic Board, May 8, 1974, Office of the University President, Box 13, Folder 17, UTK.

SEC, it fell outside of the board's purview.<sup>156</sup> The women's closest equivalent to the Athletic Board, the Commission for Women, had emerged out of other efforts on campus to address gender discrimination. Its task was looking at the status of women on campus broadly but featured a subcommittee on athletics which it hoped would "counterbalance" the men's administrative support.<sup>157</sup> This subcommittee succeeded Chancellor Archie Dykes' Task Force on Athletics, established in 1972 to assess gender inequity in sport.<sup>158</sup> While the university created administrative units to assess and support women's sport, these efforts did not include sustainable financial resources nor the powerful supporters of the men's program.

Thus, the first years of Title IX at the University of Tennessee were defined by the uncertain position of the women's athletic department and the alignment of university decisionmakers with men's sport. The women's program was still affiliated with the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, but the AIAW was undergoing philosophical changes of its own. While department administrators had enough funding to begin growing a program, the money was insufficient to build anything approaching the men's program. Like the AIAW, the University of Tennessee women's athletic department had to decide what the future of its structure and ideology should be.

In 1976, the women's athletic program, which had previously been housed in the education department and firmly aligned with the AIAW's educational model of collegiate sport, transitioned into a women's athletic department in the mold of its male counterparts. This transition was marked

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<sup>156</sup> Johnson to Boling, April 28, 1980, Office of the University President, Box 4, Folder 17, UTK.

<sup>157</sup> Annual Report, Commission for Women, 1975-1976, 5-8, Commission for Women Papers, Box 1, Folder 55, UTK.

<sup>158</sup> Schriver, *In the Footsteps*, xxxi.

by the end of Nancy Lay's tenure as coordinator. Lay was the person who had reinstated the women's basketball program in 1960 as a graduate student and later became a faculty member in the women's physical education department. Between her coaching and administrative experience, she was the natural selection to head the fledgling athletic program in the wake of Title IX. But she was firmly aligned with the AIAW's vision of sport. At a 1974 Commission for Women meeting, she revealed that "Her fear is that if Title IX is implemented at UT, the women's intercollegiate programs will become exactly like the men's program with the concomitant problems of professional athletes since the men's program is the only model presently available."<sup>159</sup> It was clear the ideological battles of the AIAW and NCAA had real stakes for administrators and leaders working in higher education. Under Nancy Lay's guidance, the women's athletic department grew but never approached the glamor and prestige of men's athletics, in line with the AIAW's noncompetitive philosophy. While Lay was clear that was never her goal, other members of the athletic community were less certain they wanted to abstain from the financial benefits men's athletes enjoyed.

The woman who oversaw massive changes to the women's athletic program and guided it towards a men's model of sport was Gloria Ray. She had been one of the first hires Nancy Lay had made in 1973 when the program received its first \$20,000 budget. Ray had earned a master's degree from the University of Tennessee while working as a tennis coach but left to serve as assistant director of women's athletics at the Mississippi University of Women. She returned to a changed administrative landscape, with a bigger budget and more institutional support. In the wake of the AIAW policy change on scholarships, the UT Board of Trustees endowed \$25,000 in athletic

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<sup>159</sup> CFW Meeting Minutes, February 20, 1974, Commission for Women Papers, Box 1, Folder 53, UTK.

scholarships for women. The rest of the budget came from a combination of student activity fees and a donation from men's athletics, totaling to a budget of \$126,000 in 1977.<sup>160</sup> The athletic scholarships were partial and not every team had one available—basketball, track & field, swimming, tennis, and volleyball did, while field hockey and gymnastics did not.<sup>161</sup> While the scholarships were an important milestone in the department's transition, they were not sufficient to comprehensively equalize the experience of women athletes at UT.

The early days of the women's program were somewhat of a paradox: in order to bring in more fans and their money, the teams needed to improve their abilities and play a competitive schedule. But training, travel, and equipment cost money that the teams did not have. Even by the late 1970s, teams were still traveling to away matches in personal vehicles and entire teams sleeping in one or two rooms to cut costs. Just as they had prior to Title IX, women athletes paid for their own meals and held fundraisers to support their sports. Media relations were handled by an undergraduate journalism student and uniforms sewn by students. One track & field athlete, Susan Thornton, was known for lugging her throwing equipment in a little red wagon across campus because there was no storage.<sup>162</sup> As the women's program tried to bolster its viability as a successful, competitive program, it turned to methods unavailable to the men's team.

Though striving to become more like the men's athletic program in terms of amenities and funding, Gloria Ray did take advantage of her freedom from NCAA regulations regarding recruiting and gifts. In the late 1970s, Ray instituted a new program to bring together athletes and

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<sup>160</sup> Schriver, *In the Footsteps*, 3-4.

<sup>161</sup> Earl Ramer to Thomas Hansen, May 12, 1977, Earl Ramer Papers, Box 5, Folder 11, UTK.

<sup>162</sup> Schriver, *In the Footsteps*, 6.

the Volunteer fan community: the Volunteer Parent Program. Ray had noticed that many of their athletes came from out of state and suffered from homesickness in their new environment. The Volunteer Parent program matched every athlete with a local Knoxville family as their “home away from home.” Many students cultivated close relationships with their surrogate parents, joining them for meals and spending nights away from campus there. One track athlete remembers that her Volunteer parents came to the airport with a bushel of apples before the first travel track meet. The program concluded in 1981, in anticipation of the transfer to NCAA membership.<sup>163</sup> The NCAA’s strict rules around recruitment and bribery would have prohibited these kinds of relationships, but the Volunteer Parents program benefited both the program and the athletes and created closer ties with the community.

Community engagement also intersected with the women’s athletics program in ways unrelated to ticket sales or win-loss records. As part of the commercialization of the program in 1976-77, Gloria Ray named the women’s athletics program “The Lady Volunteers,” just as the men’s program was known as the “University of Tennessee Volunteers.”<sup>164</sup> In addition to creating a rhetorical association with the locally popular men’s program, this decision sparked protest from a local feminist named Phyllis Eggers Lyle. She wrote to Ray, outraged at the emphasis on biological sex, and informed her that this decision set back the Tennessee Commission on the Status of Women’s 1975 resolution to eliminate sexism in the media. Lyle ended the letter with a plea: “Ladies will be taken lightly. Serious minded women will be taken seriously. Please change

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<sup>163</sup> Schriver, *In the Footsteps*, 7.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.



the name. Don't embarrass us any more or set us back another 100 years."<sup>165</sup> Though Title IX had started from an intellectual framework of gender separation and segregation espoused by many leading feminist organizations of the day, the UT athletic department had moved in a different direction to pursue its vision of equality for women's athletics in the tradition of men's sport.

As the AIAW had argued in its dispute with the NCAA over the administration of women's athletics, Title IX was grounded in a logic that prioritized a biological separation of sport and emphasized physical differences between men and women. In the AIAW's eyes, women and men had to remain segregated for women to receive a fair chance at accessing athletic opportunities. The AIAW maintained that this inherent difference was sufficient reasoning to keep the NCAA out of women's sport. But as the AIAW abandoned the educational model that had been its hallmark and moved towards television contracts and branding, these differences became less stark. The University of Tennessee followed suit; though it still maintained separate men's and women's departments, the women's program took on more characteristics of the men's, up to and including the name. Gloria Ray's administration wanted to capitalize on the intense loyalty that sold out football stadiums to create a viable financial base for the Lady Volunteers. But for a mainstream feminist audience, as evidenced by Phyllis Eggers Lyle, these compromises seemed to strike at the very separatism that was key to winning space for women's sport in the first place. The emergence of women's intercollegiate athletics at the beginning of the 1970s had been defined by its independence from and opposition to men's intercollegiate athletics. The erosion of this separation at the end of the decade spelled the beginning of the end for the AIAW, in the face of the NCAA's determination to integrate.

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<sup>165</sup> Phyllis Eggers Lyle to Gloria Ray, February 1977, Office of the University President, Box 82, Folder 4, UTK.

By the late 1970s, it was clear that the NCAA was set on a course to involve itself more directly with women's athletics. In 1977, NCAA membership rejected a proposal to begin offering women's championships. The University of Tennessee was among those opposed. Chancellor Jack Reese of the Knoxville campus wrote to University President Boling to affirm he believed that women's athletics should remain separate. However, Reese also indicated that he would be amenable to the AIAW and NCAA integrating into one umbrella organization with both men and women represented.<sup>166</sup> As more and more universities consolidated their athletics programs—80% by 1980<sup>167</sup>—the idea of an AIAW and NCAA merger became more popular as well, before it became unnecessary.

Despite Chancellor Jack Reese's support, most of the male administrators, particularly those who served on the Athletics Board, resisted any kind of gendered sporting integration. Vice President Joe Johnson's perspective was that there were no advantages in a merger unless scholarships were eliminated in all sports except football and basketball. Johnson felt that those were the deserving scholarship recipients, because those sports actually produced profit and funded the rest of the department. He also noted that the men's department "...must separate what Gloria and her folks want from what is mandated by Title IX."<sup>168</sup> Johnson's concerns about supporting women's sport beyond the minimums required by Title IX indicated a tension on both sides of the administrative divide. The fact that women's sport had to be funded, potentially at the cost of

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<sup>166</sup> Jack Reese to Edward Boling, March 1, 1978, Earl Ramer Papers, Box 13, Folder 1, UTK.

<sup>167</sup> Ware, *Title IX*, 15.

<sup>168</sup> Johnson to Boling, Kozar, Fly, Lambert, April 25, 1980, Office of the University President, Box 81, Folder 13, UTK.

men's sport, created frustrations for the men's department, which felt that it had built a successful program after decades of effort, and the federal government now expected the women's program to enjoy equal funding without any of the work. While the women valued their separate departments and its leadership opportunities, they had no representation in the major decision-making bodies for university athletics, even as Title IX mandated more equitable treatment.

Though the NCAA's proposal to offer women's sport was rejected by the membership in 1977, when the NCAA proposed offering women's championships in Divisions II and III in the 1981-82 season, its members were much more receptive. Rather than previous claims of its superior expertise in collegiate sport, the NCAA instead argued that it had a duty to offer these championships, that there were now women representatives on NCAA committees, and that the AIAW would not be forced to stop their own championships, as the NCAA merely offered another option to women. The NCAA's proposal passed in 1980 and was reconfirmed in 1981, in anticipation of the coming academic year. This decision left the AIAW scrambling to secure its membership as institutions left for the consolidated athletic operations and the NCAA's established reputation. In 1981, there was an average of 48% participation loss in Division I AIAW championships compared with the previous year, including the majority of its most talented teams in basketball, track & field, swimming, and volleyball.<sup>169</sup> Whatever philosophical allegiances some departments shared with the separatist AIAW model, it seemed administrative simplicity and the

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<sup>169</sup> Donna Lopiano, "President Address," January 6, 1982, 3-4, Box 303, Folder 7, Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women records, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries. Henceforth referred to as AIAW.

financial resources of the NCAA proved more persuasive. After a failed anti-monopoly suit against the NCAA in 1981, the AIAW dissolved.<sup>170</sup>

Though the Committee for Women had been opposed to the merger, leaders of UT women's athletic department were less resistant to the idea of NCAA affiliation. Like the AIAW, the women's athletic department had become increasingly commercialized in the 1970s and much more similar to the men's model of collegiate sport. The transition from Nancy Lay as coordinator to Gloria Ray as athletic director encapsulated this change, and Gloria Ray was cautiously optimistic about NCAA administration of women's sport. At a meeting of the Commission for Women prior to the NCAA vote on women's championships, Gloria Ray laid out the advantages as "increased financial support, standardization of policy regarding male and female athletes, and a better TV package."<sup>171</sup> The reference to standardization was a clear indication that separate departments no longer felt like equality to the students and leaders of the women's athletic department. By the spring of 1981 and the confirmation vote on women's championships, Ray was clear that the women's department would be transitioning from AIAW to NCAA championships, by reason that the transition would "not be too difficult and...will enhance women's athletics at the University of Tennessee."<sup>172</sup> The NCAA women's championships represented a compromise

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<sup>170</sup> Mary Jo Festle, *Playing Nice: Politics and Apologies in Women's Sports* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 200-207.

<sup>171</sup> Commission for Women Meeting Minutes, November 6, 1980, Commission for Women Papers, Box 2, Folder 7, UTK.

<sup>172</sup> Gloria Ray to Howard Aldmon, March 4, 1981, Office of the University President, Box 18, Folder 18, UTK.

from the original AIAW vision of separate but equal, but allowed the women's department to retain control of its operations and staff.

Now that the university had elected to participate in NCAA championships, the last organizational hurdle was negotiating with the SEC. Though not formally organized into a conference under SEC jurisdiction, the women's athletic directors at SEC member institutions had organized themselves in an informal conference. In 1981, the chairwoman of the SEC Women's Coordinators wrote to SEC President Bud McWhorter with their decision to formally align with the NCAA and proposed their incorporation within the SEC: "There are still several differences between men's and women's athletics, and it may be desirable to always have some differences. As a whole, we share more common than uncommon ground."<sup>173</sup> The University of Alabama formally proposed a resolution incorporating women's sports at the May 1981 meeting of the SEC.<sup>174</sup> As talks progressed, other members of the SEC expressed some concern about how UT, the only member institution with separate men's and women's departments, could be accommodated in decision-making on SEC matters.<sup>175</sup> One of the major concerns about a NCAA/AIAW merger was that women would demand equal representation or votes on NCAA matters. Though open to incorporating women's athletics into the organization, the SEC likely feared any changes to its one member, one vote policy.

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<sup>173</sup> Lawler to McWhorter, March 4, 1981, Office of the University President, Box 70, Folder 8, UTK.

<sup>174</sup> Kozar to Executive Committee of the UTK Athletic Board, May 20, 1981, Office of the University President, box 14, Folder 8, UTK.

<sup>175</sup> Kozar to Boling, September 3, 1981, Office of the University President, Box 70, Folder 7, UTK.

Despite the concerns about UT's administrative structure, it was not an impediment to the SEC's decision and the transition of the women's athletic department was complete. It also indicated that though the departments were separate, men's administrators affiliated with the SEC would soon have the authority to represent the women's program as well. On June 3, 1982, the SEC formally approved the incorporation of women's intercollegiate athletic programming into the conference structure for the 1982-83 season.<sup>176</sup> In 1984, the University of Tennessee Board of Trustees further streamlined athletic administration by passing a resolution that the women's athletic director would report directly to the UT-Knoxville Athletics Board, just as the men's athletic director did.<sup>177</sup> Though the departments remained separate until a merger in 2011, they were integrated in administration, philosophy, and goals. From the 1980s onward, the University of Tennessee Lady Volunteers operated within an administrative hierarchy which promoted a men's model of competitive sport.

The evolution of women's collegiate sport at the University of Tennessee is highly representative of the shift that women's college athletics underwent nationally in the transition from the AIAW's educational model to the NCAA's commercial model of sport. As departmental leaders like Gloria Ray endorsed the model that had brought men's athletics to such success and popularity, women's sport at the university evolved past the noncompetitive pursuit that had defined it for decades. While this transformation did mark somewhat of a shift to the gender

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<sup>176</sup> Final Report, Transition Committee on Women's Sports, May 16, 1984, Office of the University President, Box 69, Folder 16, UTK.

<sup>177</sup> Development and Organization of UT Athletics Department, 1984, 7, Office of the University President, Box 15, Folder 1, UTK.

dynamics at the university—in terms of acceptable pursuits for women as athletes—the conservative underlying principles of Title IX played out as intended, in the maintenance of sex-segregated collegiate sport. This segregation created opportunities to coach and compete, but also implicitly reinforced that men and women were fundamentally and biologically different. The sex segregation of collegiate sport originated in the nineteenth century and its updated form shaped the separate athletic departments and divisions for men and women, as well as reinforced the continuing dominance of men’s authority in collegiate sport. Title IX argued, and the University of Tennessee agreed, that in the realm of athletics separate could be equal.

#### **4.4 Negotiating Affirmative Action and Collegiate Sport at Tennessee**

The University of Tennessee’s identity as a southern institution, steeped in its traditions of racial discrimination, manifested in the maintenance of racial hierarchies within athletics. Though the university had responded to federal mandates and local activism in changing its racial policies in the 1950s and 1960s, these changes were not enough to alter its identity as a predominantly white institution. The presence of Black athletes on its football and basketball teams, while meaningful, were not indicative of transformative changes. Examining the relationship between athletics and desegregation offers critical insight into the realities of integrating higher education. At the University of Tennessee, collegiate athletics were a powerful motivator to accelerating racial integration, but only so far as it benefited the university in meeting in its own goals and without challenging its traditional authority figures.

But in the 1970s, the University of Tennessee was adjusting to the new reality of racial integration. Because of its involvement in the *Geier v. Dunn* lawsuit, which required sustained

efforts to desegregate the student body and faculty, as well as declining enrollments, the university administration focused on attaining new students, particularly Black ones. Throughout the 1970s, the University of Tennessee submitted numerous reports on its progress in desegregating the institution. Its priorities were proving that the university was complying with court orders and, crucially, benefiting financially from boosting enrollments. Because of both federal mandates against discrimination and the necessities of complying with *Geier v. Dunn*, the University of Tennessee prioritized affirmative hiring and admissions.

But the University of Tennessee grappled with the costs of affirmative action in the late 1970s and early 1980s as the economic climate aggravated existing financial problems. Its decisions regarding athletics, meanwhile, revealed the limits of its commitment to achieving racial equality. The university was happy to accept Black students and their tuition dollars. However, students' and faculty's demands for racially conscious policies across the board met resistance when it came to men's athletics. Just as the university had changed a century-old policy of racial exclusion to remain competitive within its conference, administrators resisted efforts to apply affirmative action to the hiring of coaches because they felt it could threaten their ability to compete within the conference. The financial boons of a successful football team and the maintenance of administrative control over the program outweighed any other concerns within the university.

Since the early 1970s, Black athletes had advocated for hiring Black coaches. Despite repeated remarks from various administrators both inside and outside the athletic department, little progress had been made. This issue came to a head in 1978, with the resignation of basketball coach Ray Mears and the hiring of Don DeVoe, another white coach. A professor of zoology wrote to President Boling with concerns about the process. Professor Joseph C. Daniel argued that it



would have been impossible for DeVoe to have been hired according to equal opportunity and affirmative action requirements: “Needless to say it is demoralizing to see other units of the university ignore the principle and apparently be immune to the regulations. Or maybe there aren’t any blacks in basketball!”<sup>178</sup> Boling responded defensively, implying that Daniel’s own frustration with the “difficulties” of affirmative action in his own department had affected his perception of the hire. Instead, Boling asserted, “there are certain types of jobs in which the pool of qualified candidates is readily ascertainable...Affirmative action does not require the desired qualifications for a position be altered to permit the inclusions of blacks or women...into the pool.”<sup>179</sup> Boling’s articulation of affirmative action indicated little understanding of how race or gender might disadvantage certain candidates from receiving the qualifications he so highly prized and indicated a deeply entrenched conservatism within the administration.

Boling’s view on the relationship between affirmative action and athletics affirmed the colorblind attitude that emerged from the New Right in the 1970s. Rather than take race into consideration under affirmative action, certain conservative factions instead argued that paying attention to race perpetuated racism.<sup>180</sup> President Boling’s understanding of affirmative action did not include race as a relevant characteristic comparable to a coach’s proven record of success on

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<sup>178</sup> Joseph C. Daniel, Jr. to Edward Boling, March 16, 1978, Office of the University President Collection, Box 4, Folder 12, UTK.

<sup>179</sup> Edward Boling to Joseph C. Daniel, Jr., March 27, 1978, Office of the University President Collection, Box 4 Folder 12, UTK.

<sup>180</sup> Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 301-306; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (Mar. 2005): 1238.

the court. While Boling's approach made sense from an athletic perspective, it also ignored the reality that segregation and ongoing discrimination had blocked many Black men from gaining coaching experience. Affirmative action was intended to remedy these oversights by considering a wider pool of candidates than the "readily ascertainable." Boling's letter to Daniel did not reflect this understanding and indicated a much more conservative approach to racial discrimination remained in place at the university, despite the concessions earlier in the decade.

Coach DeVoe's hiring sparked a campus-wide uproar and put athletics firmly at the center of debates around racial equality, athletics, and the university administration. After a series of further exchanges, Professor Daniel was dissatisfied with Boling's answers and brought the matter before the Faculty Senate, in the belief that all areas of the university should follow the same nondiscrimination policy in philosophy and in function.<sup>181</sup> Soon after, a member of the Student Senate wrote to Jack Reese, the chancellor of the Knoxville campus, to inform him that the Senate had passed a resolution calling for greater attention to the UTK affirmative action guidelines.<sup>182</sup> The matter finally reached the Faculty Senate the following spring in 1979 and the campus newspaper the *Daily Beacon* published a series of articles on the controversy.

Just as Black athletes had questioned the relationship between athletics and the university in 1971, the administration's hiring decision prompted scrutiny of athletics' special status from many sections of the university community. The *Daily Beacon* reported that the chairman of the Commission for Blacks, Luther Kindall, had appeared before the Faculty Senate to declare that the

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<sup>181</sup> Joseph C. Daniel, Jr. to Edward Boling, April 28, 1978, Office of the University President Collection, Box 4, Folder 12, UTK.

<sup>182</sup> Steve Gill to Jack Reese, June 7, 1978, Office of the University President Collection, Box 4, Folder 12, UTK.

athletic department “acts as an autonomous unit and does not try to recruit blacks for coaching positions” and further charged that the entire university did not have enough Black faculty members either. Jack Reese responded to the first claim by noting that it was often tradition for new coaches to bring along their own staff, thus reducing the need or opportunity for affirmative searches. But the following week, Reese acknowledged that the athletic department did not follow the same guidelines as other UT departments, to explain the presence of only two Black coaches. Athletic director Bob Woodruff declined to comment on the matter and President Boling called Kindall’s charges “unfounded.”<sup>183</sup> The totality of the administration’s response reflected a belief that even if affirmative action was university policy, athletics was in some way different and exempt.

Reporting on the conflict between faculty and administration revealed internal disagreements among university administration over whether athletics could be subject to efforts to promote racial equality. A meeting of the Commission for Blacks a week after the *Daily Beacon* report on Luther Kindall’s accusations shed some light on the controversy’s evolution. After Professor Daniel’s objections to the hiring of Coach DeVoe in late 1978, the matter progressed to the Commission for Blacks in January 1979. The Commission tried to ascertain who was responsible for the athletic department’s affirmative action plan. Andy Kozar, President Boling’s executive assistant, also served as the UT system’s affirmative action officer. He confirmed that UT-Knoxville Athletic Department was under the jurisdiction of the UT-Knoxville Affirmative Action Officer, Luke Ebersole. Kozar noted that “problems exist in the area of implementation”

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<sup>183</sup> Nancy Haggerty, “Athletics follows different rules,” *Daily Beacon*, November 6, 1979, Office of the University President Collection, Box 4, Folder 17, UTK.

but that “an ongoing effort was being made to rectify the situation.” At the same meeting, Thomasenia Robinson, UT-Knoxville’s Affirmative Action Coordinator and the chairperson of the university’s Equal Employment and Opportunity Commission, confirmed Ebersole was the athletic department’s affirmative action supervisor. But Robinson also observed that Coach Don DeVoe had “hired no black assistant coaches or trainers, yet apparently sees the need to diligently recruit black players.”<sup>184</sup> A division among the administrators seemed clear, between those primarily concerned with affirmative action and those closely aligned with the athletic department.

The high-level nature of the administrators associated with men’s athletics frustrated faculty attempts at accountability. At the Commission for Black meeting in November 1979, Kindall repeatedly argued that the administration saw athletics as having a different affirmative obligation than other units of the university. Kindall reported that on a phone call with Jack Reese, Reese did agree that the athletic director should be accountable to the UT-Knoxville Affirmative Action office. But Reese also reported that Andy Kozar would be creating a committee to establish a separate affirmative action plan rather than following the existing plan. Even as the administration closed ranks with the athletic department, the faculty pushed back. Led by Kindall, the Faculty Senate unanimously agreed to investigate the status of affirmative action in the athletic department and publish the results in the *Faculty/Staff Athletics Information Book*. Kindall also met with Dr. Sharon Patton, the chairperson of the Faculty Senate Athletics Committee, who agreed that her committee would investigate the athletic director’s current affirmative action

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<sup>184</sup> Commission for Black Meeting Minutes, November 7, 1979, 1-2, Commission for Women Collection, Box 2, Folder 6, UTK.

plans.<sup>185</sup> The conclusion of the Commission's meeting made it clear that the administration's desire to treat athletics as a unique department within the university was going to be closely scrutinized.

Campus coverage of the proposed athletics affirmative action plan centered Luther Kindall's intense skepticism that the administration was taking these complaints seriously. *The Daily Beacon* reported that "In response to pressure from the chairman of UT's Commission for Blacks, the athletic department will create and supervise its own affirmative action program." In the proposed plan, the affirmative action officer would no longer report to the administration but to the executive committee of the athletic board, just as athletic director Bob Woodruff did. Kindall's response to this proposed plan was characterized as "angrily," and he was quoted as saying it was like "'putting a wolf in a cage of wolves,'" indicating his disbelief that the officer would have any real authority or desire to enforce policy. Kindall described this plan as nothing more than a maintenance of the status quo and "not worth the paper it's written on." In terms of achieving affirmative goals, quotes from Kozar affirmed Kindall's view: "Kozar said he did not expect the new program to result in the hiring of more black coaches." Instead, this new program would simply clarify the reporting chain and not produce any substantive changes in the procedures being followed. While to Kozar this lack of change was because the athletic department already acted affirmatively, Kindall disagreed, stating that if Thomasenia Robinson, the affirmative action officer, had no idea of the department's affirmative action plans then the department was just "'lying.'" The article concluded with a statement that the Commission for

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<sup>185</sup> Commission for Black Meeting Minutes, November 7, 1979, 2-3, Commission for Women Collection, Box 2, Folder 6, UTK.

Blacks would form a committee to investigate the athletic department in addition to the Faculty Senate's inquiries.<sup>186</sup>

The Commission for Blacks' initial investigation into the athletic department did not alleviate their concerns about the athletic department's commitment to diversity. The commission's athletics committee concluded that instead of affirmative action supervision reporting back to the athletic committee, the athletic department affirmative action should instead report to the Knoxville chancellor Jack Reese, whose "record speaks for itself." The committee also reported "...expressed concern that the Commission, and many Blacks as well as Whites on the campus and across the State, have a basic mistrust for Dr. Boling's and Mr. Woodruff's genuine commitment to affirmative action based on their previous noncompliance with affirmative action guidelines."<sup>187</sup> Boling and Woodruff were two white men, placed highly within the administration, and at odds with the rest of the campus over how far racial integration should penetrate beyond the racial composition of athletes.

Though the athletic department was a major factor in the integration of the University of Tennessee, faced scrutiny for discriminatory practices, and hosted a sizable concentration of Black undergraduates on campus, high-placed members of the administration continued to shield it from scrutiny about its hiring practices. Private correspondence between Andy Kozar, both affirmative action officer and executive assistant to President Boling, and Jack Reese again justified the

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<sup>186</sup> Nancy Haggerty, "UT will institute new program," *Daily Beacon*, November 12, 1979, Office of the University President Collection, Box 4, Folder 17, UTK.

<sup>187</sup> Commission for Blacks Meeting Minutes, November 21, 1979, 1-2, Office of the University President Collection, Box 4, Folder 9, UTK.

Commission's fears of the athletic department's autonomy. Kozar wrote to Reese that he did not think the Commission for Blacks, Commission for Women, or Faculty Senate needed to have any presence on the drafting committee for the athletic department's affirmative action plan.<sup>188</sup> Kozar was successful in his protection of the drafting of the department's affirmative action plan, but Reese assured Kindall that the Commission for Blacks, Commission for Women, and other interested groups would be involved in the review process.<sup>189</sup> Reese also personally promised to continue advocating the hiring of Black coaches as a member of the executive committee for the athletic board.<sup>190</sup>

But despite the athletic department's numerous critics from students, faculty, and administrators not associated with athletics, the final affirmative action plan did not differ substantively from the one Professor Daniel's initially objected to in 1978. The October 1980 Athletic Department Affirmative Action plan designated the chairman of the executive committee as the affirmative action officer for the department, reporting to President Boling's executive assistant.<sup>191</sup> Dr. Sharon Patton, the chairwoman of the UTK Faculty Senate Athletics Committee, criticized a draft of this plan as "more of gesture at equal opportunity rather than affirmative action." She emphasized that "...affirmative action is to seek out people not just state that we do

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<sup>188</sup> Andy Kozar to Jack Reese, December 28, 1979, 1, Office of the University President Collection, Box 4, Folder 17, UTK.

<sup>189</sup> Jack Reese to Luther Kindall, April 11, 1980, Commission for Blacks Collection, Box 1, Folder 6, UTK.

<sup>190</sup> Jack Reese, "Improving Human Relations," Campus Newsletter, September 24, 1980, Smalls Collection, Box 1, Folder 2, UTK.

<sup>191</sup> Affirmative Action Plan, Athletics Department, October 1980, Office of the University President Collection, Box 4, Folder 17, UTK.

not discriminate.” Patton echoed Professor Daniel’s initial concerns by objecting to the draft’s stipulation that the jobs be advertised only to “recognized” sources of candidates, rather than with the intention of attracting unknown applicants. Patton repudiated the claim at the heart of the controversy, that coaches were a special category who should be hired in a different process than any other employee at the university, subject to an affirmative action plan.<sup>192</sup> However, Patton’s objections were not enough to deter the clear support of the president, the chancellor, the athletic director, and the Board of Trustees, all of whom served on the athletic board and were ultimately protective of its autonomy.

Racial integration had not meaningfully affected the major decisionmakers at the University of Tennessee in the twenty-plus years that Black students had been accepted at the University of Tennessee. Despite the dozens of Black athletes recruited since the university’s integration of athletics in 1968, in 1985, out of the 67 coaches and staff members in the men’s athletic department, none were Black.<sup>193</sup> By 1990, the department employed only four Black coaches, three assistant coaches and one head coach, out of an estimated 60-70 personnel.<sup>194</sup> The absence of Black coaches and administrators at the university mirrored other histories of integration in athletics elsewhere. The situation of Black athletes at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville spoke to the limited power of their positions. The athletic administration actively recruited these students to form competitive teams, giving them some influence as prominent

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<sup>192</sup> Sharon Patton to Andy Kozar, September 9, 1980, 1-2, Office of the University President Collection, Box 4, Folder 17, UTK.

<sup>193</sup> Department Work Force Analysis Summary, 1985, Commission for Blacks, Box 1, Folder 11, UTK.

<sup>194</sup> Commission for Blacks Student Committee, Recommendations Evaluated, April 9, 1990, 1-3, Commission for Blacks Collection, Box 1, Folder 15, UTK.



members of the student body, but the financial value of these teams also made the university hesitant to make any radical changes. Though Black male athletes did advocate for progressive racial policies at the University of Tennessee, the function of the athletic program was ultimately a conservative one that maintained a status quo.

Overall, neither the history of racial integration at the university nor the maintenance of sex-segregated sport and the adoption of a men's model across both sexes pointed to any radical change to the hierarchies that had long dominated the University of Tennessee. As the women's athletic department, now integrated fully into the men's athletic administration, national organization, and philosophy, worked to become competitive, it similarly benefitted from Black athletes.

#### **4.5 Institutional Benefits to Racial Integration in Women's Collegiate Sport**

Neither the racial integration of the men's athletic department nor the expansion of the women's athletic department did much to disturb the stranglehold of white, male dominance in collegiate sport. Though the staff and coaches of the women's athletic department were almost entirely women, the athletic board, university administrators, and majority of the Board of Trustees were all white men. But the racial integration of women's sport, following logically from the integration of men's sport in years prior to Title IX, facilitated the recruitment of excellent athletes for its nascent women's teams, as it had for UT's men's programs a decade earlier. What is critical to understand about the impact of racial integration at the University of Tennessee is the competitive advantages it conferred to the institution without disrupting existing power structures. Black women competing for the university—like their peers in men's football—would have been

acutely aware of their status as a racial minority on campus and losing out on the opportunity to work with Black coaches available at historically Black institutions like Tennessee State.

Not only did the University of Tennessee receive the full benefits of Title IX as a large, financially secure, white institution, it received the benefits of racial integration, too. For example, the Lady Volunteers' first post-Title IX championship did not come from its future Hall of Fame coach Pat Summitt, but from track & field in 1981 and was a result of racially integrating its team. This 1981 national title perfectly embodied how the University of Tennessee's women's athletic department was able to capitalize on both the sex-separatism of Title IX and the integration of collegiate athletics. The track & field team was coached by Terry Crawford, herself a UT alumnus. She recalled that in her own undergraduate career in the 1960s, the only organized women's track program in the state was the Tennessee State University Tigerbelles, a program at an HBCU. Crawford instead had to join a male community track club in Knoxville.

By the late 1970s, Crawford was recruiting Black women track athletes to the University of Tennessee. Sharieffa Barksdale, a member of the 1981 championship team, cited Tennessee State's Wilma Rudolph as a major inspiration for her own career. But Barksdale's older brother was recruited to UT in 1977 to play on the football team and in 1980, the university offered her a partial scholarship. Her family ties, the scholarships funded from Title IX's mandates, and the university's athletic integration led Sharieffa Barksdale to the University of Tennessee, where once she may have had little choice but to follow in Wilma Rudolph's footsteps at Tennessee State University. Barksdale's teammate LaVonna Martin, a Lady Volunteer from 1985-1988, had even closer ties. Her mother Brenda Martin had received an offer from Tennessee State to run track in the 1960s, but Brenda's parents had wanted her to stay closer to home in Dayton, Ohio. When the time came for LaVonna to make her own decision, she looked at the achievements of another

Black athlete on the 1981 UT championship team, Benita Fitzgerald.<sup>195</sup> Though the Tigerbelles were and remained icons to many Black woman athletes, new traditions and heroes had emerged in Knoxville under the auspices of Title IX. While UT won its first women's national championship in 1981, the Tennessee State Tigerbelles won its last national championship in 1980. There was a clear balance of power shifting away from Tennessee State and toward the University of Tennessee in this particular moment and towards predominantly white universities in general.

While Black women athletes were winning championships for the University of Tennessee, they were not being coached by Black women. Just as the Commission for Blacks had scrutinized the lack of Black coaches for men's sport, so the staff of the women's athletic department came under scrutiny in the 1980s. The Subcommittee for Women's Athletic reported in 1983 that of the 58 women competing in basketball, track & field, and volleyball, 24 were Black—16 of the 24 were track athletes. The report commended the department for offering scholarships to 21 of the 24 Black athletes. However, the report condemned the fact that between 1982 and 1984, there had not been a single Black staff member and that in two sports, tennis and swimming, there had never been any Black athletes. The staff was composed of 12 members, nine white women and three white men. In the late 1970s, there had been a single Black coach—a Black man, Andy Roberts.<sup>196</sup> A 1992 report from Commission for Blacks reports that the women's athletic department still did not have any Black staff members, despite efforts to recruit minority candidates.<sup>197</sup> The racial

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<sup>195</sup> Schriver, *In the Footsteps*, 72-73.

<sup>196</sup> Report of the Subcommittee for Women's Athletics, Commission for Blacks 1983, Commission for Blacks Collection, Box 1, Folder 9, UTK.

<sup>197</sup> Report on the Status of the 1989 Task Force on Race Relations' Recommendations, Commission for Blacks 1992, 5, Commission for Blacks Collection, Box 1, Folder 16, UTK.

integration of the sex-segregated women's athletic department resulted in similar circumstances as the racial integration of the men's athletic department, where the players on the field were increasingly diverse but the coaching staff and administration remained white.

Looking at the progress that white women made in establishing the women's athletic department also draws comparisons to the battles that Black members of campus waged to accomplish similar tasks. Faculty members and administrators like Luther Kindall, head of the Commission for Blacks, fought to enforce affirmative action in athletics and largely failed. While the men's administration capitulated to some of the demands made by Black athletes, administrators also stood firm on integrating themselves. Comparatively, the women advocating for remedies to gender discrimination enjoyed a much higher rate of success than Black advocates for equality in sport. In a little over a decade, the women's intercollegiate athletics program went from a handful of club sports housed in the aquatic center to a million-dollar-plus budget.<sup>198</sup> Unsurprisingly, this progress aligned with the women's athletic administration's turn to a commercial model and participation in organizations like the NCAA and SEC, organized and administered overwhelmingly by white men.

The women's athletic administration at UT negotiated a path between the hardline separatism of the original AIAW and legislators' Title IX philosophies and the total integration experienced in most university departments. But their success was largely dependent on the students' and leaders' willingness and desire to emulate a male approach to sport and gain access to requisite funding. By cooperating within these systems, Gloria Ray and her department found

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<sup>198</sup> The women's athletic budget was \$1.135 million in 1983-84. Development and Organization of UT Athletics Department, 1984, 16, Office of the University President, Box 15, Folder 1, UTK.

enormous success. And this was also clearly what her coaches and students wanted. In an interview, Pat Head marked Gloria Ray's hiring in 1976 and the transition to the NCAA as foundational for her own legacy: "...when the NCAA took over, it was the defining moment for women's athletics from a competitive championships opportunity. That gave women's athletics instant credibility and national exposure. And so the resources were put in place throughout the country, although some at a different level."<sup>199</sup> A 1975 survey of 48 women athletes recorded similar sentiments: "There was a general feeling that the 'administrators' in charge of the athletics program have been keeping it from developing."<sup>200</sup> Since the 1980s, the University of Tennessee Lady Volunteers have won ten national championships in basketball and track & field, and finished as runners-up in dozens more. It was in the transition to the men's model of sport, combined with racial integration and the maintenance of sex segregation, that allowed students and administrators of women's athletics at the University of Tennessee to receive material support and find success under Title IX.

## 4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that although the implementation of Title IX and ongoing disputes about affirmative action sparked vigorous debate among students, coaches, faculty, and administrators, as well as the local community, these changes did little to affect the fundamental

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<sup>199</sup> Schriver, *In the Footsteps*, 231.

<sup>200</sup> Summary of Meeting with Female Athletes, Task Force for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, Final Report, 1976, 59, Earl Ramer Papers, Box 13, Folder 2, UTK.

balance of power within the university regarding either race or sex. Women athletes, coaches, and administrators secured funding to support a competitive intercollegiate program. However, mirroring national patterns, the women's athletic department evolved from a model that rejected the commercialism of men's sport into one that embraced it. Black athletes and faculty, as well as their allies, continued to raise the lack of Black coaches within competitive men's sport as an indication that the university had not fully integrated nor committed itself to equality. The response of high-level administrators, from the president to the athletic director, confirmed that athletics could not be a vector for radical changes to the power or authority structures of the university.

Even in the midst of seemingly progressive changes to its racial and gender policies, the racial and gender hierarchies of collegiate sport and the university went unchallenged. The presence of women and Black players did not alter the university's racial identity nor the fact that nearly all its major decisionmakers were white men. The history of collegiate sport at the University of Tennessee reflects a continued athletic dominance stemming from decades of financial privilege—directly tied to its predominantly white identity—and the benefits it accrued from recruiting Black players and offering women's sport. Both the Tennessee Volunteers and Lady Volunteers have brought home national championships and remained competitive in the most lucrative college conference in the country in the decades since then.

In these two chapters, I have argued that the two halves of the University of Tennessee's collegiate sport history, before and after Title IX, demonstrate that even landmark transformations to the racial and gender composition of collegiate athletes have resulted in few changes to the overall power structure of sport. The integration of Black athletes and the inclusion of women athletes through sex-segregated and racially integrated divisions created incredible opportunities for students, and few for Black coaches. I have also shown the legacy of the nineteenth century in

prioritizing women's control of women's sport and relying on a biological rationale within the debates and decisions made by various students and administrators over the course of the twentieth century. The University of Tennessee's success under the auspices of Title IX's implementation bore out its underlying intent in the maintenance of sex-segregated collegiate sport to create opportunities for women.

The institutional, racial privilege that the University of Tennessee enjoyed for decades and its trickledown effects on college sport become even more apparent when contrasted with the history of its cross-state neighbor, Tennessee State University. In many ways, their histories are a perfect inverse. Whereas racial integration and the expansion of women's sport brought even more acclaim to the University of Tennessee, they led to the downfall of an athletic dynasty at Tennessee State University.

## **5.0 A Talented Tenth: The Gendered Dynamics of Black Collegiate Sport at Tennessee State University, 1912-1972**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Though the establishment of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in the late nineteenth century stemmed from an ongoing regime of racial discrimination in the U.S. South, Black men and women at HBCUs persisted in creating vibrant intellectual and cultural communities and training new generations of Black leaders. And just as the modernization of white higher education in the South incorporated men's collegiate sport as a training ground for white masculinity and leadership, HBCU sport became a deeply cherished venue for displaying Black skill and pride. But while ample scholarship has explored the rich history of HBCU men's sport—specifically football—the significance of HBCU women athletes has largely been neglected within historical scholarship.

In this chapter I argue that Tennessee State University used men's collegiate sport as a venue for displaying the achievements of its students and demonstrating that Black men were not inferior to any other citizens because of the color of their skin. This project of Black pride took on a distinctly masculine character, shaped by the particular historical stereotypes used against Black men and the physical nature of sport. Because the philosophy of protectionism that had defined women's collegiate sport in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was so deeply intertwined with whiteness, Black community leaders did not limit Black women's opportunities



to participate in competitive sport on the basis of physical harm. While there were debates within the Black community about the social propriety of Black women competing, the absence of physical concerns created opportunities for Black women at Tennessee State to compete at the highest levels of sporting competition. But despite the presence of an incredibly talented track & field team that demonstrated the abilities and excellence of Black women on international stages, the Tennessee State University administration largely neglected these athletes and their dedicated coach. Collegiate sport was a cherished proving ground for Black Americans, but operated within a gendered hierarchy that undervalued the contributions and achievements of Black women.

While the Tennessee State Tigerbelles, collectively and individually, and their coach Ed Temple have been the subject of substantial scholarly work, scholars have largely focused on their international achievements in Olympic competitions and their significance to the civil rights movement or the Cold War.<sup>201</sup> Just as much attention should be paid to their string of domestic athletic success and the context of the program's operation within an HBCU, where the majority of these women spent the majority of their time. That attention would underscore the how their tremendous achievements refracted differently through the lens of domestic racial debates and the dynamics of gender and class norms within the Black community. This chapter fits into a growing body of scholarship on HBCU men's sport and particularly leans on the recent work of historian

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<sup>201</sup> For histories of the Tigerbelles in international context see Carroll Van West, "The Tennessee State Tigerbelles: Cold Warriors of the Track," in *Separate Games: African American Sport Behind the Walls of Segregation*, ed. David K. Wiggins (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2016), 61-71; Ariail, *Passing the Baton: Black Women Track Stars and American Identity*; Liberti and Smith, *(Re)Presenting Wilma Rudolph*; Lansbury, *A Spectacular Leap: Black Women Athletes in Twentieth-Century America*, which focuses on Wilma Rudolph and Wyomia Tyus in later chapters; David Maraniss, *Rome 1960: The Olympics That Changed the World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008).

Derrick White in his work on the men's football program at Florida A&M, another HBCU, over several decades.<sup>202</sup> White's focus on a single institution and examination of how talented athletes and long-tenured coaches negotiated with the local community and university administration provides a valuable case study. But unlike Florida A&M, Tennessee State had robust men's and women's intercollegiate sports programs. Understanding the history of Black women's collegiate sport is as much a story of the institution and its close ties to men's collegiate sport as it is one of sporting accomplishments. Even though the Tigerbelles arguably outstripped the achievement of Tennessee State men's football, they were perpetual second-class citizens on their own campus.

This chapter begins with an exploration of how Black collegiate sport at Tennessee State was shaped by its southern context, segregation, and masculinity. It then establishes how Tennessee State administrators consistently prioritized and developed athletics as the university progressed from its early days as a teacher's college into a full-fledged liberal arts institution. Though many HBCUs began building athletic programs in the 1920s, Tennessee State's first

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<sup>202</sup> For histories of HBCU sport see White, *Blood, Sweat & Tears: Jake Gaither, Florida A&M, and the History of Black College Football*; Hawkins, Cooper, Carter-Francique, and Cavin, eds., *The Athletic Experience at Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Past, Present, and Persistence*; Wiggins and Swanson, editors, *Separate Games: African American Sport Behind the Wall of Segregation*; David K. Wiggins, "'With All Deliberate Speed': High School Sport, Race, and *Brown v. Board of Education*," *Journal of Sport History* 37, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 329-346; Patrick B. Miller, "To 'Bring the Race along Rapidly': Sport, Student Culture, and Educational Mission at Historically Black Colleges during the Interwar Years," *History of Education Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 111-133. For histories of Black masculinity see Riché Richardson, *Black Masculinity and the U.S. South: From Uncle Tom to Gangsta* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2007); Richard Majors, "Cool Pose: Black Masculinity and Sports," in *Contemporary Themes: African Americans in Sport*, ed. Gary A. Sailes (New York: Routledge, 2007); Anthony, *Searching for the New Black Man: Black Masculinity and Women's Bodies*.

president was particularly passionate about growing the school's sporting capabilities. His passion for sport also opened opportunities for Black women to compete in intercollegiate sport. The chapter then explores the history of women's track & field at Tennessee State, centered on the career of longtime coach Edward S. Temple and how, despite the university's indifference to women's sport, it flourished prior to Title IX. Unlike other HBCUs, Tennessee State's administration did not emphasize nor discourage women's sport. This neglect deprived the program of resources but allowed Ed Temple and his talented athletes to blaze new pathways for Black women in competitive sport, domestic and international. It concludes with an introduction to the desegregation case, *Geier v. Dunn*, that came to dominate Tennessee State's decision-making in the 1970s, in the realm of athletics and beyond.

## **5.2 The Marriage of Black Masculinity and Collegiate Sport**

In the creation and maintenance of historically Black colleges and universities, the paradox of life under Jim Crow was distilled. Though HBCUs represented new opportunities for formal education in the South that had not existed during slavery, the maintenance of racial segregation pointed to the reemergence of white supremacy in the wake of Reconstruction's failure. By and large, these institutions dealt with severe underfunding and denigration from white institutions and stakeholders. However, some scholars have noted that segregated education did create some favorable circumstances for the fostering of Black leadership and racial pride in the twentieth

century.<sup>203</sup> And just as collegiate sport became entangled with white supremacy at universities like Tennessee, collegiate football combined with the expression of Black pride and equality at Tennessee State and other HBCUs. The interweaving of masculinity, sport, and Blackness at Tennessee State University in the years prior to 1972 laid the foundation for a sporting culture that venerated men's sports as the apotheosis of a historically Black university.

Since its earliest years, Tennessee State University never stood on equal ground with other public institutions of higher education in the state. Tennessee State originated as a teacher's college, part of statewide efforts to increase the numbers of teachers in the state, both Black and white, and secure federal funding related to education. Prior to its establishment in 1912, the state of Tennessee had not supported any colleges or universities for Black students. Instead, the state had paid the University of Tennessee-Knoxville—which remained racially segregated—to send the students to Knoxville College, a local Black affiliate. In 1909, the Tennessee State Legislature designated funds to establish three white teacher training schools in East, Middle, and West Tennessee, and one for Black citizens in a site to be determined. While each of the white schools received \$33,430 from the general education fund in initial appropriations, Tennessee State

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<sup>203</sup> See Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Jeanita W. Richardson and J. John Harris III, "Brown and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs): A Paradox of Desegregation Policy," *Journal of Negro Education* 73, no.3 (Summer 2004): 365-378; Eddie Cole, *The Campus Color Line: College Presidents and the Struggle for Black Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020); Jelani M. Favors, *Shelter in a Time of Storm: How Black Colleges Fostered Generations of Leadership and Activism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

received \$16,700.<sup>204</sup> This initial disparity was indicative of the decades to come, of both financial neglect and a clear prioritization of the state's white, flagship university.

Though the establishment of a Black college was a major development, it still suffered from underfunding and a lack of political support during its early years. The Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State Normal School for Negroes officially opened in 1912 in Nashville under the supervision of William Jasper Hale, a Black principal from Chattanooga, Tennessee.<sup>205</sup> Hale had been part of an intense, failed lobbying effort to establish the school in Chattanooga and he personally ran a fundraiser for \$71,000. The other unsuccessful bid came from Memphis in west Tennessee, where 52,441 Black Tennesseans lived according to the 1910 census, but they had little influence in local government to secure a bid. The Davidson County government, home to Nashville, voted to appropriate \$60,000 to help establish the school. The 1910 census reports that Nashville was home to 36,523 Black citizens and they comprised 33% of the city's population.<sup>206</sup> However, there was no Black public high school in Nashville until 1939, unlike Chattanooga, Knoxville, and Memphis.<sup>207</sup> Tennessee A&I's presence in Nashville represented a new educational opportunity for Black students, locally and state-wide, but the deep roots of segregation also meant that these students were often underprepared by the standards of predominantly white higher educational institutions.

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<sup>204</sup> "Historical Development of the Two Universities," Frederick S. Humphries Records, Box 21, Folder 254, TSU.

<sup>205</sup> The institution that is now Tennessee State went through many name changes. It will be referred to as Tennessee State throughout for the sake of clarity and the bulk of this narrative occurring under that name.

<sup>206</sup> 1910 Tennessee state census, Composition and Characteristics of the Population for Cities of 25,000 or More.

<sup>207</sup> Bobby L. Lovett, *A Touch of Greatness: A History of Tennessee State University* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2012), 8, 20.

From 1912 to 1951, Tennessee A&I continued to progress in its offerings and accreditation but struggled to match predominantly white educational institutions. In the first year 300 students attended classes in academic subjects or to pursue a teaching certification. Under Hale's supervision, until his retirement in 1943, Tennessee A&I became an accredited, four-year degree-granting teacher's college. By 1935, it had become Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College and in 1951 Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State University. Though Tennessee A&I offered Black students unprecedented opportunities for education, it also continued to suffer from underfunding, particularly in comparison to the University of Tennessee system. The Tennessee state legislature recognized this inequality in 1941 when it passed a 'separate but equal' law requiring the State Board of Education to create equal educational opportunities for Black and white citizens, specifically using the University of Tennessee as a benchmark.<sup>208</sup> However, the funding discrepancies continued at both the state and federal level. In 1945, the University of Tennessee received \$1,215,827 in federal land grant funds and Tennessee A&I received only \$17,105.<sup>209</sup> In this segregated system of higher education, government officials consistently compared Tennessee's only public historically Black institution to white institutions and found it wanting for reasons of the state's own making.

However, segregation did allow for Black administrators, teachers, and students to build their own communities and traditions. Like many other HBCUs, Tennessee State invested in building a strong athletic program. Its later arrival onto the collegiate sport scene in some ways

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<sup>208</sup> "Chapter 1: Purpose and History," Tennessee State University Self-Study Report, Andrew P. Torrence Records 1968-1974, Box 6, Folder 66, TSU.

<sup>209</sup> Lovett, *A Touch of Greatness*, 114.

benefitted it. Most HBCUs were established in the late nineteenth century, most in response to the availability of federal land grant funding through the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890. Black collegiate sport began in the 1890s, with the first intercollegiate basketball game played in 1890 and the first football game in 1892. Track & field followed later in 1907 and basketball in 1910. Much like the history of white collegiate sport, the 1890s and 1900s were a time of association and conference building. In the first half of the century, neither the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) nor the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) accepted HBCUs as members.<sup>210</sup> As in so many other areas of life, Black Americans built their own institutions.

Though segregated, the histories of Black and white collegiate sport followed largely similar paths. Just as the death of several students in 1905 prompted President Theodore Roosevelt to call for serious reforms in collegiate football prompted the formation of the NCAA, the 1905 incident prompted Black colleges to organize. One difference was the lack of a unifying national organization like the NCAA for Black collegiate sport. However, as has been previously argued, the NCAA was actually far less influential in its early decades than regional organizations like the Southeastern Conference.<sup>211</sup> In that way, the regional conferences that organized Black collegiate football resembled white collegiate football. Of the several that formed, some of which still exist today, the most influential was the Colored Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA). Like

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<sup>210</sup> J. Kenyatta Cavil, "Early Athletic Experiences at HBCUs," in *The Athletic Experience at Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Past, Present, and Persistence*, eds. Billy Hawkins, Joseph Cooper, Akilah Carter-Francique, and J. Kenyatta Cavil (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 28, 32, 40.

<sup>211</sup> Swanson, "Establishing Proper 'Athletic Relations'," 168-188.

white conferences, the CIAA and other Black conferences were concerned with standardizing eligibility guidelines and rulebooks.<sup>212</sup> What had begun as student-run pastime had turned into a profitable and public venture for universities already under scrutiny. HBCUs like Tennessee State were part of the national trend that centralized power over sport with university administrators and rendered sport a powerful tool for raising money and alumni spirits.

The sporting culture that developed around Black collegiate sport, particularly football, has been the subject of detailed scholarship. Historian Derrick E. White in his work on the history of Florida A&M football describes the community of athletes, administrators, coaches, sportswriters, and fans that sustained black sport as a “sporting congregation.”<sup>213</sup> His framing highlights the clear cultural significance and devotion that sport played in the African American community in the twentieth century. Susan Cahn has also noted the significance of Black sport more broadly to the formation of communities in the wake of the Great Migration.<sup>214</sup> But the other major point of emphasis in scholarship has been the significance of collegiate football and sport more broadly to the construction of Black masculinity. As White writes, HBCU sport was “one of the most critical sources of Black pride and producers of Black manhood in the twentieth century.”<sup>215</sup> Though

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<sup>212</sup> David K. Wiggins and Chris Elzey, “Creating Order in Black College Sport: The Lasting Legacy of the Colored Intercollegiate Athletic Association,” in *Separate Games: African American Sport Behind the Wall of Segregation*, eds. David K. Wiggins and Ryan Swanson (Fayetteville, Ark.: University of Arkansas Press, 2016), 145, 146, 148.

<sup>213</sup> White, *Blood, Sweat & Tears*, 8.

<sup>214</sup> Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 39.

<sup>215</sup> White, *Blood, Sweat & Tears*, 8.



White's work focuses specifically on Florida A&M, this was a national phenomenon across both public and private HBCUs.

Since the early twentieth century, HBCU administrators had been calling for the inclusion of physical education in curricula as part of a larger cultural effort towards equality. Just as PWI administrators believed in football's ability to train the next generation of leadership for the New South, so did HBCU administrators believe that collegiate sport could teach young Black men self-reliance and self-control. Beyond the personal values that participating in sport could impart, Black leaders believed that athletic excellence could be a vital tool in the battle against Jim Crow. In his work on HBCU sport in the interwar years, historian Patrick B. Miller terms this approach "muscular assimilation," as the hope that participation in amateur, professional, and international sport would lead to victories on and off the field.<sup>216</sup> The deeply held association between masculinity and sport held true for both Black and white institutions.

The cultural significance that collegiate sport held for HBCUs, and their local Black communities helps to explain how Tennessee State, underfunded before it even fully existed, continually invested its meager resources in sport. President Hale focused on athletics as a way of boosting the school's profile locally and regionally. In the school's first year in operation, students and faculty organized an Athletic Association which offered intramural football, basketball, baseball, tennis, handball, center ball, and croquet to both men and women. In 1931, Tennessee A&I built a football stadium and throughout the 1930s the federal Works Progress Administration supplied labor and funds to add more seating and a cinder track.<sup>217</sup> The investment in collegiate

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<sup>216</sup> Miller, "To 'Bring the Race along Rapidly'", 112-114.

<sup>217</sup> Lovett, *A Touch of Greatness*, 285.

athletics at Tennessee A&I fell in line with the emergence of more organized and competitive programs at public HBCUs in the years prior to World War II.

When Walter S. Davis became president in 1943, he continued to prioritize sports, with the explicit goal of proving Tennessee State equal to the University of Tennessee. Davis reinstated the football program after World War II and the addition of veterans with experience playing in military camps proved an immediate boost to the team's chances. From 1945 to 1947, Tennessee A&I won the Vulcan Bowl, a competition for HBCUs that served as a proxy for the Black college football national championship in the 1940s. In the 1950s, Tennessee State won three consecutive national basketball championships in the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). Tennessee State was the first HBCU team to play in the NAIA Christmas Invitational Tournament let alone win it three consecutive years.<sup>218</sup>

Tennessee State's success in the 1950s and 1960s is part of what J. Kenyatta Cavil calls an HBCU renaissance and Derrick White the golden era of HBCU sport. Press and popular attention tended to focus on the few Black players who participated on PWI teams, in relatively small numbers. However, as Derrick White observes, in the wake of World War II, HBCUs enjoyed an era of great coaches, elite players, and sustained success. In fact, prior to the full desegregation of college football in the late 1960s, when elite HBCUs played white schools in the 1960s, they won more often than they lost.<sup>219</sup> The success that HBCUs were enjoying among themselves—and likely the potential profit—contextualizes the gradual softening of the NAIA and the NCAA to admitting Black institutions. The NCAA finally admitted HBCUs to compete in collegiate football

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<sup>218</sup> "TSU success more than wins, losses," *The Tennessean*, February 19, 1987.

<sup>219</sup> White, *Blood, Sweat & Tears*, 10.

in 1956. It created a separate College Division, the precursor to Division II. Tennessee State was one of the first HBCUs to play in a College Division regional bowl in 1965 and competed in various bowls throughout the 1960s, coached by the legendary John Merritt. Tennessee State also won two football championships in 1956 and 1967. In the same year the NCAA admitted HBCU football teams, it also started a small college national basketball tournament to compete with the NAIA.<sup>220</sup>

The records of HBCU teams in the first twenty years that the NCAA and NAIA accepted HBCU competitors speaks to the successful programs these schools had built behind the wall of segregation, as David K. Wiggins terms it. In those twenty years, from 1953 to 1973, HBCU teams won ten national championships, had eight teams make Final Four appearances, seven Elite Eight teams, and 18 NAIA national championships in sports other than basketball and football.<sup>221</sup> Black leaders believed sport could be an important avenue for promoting racial pride and administrators like Walter S. Davis invested scarce financial resources in nurturing these goals at schools like Tennessee State. In collegiate football as much as their intellectual curriculums, HBCUs could continue to promote the excellence of their students and prepare them to be active, healthy, and masculine leaders. But at a university like Tennessee State, it was not only men participating in this project of racial uplift.

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<sup>220</sup> Cavil, "Early Athletic Experience," 44-46.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid, 46.

### 5.3 Reconciling Black Femininity, Racial Uplift, and the Tigerbelles

Though Black women were just as invested in the fight for equality, the choices available to them were profoundly shaped by their gender as well as their race. As women, they labored under expectations from not only the dominant white culture that upheld white women as paragons of womanhood, but also from Black leaders who wanted Black women to serve as perfect exemplars of the race by upholding white middle-class standards of womanhood. As W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in *Darkwater*, “The Uplift of Women is, next to the Problem of the Color Line and the Peace Movement, the greatest modern cause.”<sup>222</sup> And Black women also sought these responsibilities. Nannie Helen Burroughs, Mary Church Terrell, and other club women saw their duty as raising the status of Black women, educating them to be productive members of society, and battling stereotypes of promiscuity and immorality.<sup>223</sup> HBCUs like Tennessee State and Bennett College were typical sites for such middle-class efforts towards respectability and racial uplift for Black women. But these were not compatible ideals with the burgeoning women’s sports programs emerging in the mid-twentieth century at Bennett College, Tuskegee Institute, and Tennessee State. As Black women embraced competitive sport, some elements of the Black

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<sup>222</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The damnation of women, ca. 1920*, 19. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

<sup>223</sup> See Victoria W. Wolcott, “‘Bible, Bath, and Broom’: Nannie Helen Burroughs’s National Training School and African-American Racial Uplift,” *Journal of Women’s History* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 88-110; Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Marcia Chatelain, *South Side Girls: Growing Up in the Great Migration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

community found it incompatible with the project of fostering respectable, middle-class womanhood in Black women.

The Tennessee State Tigerbelles have been well-studied in the context of their international achievements and the symbolic power of their accomplishments in the midst of the civil rights movement and the Cold War.<sup>224</sup> While their achievements as Olympic athletes deserve such scholarly attention, the majority of Tigerbelles—including those women—spent the majority of their time living and competing at an HBCU. Their histories and careers necessitate reckoning with their experience at an institution inextricably involved with a project of racial uplift through sport. But where did the Tigerbelles fit into this effort? During Temple's 44 years of coaching, the Tigerbelles won 34 national titles and five junior championships. And of the 40 Olympic athletes he coached, all but one graduated with a degree. Though their sporting talents could not be denied, their symbolic value to Tennessee State as athletes, because of their gender, remained negligible throughout their decades of success. Their post-track careers, building upon their educational achievements, fit more comfortably into the project of racial uplift than their medals or records. Using the Tigerbelles to examine the history of Tennessee State and the project of racial uplift at HBCUs reveals the dynamics of race, gender, and bodily history that both gave Black women's sport a chance to flourish but denied it the prestige of its male counterpart.

From the earliest days of Tennessee State, athletics was part of the educational mission and women participated alongside men. When students established an Athletic Association in

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<sup>224</sup> See Lansbury, *A Spectacular Leap*; Ariail, *Passing the Baton: Black Women Track Stars and American Identity*; Carroll Van West, "The Tennessee State Tigerbelles: Cold Warriors of the Track"; Liberti and Smith, *(Re)Presenting Wilma Rudolph*.

Tennessee State's inaugural years to organize intramural events, both men and women joined and participated in a variety of sports. Because Tennessee State came into existence in the 1910s, its students and administration did not partake in the same power struggles that characterized collegiate sport's earliest decades. University administration remained in control of collegiate sport from the beginning, responding to student enthusiasm and building physical requirements into the earliest curricula. The first university president William Jasper Hale charged the inaugural class with not only gaining knowledge of mathematics and letters, but also attending physical education classes to "secure ease and gracefulness of carriage," as well as "the general development of the shoulders, chest and body."<sup>225</sup> While physical education was part of the curriculum for both men and women, even the phrase "shoulders, chest and body" carried masculine overtones of the ideal outcome of exercise's impact on strengthening and defining the upper body. The Association offered football, baseball, tennis, handball, center ball, and croquet. Women participated in all sports except football and organized their own competitive basketball team.<sup>226</sup> The early years of Tennessee State's athletic activities captured the unique position of its women athletes throughout the twentieth century. That women were encouraged and welcomed to compete in collegiate athletics sixty years before the passage of Title IX reflects the opportunities available to women at historically Black institutions, even as women's athletics waxed and waned at many PWIs. But women were not the focal points of athletic activities because they did not play football, the symbolic heart of the covenant between men's athletics and the university.

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<sup>225</sup> Lewis and Thomas, *A Will to Win*, 2.

<sup>226</sup> Lovett, *A Touch of Greatness*, 285.

The opportunity to compete in intramural sports was an indication of the future potential for women's sport at Tennessee State, but this promise was not fulfilled until Walter S. Davis became university president in 1943. In the thirty years since the university's founding, men's collegiate sport had flourished. As the football team won national championships, President Davis decided to hire the university's first women's athletic coach. Howard Gentry, athletic director from 1961-1976, characterized Davis' decision as "more of a competitive whimsey than a determined drive." As with football, Davis saw the establishment of a women's track and field program as another way for Tennessee State to use athletics and prove itself equal to the University of Tennessee. Davis lured Jessie Abbott, a graduate of Tuskegee University and daughter of famed Tuskegee football coach Cleve Abbott, away from Tuskegee women's track and field program to serve as the women's track and basketball coach.<sup>227</sup> However, the program languished through the 1940s, with little funding and little interest beyond a few enthusiastic participants. Jessie Abbott left coaching after two seasons to focus on her teaching and administrative duties at the university. Davis replaced Abbott with Tom Harris in 1946, an All-American former football player from Tuskegee, but track remained an afterthought until the arrival of one of women's collegiate sport's most transformative figures: Edward Stanley Temple.<sup>228</sup>

Temple's 44-year coaching career at Tennessee State saw the rise and fall of a sporting dynasty. Temple first arrived at Tennessee State in 1946, hailing from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and having competed as an all-state high school athlete in basketball and football. In his autobiography, Temple reports that he chose Tennessee State on the recommendation of a friend

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<sup>227</sup> Lovett, *A Touch of Greatness*, 290-291.

<sup>228</sup> Lewis and Thomas, *A Will to Win*, 108-110.

who was to be the new men's track coach—Tom Harris. However, there was little infrastructure to support a collegiate track program. Temple recollected that there were no scholarships to attract highly talented athletes, just work-aid grants. Upon his graduation from Tennessee State in 1950, President Walter Davis recommended that Temple remain at TSU for graduate school and work in the campus post office while coaching the men's and women's track teams. From 1950 to 1953, Temple pursued a master's degree in sociology and acted as campus postmaster to support himself and his wife. He coached the men's and women's teams until another Tennessee State coach with seniority decided to take a crack at the men's team. Temple was left with the women.<sup>229</sup>

In thinking back to the early days of the program and the decision to have Temple coach both men and women, he said this of Walter S. Davis: "President Davis was broadminded enough to provide a women's program, but if he'd had any idea that it would ever surpass football, he wouldn't have turned it loose."<sup>230</sup> If Davis' goal was to compete with the University of Tennessee, even forming a team with a coach put Tennessee State University ahead of the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, whose women's intercollegiate athletic program had collapsed in the late 1920s.<sup>231</sup> The state of the team when Temple took over in 1950 supports the idea that Davis had little interest in fielding a competitive team. Temple recalled that the track program consisted of a "partial track ending at a dump, no budget to speak of, three or four fellows and two girls."<sup>232</sup> But

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<sup>229</sup> Ed Temple, *Only the Pure in Heart Survive* (Nashville, T.N.: Broadman Press, 1980), 17-19.

<sup>230</sup> Temple, *Only the Pure in Heart Survive*, 19.

<sup>231</sup> Klein, *Volunteer Moments*, 98.

<sup>232</sup> Temple, *Only the Pure in Heart Survive*, 19.



under Temple's determined leadership, the women's track program became world-famous, surpassing Tennessee State football everywhere but in the eyes of the administration.

It only took Temple two years to attract his first gold medalist to Tennessee State, but conditions at the university nearly jeopardized the recruitment and hinted how little the administration prioritized women's athletics. Mae Faggs, a sprinter from New York state, had competed for the United States at the 1952 Summer Olympics in Helsinki and won a gold medal in the 4x100 meters relay. Temple wrote that Faggs chose Tennessee State over Tuskegee University or New York University (NYU) because it was closer than Alabama to New York and NYU did not offer any financial aid. However, the only package that Tennessee State offered to any runner, even an Olympian, was a work-aid package. Temple's runners received a scholarship in exchange for their work on campus in the library, post office, or cafeteria, unlike their male counterparts in football or basketball. Receiving any additional funding was another battle. In 1953, Temple and Faggs were particularly galled by the university administration's refusal to pay for a train ticket so Faggs could attend the National Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) Outdoor Championship in Texas and defend her title in the 100-meter dash.<sup>233</sup>

Fagg's decision to attend Tennessee State also proved to be a bellwether for the balance of power in the U.S. women's track and field landscape. Prior to Temple and Tennessee State's ascendancy in the 1950s, the major track and field powerhouses were the Tuskegee Institute and other AAU track clubs across the country. The Tuskegee Tigerettes, coached by Cleve Abbott, had won eight outdoor national titles from 1939 to 1948. The Police Athletic League in New York and the Chicago Track club both won titles from 1948 to 1955, until the Tigerbelles won their first of

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<sup>233</sup> Temple, *Only the Pure in Heart Survive*, 20.

their 14 consecutive outdoor national AAU championships, from 1955 to 1968. As Temple put it, the 1955 championship was “the first championship any sports team at TSU had ever won that wasn’t limited to black schools.”<sup>234</sup> While Tennessee State’s football and basketball teams had won championships playing other HBCU schools, the Tigerbelles won against integrated competition. Under Temple’s tutelage, Tennessee State was becoming a major destination for talented women track athletes. That the university was willing to sanction a women’s program was crucial, but far more depended on Temple’s determination and that of his athletes.

In retrospectives on his career, Temple emphasized the adversity that the Tigerbelles faced from both the university administration and society at large. In the team’s first few seasons, he had a \$64 budget to cover equipment, shoes, uniforms, and travel costs for a five-person team.<sup>235</sup> Temple recalls the yearly trips the team made to the Tuskegee Relays, a major track meet hosted established by Cleve Abbott at the Tuskegee Institute. The entire team gathered in a single station wagon with no budget for food and no place to stop and rest. The Tigerbelles would grab two sandwiches, an apple, and an orange from the university cafeteria and stop only for gas. As Temple recalled, “that was all you was going to get, was gas. You wasn’t going to go to the rest room or nothing.” The only alternative was to pull over to a field along the way.<sup>236</sup> Even as the team attracted a higher caliber of athletes and became competitive at national competitions, there was

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid, 20-21.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>236</sup> Coach Ed Temple, interview by Rachel Lawson, August 11, 2003, transcript, Nashville Civil Rights Collection, Nashville Metro Archives, Nashville, TN.

minimal support for food and lodging from the administration. And in some of the areas they traveled, there was nowhere for the team to stay even if the funding was available.

Segregation shaped the team's fortunes in other important ways when it came to recruitment. Though women's track and field was an integrated sport relative to men's track in the 1950s, the teams themselves were not integrated.<sup>237</sup> This segregation meant that Temple faced little competition from other top programs in recruiting talented Black women high schoolers to his historically Black collegiate program. Black high school track competitions in Tennessee took place at Tennessee State every year, where Temple previewed his potential recruiting class. Critically, he found one of his most important runners this way: Wilma Rudolph. Though she did not turn in a performance nearly as dominant as her medal-winning times in Melbourne or Rome at the Olympics, Rudolph's potential was enough to catch Temple's eye and for him to invite her to his summer training program. Temple had adopted the idea from Cleve Abbott at Tuskegee. He invited promising youth athletes to stay at Tennessee State for a month in the summer, training with the Tigerbelles in preparation for national competitions. Attendees had to pay their own way, but Temple and the Tigerbelles provided room and board. For the month of June, Temple's team and approximately ten high school girls from nearby Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, Texas, and Louisiana practiced three times a day.<sup>238</sup> Considering his limited budget and the restrictions imposed by segregation, Temple's strategies for attracting and training young talent were

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<sup>237</sup> Ariail, *Passing the Baton*, 16.

<sup>238</sup> Coach Ed Temple, interview by Rachel Lawson, August 11, 2003, transcript, Nashville Civil Rights Collection, Nashville Metro Archives, Nashville, TN.

instrumental to the success of his program. Though he could not offer athletic scholarships, Temple gave these women a chance at education and a competitive environment to hone their skills.

Even as the Tigerbelles began their streak of national championships in the 1950s and became regulars on the United States Olympic track team, Temple clearly remained cognizant of his team's treatment in comparison to men's sports. In 1952, discussing his athletes' chances of making the Olympic team to Helsinki, Temple insisted that Tennessee State had "a marvelous football and basketball program" but that it was becoming a track power too.<sup>239</sup> In contemporary interviews from his coaching career, Temple spoke well of the support he received from the administration. He recognized that few schools supported any kind of intercollegiate program for women at the time and that Tennessee State was one of the first.<sup>240</sup> But in interviews and retrospectives post-retirement, Temple told a different story. Reflecting on these years, Temple said "During the time we were winning these national championships, placing girls on Pan American and Olympic teams, and bringing back the hardware, all we got from the school administration was a pat on the back, some little parties in the cafeteria, and some tiny budget increases."<sup>241</sup> These frustrations came to a peak in the 1960s, as his Tigerbelles reached new heights on the international stage and the civil rights movement emerged in Nashville.

Though the external factors pressing down on the Tennessee State administration—a changing racial landscape nationally and the international reputation of the Tigerbelles—seemed

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<sup>239</sup> Saul Kohler, "Track Coach from Harrisburg Thinks His Pupils Will Catch the Boat to Helsinki," *Harrisburg Patriot*, June 27, 1952.

<sup>240</sup> "Temple Critical of Story About A&I Women's Track," *The Tennessean*, November 10, 1960.

<sup>241</sup> Temple, *Only the Pure in Heart Survive*, 31.

powerful enough to secure some improvements for women's sport, it was only Temple's personal connection to powerful men that secured any promises. In the 1960s, the Tennessee State Tigerbelles reached the height of their success and fame. World champion runners, they dominated the international track and field circuit. But at home, they faced their own, enduring challenges. By 1967, Temple recalled, "... my girls had competed in three Olympics and had won sixteen medals, I had coached two Olympic teams, the Tigerbelles had won twenty medals in three Pan American Games, and we had won twelve national titles. We had done everything we could do on a track, and we *still* didn't have any scholarships."<sup>242</sup> There were few colleges or universities in the United States where women's athletic scholarships were even a thought, but there was also no school that could match the Tennessee State Tigerbelles' record of achievement, domestic and internationally, over the past decade. It did not seem to be enough for Tennessee State's administration to invest in women's sport or leverage the profile of the Tigerbelles.

Despite the success of athletes like Wilma Rudolph, a nationally recognized figure after her performance at the 1960 Olympic games in Rome, there was little recognition from Tennessee State itself. The Tigerbelles were still on work-study grants. In a *Sports Illustrated* profile written in November 1960, author Barbara Heilman eviscerated Tennessee State for the conditions that Temple and the Tigerbelles were working under. As Heilman wrote, "the TSU track is an oval ribbon of dirt, unmarked and unsurfaced...Before the Olympics, Temple got [his wife] and the girls out at dawn to line it and himself paid to have it done when the Games got too close..." Temple's wife Charlie recounted Temple's never-ending battle with the football team to give the Tigerbelles a place to train. As she said, "he goes down there with a shovel and a rake...then the

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<sup>242</sup> Temple, *Only the Pure in Heart Survive*, 29.

football team comes out with those cleats.” But beyond the daily frustrations of practice conditions, Temple wanted systematic change to how the university treated women’s track.

In the 1960s, Ed Temple had a proven track record of success that he could not convert into institutional support. After the 1960 Olympics, where Ed Temple served as head coach of the U.S. Women’s Track & Field team, he had expected that he would be able to take a break. In his *Sports Illustrated* profile, he sympathized with his wife Charlie, who had to take over full responsibility for the post office while he traveled to Rome. In fact, he lamented that she had not even gotten two weeks of vacation in the last five years, guaranteed to her by the state of Tennessee as a public employee. Temple himself had not had a vacation in the past six years. But when Temple approached President Walter S. Davis for a time off upon his return from Rome, Davis told him that the time off for the Olympics was a vacation.<sup>243</sup> While this story was told somewhat humorously among other anecdotes about asking for a raise in 1960, his autobiography reflected greater frustration. Temple wrote that “I was so exhausted I asked for a vacation. I was told that the time I had spent in Rome was my vacation. Vacation? Shoot, I lost eighteen pounds!”<sup>244</sup> He was also more candid about the difference in treatment that he and his teams received as compared to the preferential treatment the football program received, year in and year out.

After the 1960 and 1964 Olympics, Temple could no longer live with such a large imbalance. Recalling 1960, Temple wrote “When we came back from the 1960 Rome Olympics with six *gold medals*, I just knew we’d be getting some scholarships. After all the men’s team had

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<sup>243</sup> Barbara Heilman, “Like Nothing Else in Tennessee,” *Sports Illustrated*, November 14, 1960. <https://vault.si.com/vault/1960/11/14/like-nothing-else-in-tennessee>.

<sup>244</sup> Temple, *Only the Pure in Heart Survive*, 31.

plenty of them, and they hadn't accomplished near what we had. But we were still turned down." Beyond his anger that his athletes would not be rewarded with scholarships after such monumental achievements, Temple went so far as to say the university actively disliked having such a prominent women's athletic program. Still reminiscing on the 1960 Games, Temple claimed "The administration would have been much happier with a little intramural program because it didn't expect all of this success and didn't know how to handle it." By 1964, where Temple again served as head coach of the U.S. Olympic women's track & field team and the Tigerbelles had won six of the seven medals in women's track, Temple "was determined that something had to be done about the budget and my salary."<sup>245</sup> But clearly President Davis and the Tennessee State administration had no interest in prioritizing women's athletics in the 1960s.

To make any gains for himself or his athletes, Temple had to call upon his own network of allies in the media and appeal to a higher political authority than Tennessee State's administration. In his 2003 oral history, Temple emphasized his positive relationship with the press as one of the major advantages of his time as coach of the Tigerbelles. Women's sport received far less attention in the media than men's sports and local reporters' willingness to cover the Tigerbelles' achievements was important publicity for the team. Temple named Fred Russell at the *Nashville Banner* and Raymond Johnson and F.M. Williams at *The Tennessean* as key supporters of his program.<sup>246</sup> In fact, it was Fred Russell who prevented Temple from leaving Tennessee State entirely. In 1968, Temple had just returned from Africa, where he had traveled with the state

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>246</sup> Coach Ed Temple, interview by Rachel Lawson, August 11, 2003, transcript, Nashville Civil Rights Collection, Nashville Metro Archives, Nashville, TN.

department to hold track and field clinics for local boys and girls. When Temple returned to Nashville, he met with the athletic director Howard Gentry and President Walter S. Davis to advocate for improvements. Temple argued that his athletes had "...set world records. They've done everything that you could possibly do, and they still on work-aid. Now it's time for them to get a break." Davis responded that there simply were not enough scholarships outside of basketball and football for any women.<sup>247</sup> Despite Olympic gold medals and world records, Black women athletes were still not as valuable to the university as men's sport. After nearly two decades at Tennessee State and consistent neglect from the administration, Temple had enough.

The administration's consistent neglect, at best, and disdain for, at worst, the women's track program ran counter to its embrace of collegiate sport as a vehicle for Black pride and took a personal toll on personnel like Ed Temple. Temple called up Fred Russell at the *Banner* and told him he was ready to leave. This was not the first time that there had been rumors or offers for him elsewhere. In the 1960 *Sports Illustrated* profile, Heilman had speculated that Temple was tempted to leave for a position at Grambling State University in Louisiana, with better working conditions and better pay. She also speculated that star runners, Wilma Rudolph included, would follow.<sup>248</sup> In 1960, Temple objected to this characterization, saying that he "couldn't have better support here than Dr. W.S. Davis and the administration have given me. He's our best backer, always behind us, 100 percent."<sup>249</sup> By 1968, he was telling Fred Russell he was out the door unless something

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Barbara Heilman, "Like Nothing Else in Tennessee," *Sports Illustrated*, November 14, 1960. <https://vault.si.com/vault/1960/11/14/like-nothing-else-in-tennessee>.

<sup>249</sup> "Temple Critical of Story About A&I Women's Track," November 10, 1960.



changed. Temple felt similar frustrations in 1960, but two consecutive world-class showings still were not enough to elevate women's track to anywhere near the prestige of men's sports. Russell's solution was to put Temple in contact with Buford Ellington, the governor of Tennessee.

A day after calling Fred Russell, Ed Temple met with Governor Ellington. Ellington was shocked to learn the conditions that Temple was working under with no track, no scholarships, and little financial support from the university. As Temple recalled the conversation, Ellington told him "Coach, I don't believe that." Temple replied that it was true. Ellington immediately called Howard Warf, the Commissioner of Education in Tennessee and told him that the governor wanted women's athletic scholarships at Tennessee State. It was more progress than Temple had made in twenty years, and he felt overjoyed: "And it tickled me, when I got back to the campus here, the athletic director, he wouldn't talk to me. The president, his jaws was tight. Everybody's jaws was tight. But I really didn't care, because I got scholarships and we got a new track..."<sup>250</sup> His days of raking out the dirt before the football team practiced were over. The antagonism that Temple remembered from members of the administration indicates clearly that as an advocate for women's sport he was an outsider to the power structures that elevated men's sport as symbolic of not just the university but its hopes for racial equality.

But this anecdote also raises the question of why Governor Ellington intervened so decisively in this issue when the state took little interest in Tennessee State, as an HBCU, or its achievements. Ellington served as governor from 1959-1963 and 1967-1971. Previously, his involvement with Tennessee State had stemmed from the state's response to the Nashville Student

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<sup>250</sup> Coach Ed Temple, interview by Rachel Lawson, August 11, 2003, transcript, Nashville Civil Rights Collection, Nashville Metro Archives, Nashville, TN.

Movement in the late 1950s. In 1959, Governor Ellington had decreed that any student found to be arrested and convicted for their involvement in civil rights protests should be expelled from the university.<sup>251</sup> But by 1968, Ellington was willing to use his considerable influence to improve conditions at an HBCU, prior to any desegregation lawsuit decisions. The dynamic between Temple and Ellington was reminiscent of the dynamic between Jake Gaither, Florida A&M's football coach, and white politicians in state governments.<sup>252</sup> Individual Black men with exceptional status could negotiate within white power structures for individual gains, but not systematic ones. What happened with the Tigerbelles at Tennessee State University prior to Title IX was due to their exceptional achievements and specific relationships between influential men.

By 1968, Tennessee State University had one of the premier women's athletic programs in the world. Prior to 1968, the university was already ahead of the curve simply by offering work-aid grants to women's athletes and offering a competitive program. But after 1968, four years prior to the passage of Title IX, Tennessee State was setting a new bar for women's collegiate sport broadly and particularly for Black women's collegiate sport. However, these gains did not come from an institutional mandate to support women's sport at Tennessee State. The progress at Tennessee State stemmed from Ed Temple's interpersonal connections and willingness to leverage his presence at the school for improvements to the program. This was only possible because of Temple and the Tigerbelles' exceptional record of achievement in domestic and international competition. What the experience of Temple and the Tigerbelles shows is how despite the importance of sport as a proving ground for racial equality, Black women did not command the

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<sup>251</sup> Lovett, *A Touch of Greatness*, 139.

<sup>252</sup> White, *Blood, Sweat & Tears*, 126.

same respect from the Black men leading HBCUs in the mid-twentieth century. While Black women had ways of contributing to the movement, it was not as athletes.

#### **5.4 Negotiating Integration as a Black Institution**

Beginning in the late 1960s, Tennessee State found itself embroiled in a court case assessing the state of racial equality in higher education in Tennessee. While other universities, including the University of Tennessee, were party to this suit, it had greater impact on Tennessee State which found not only the racial composition of its student body, faculty, staff members, and administrators under scrutiny from various bodies, but also its racial identity under attack as retrograde and preventing racial equality. Tennessee State's role and identity as a Black institution had defined its operation for fifty-plus years, both negatively in terms of discriminatory treatment from the state and positively as an incubator for Black community and leadership. From 1968 to the late 1980s, Tennessee State's involvement in the *Geier* lawsuit necessarily impacted all levels of decision-making and these decisions will set the stage for the fate of the Tigerbelles.

Sport did not become a key metric for assessing the racial identity of Tennessee State or the status of desegregation in the state until after the decision to merge the two universities. But the history of this lawsuit and the debates that Tennessee State engaged in during the late 1960s and early 1970s are crucial context for understanding the history of men's and women's collegiate sport in the late 1970s and 1980s, as Title IX also became a factor for the university. Its status as an HBCU had defined Tennessee State and having that identification questioned was a blow to the local Black community, alumni, students, and the administration. Exploring the moment of crisis that the university community found itself in and laying out this unique case of Black and white

institutions merging under the auspices of an HBCU underscores the significance of the university's decisions regarding men's and women's sport in the 1970s and 1980s.

Though the *Geier v. Dunn* lawsuit implicated every public institution of higher education in the state of Tennessee, it had the greatest impact on Tennessee State, the only predominantly Black institution in the state. The initial case centered on the duplication of course offerings already available at Tennessee State at the new University of Tennessee-Nashville campus. The plaintiffs argued that white students could have taken those classes at Tennessee State. Even as the case expanded to address the failure of multiple institutions to desegregate their student bodies, faculties, and staff, Tennessee State bore the brunt of the state's scrutiny and blame for the lack of racial diversity across in Tennessee's higher education. Though Tennessee State had never discriminated against any students—segregation only ran one way—its retention of a majority Black student population and the failure to attract white students was seen as not only a disappointment, but an obstacle to desegregation. After decades where it had been the only option for Black students within the state pursuing higher education, Tennessee State now bore the blame for black students' continued desire to pursue degrees in an environment where they constituted a racial majority.

The case of *Geier v. Dunn* offers an uncommon perspective on the traditional narratives of school integration.<sup>253</sup> Throughout the desegregation process, Tennessee State, as the only Black

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<sup>253</sup> Typical histories of integration document the destruction of Black educational infrastructure in favor of white schools, teachers, and administrators. See Michael Fultz, "The Displacement of Black Educators Post-Brown: An Overview and Analysis," *History of Education Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 11-45; David S. Cecelski, *Along Freedom Road: Hyde County, North Carolina, and the Fate of Black Schools in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of

institution, was held to higher and inequitable standards and, in the wake of the merger with UT-Nashville, asked to abandon its institutional identity for the sake of white students and racial equality. White universities involved in segregation were not expected to attract such a substantial racial minority as to no longer be considered predominantly white. Nationwide, the school integrations initiated by *Brown v. Board of Education* had resulted in a wave of unemployment for Black teachers, principals, and administrators so severe that President Lyndon B. Johnson asked the National Education Association to investigate.<sup>254</sup> But Tennessee State's history is also unique in Judge Frank Gray's to prioritize Tennessee State in the merger and preserve its administration and faculty. While mergers were sometimes used to promote integration in higher education, the preservation of an HBCU was unprecedented. What began as a case asking questions of the major predominantly white institution in the state turned into a referendum on the state of desegregation in higher education and the future of historically Black colleges and universities, with Tennessee State, its students, its administration, and its future squarely in the middle.

This referendum on race in higher education stemmed from the financial situation for higher education in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The University of Tennessee's decision to open an extension center in Nashville came in reaction to the difficulties that many universities were facing by the late 1960s and the particular demographics of Tennessee's population. After the rapid expansion of undergraduate enrollment in the wake of the G.I. Bill and postwar baby boom, enrollment was beginning to slow down by the late 1960s, with the potential to jeopardize

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North Carolina Press, 1994); J. Harvie Wilkinson III, *From Brown to Bakke: The Supreme Court and School Integration, 1954-1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

<sup>254</sup> Fultz, "The Displacement of Black Educators Post-Brown," 22.

university funding. The University of Tennessee system, founded in Knoxville, had an additional campus in Martin, Tennessee, but no significant presence in Tennessee's major urban areas like Memphis, Nashville, or Chattanooga, and thus limited prospects for attracting more students. Accordingly, in 1968 the University of Tennessee opened two new branches in Chattanooga and Nashville. In Chattanooga, the private University of Chattanooga could not compete with the prestige of the UT system and merged to form the present-day UT-Chattanooga.<sup>255</sup> In Nashville, Black students and faculty resisted what they felt were threats to the Black intellectual and cultural community established at Tennessee State.

The four plaintiffs who initiated *Geier v. Dunn* represented a diverse range of interests in Nashville's higher education ecosystem. Rita Sanders Geier, the original plaintiff, was a Black woman on faculty at Tennessee State. She was born and raised in Memphis, attending a segregated high school, before earning her bachelor's degree at Fisk University, a private HBCU in Nashville. In 1968, she was working in the law offices of George Barrett and as an instructor at Tennessee State. For her, the juxtaposition of the cost of the new UT-Nashville Extension Center and the low salaries Tennessee State faculty received were clear markers of continuing segregation in higher education.<sup>256</sup> George Barrett, a white lawyer, agreed to file the initial petition. He had been active with the American Civil Liberties Union in previous cases and received support from the Field Foundation in New York City, which was involved in educational and child welfare issues.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Memo from Starlin Adams to Frederick S. Humphries, November 5, 1976, 6-7, Frederick S. Humphries Collection, Box 1, Folder 17, TSU.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>257</sup> "Historical Development of the Two Universities," 15, Frederick S. Humphries Collection, Box 21, Folder 254, TSU.

Geier was joined in the complaint by Patrick Gilpin, a white instructor at both Tennessee State and UT Nashville, Harold Sweatt, a local Black citizen whose son Phillip was a high schooler in Nashville, and Ernest Terrell, a Black graduate student at Tennessee State. Though the construction of a single extension center was the precipitating event, the suit addressed segregation on a much larger scale and had far larger consequences.

In the initial ruling, the Geier plaintiffs were successful in the large scale but failed in the small scale. The defendants in *Geier v. Dunn* ranged from the Governor of Tennessee to the State Board of Education, the University of Tennessee Board of Trustees, and the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The United States Department of Justice entered as a party to the complaint in July 1968 and called for a statewide plan to desegregate education.<sup>258</sup> Though the District Court judge assigned to the case, Frank Gray Jr., agreed that the state must desegregate, he did not find that the construction of the extension center impeded this goal. This decision hinged on the specific purpose of the extension center. In 1968, the University of Tennessee-Nashville was a night school for continuing education. Its students were mostly white working adults, and it was not a degree-granting institution. Thus, Judge Gray concluded that UT-Nashville was not founded for a racially discriminatory purpose and instead responded to a need in the community. He denied the injunction but ordered the defendants to submit a plan for desegregation by April 1, 1969, with particular attention to Tennessee State University.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Memo from Andrew P. Torrence to Students, Faculty, and Alumni of Tennessee State University, May 30, 1972, 3-4, Andrew P. Torrence Collection, Box 1, Folder 2, TSU.

<sup>259</sup> United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, Appeal from the US District Court for the Middle District of Tennessee, April 13, 1979, 5, Frederick S. Humphries Collection, Box 6, Folder 66, TSU.

Addressing discrimination would thus require intense cooperation between institutions that lacked a history of doing so.

From April 1969, when the first desegregation plan was due, to 1972, when Judge Gray assessed desegregation progress, the focus was on individual, institutional efforts. Though desegregation was a statewide problem, there was no single organizational body which managed education in the state. The University of Tennessee was managed by its own Board of Trustees, while the State Board of Regents (formerly the State Board of Education) oversaw all public community colleges, colleges, and universities in the state, including Tennessee State. The common authority was the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, which was a relatively new organization founded in 1967 and not involved in the day-to-management of campuses. Instead, state desegregation plans focused on policy changes at each individual institution. For Tennessee State, the priority was recruiting white students and faculty. At the University of Tennessee and other predominantly white institutions, the goal was recruiting more Black students and faculty.<sup>260</sup> While these measures did address racial imbalances in higher education, it was not a comprehensive approach, nor did it make substantial progress in achieving equality.

Overall, a lack of clarity about the desired outcomes of desegregation impeded progress. It was unclear whether universities were trying to attract increased racial minorities for their respective institutions or alter the racial character of the university, which would be particularly alarming to the Tennessee State community. In May 1969, George Barrett, the plaintiffs' attorney,

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<sup>260</sup> George E. Barrett and Larry Helm Spalding, Individual Plaintiffs' Critique of State's Plan, May 17, 1969, Rita Sanders, et al, and USA vs. Buford Ellington, et al., Civil Action No. 5077 in the United States District Court for the Middle District of Tennessee, Nashville Division, 3, Andrew P. Torrence Collection, Box 1, Folder 6, TSU.



filed an individual critique of the state plan for desegregation. He pointed to the lack of coordination between the State Board of Regents and Board of Trustees as a fundamental roadblock to integration. For Barrett, the goal was to alter the racial identity of universities, so it was not a matter of attracting white students to a Black university or vice versa but ensuring that all students had equal access to universities. He also thought that Tennessee State faced the greatest difficulties in this regard. Barrett argued that Tennessee State, with its historically Black character, could not attract white students until it met their specific educational needs and was the only school to do so. Otherwise, prejudice against Black institutions would push prospective students elsewhere.<sup>261</sup> Yet, the state plan relied heavily on the assumption that Tennessee State could begin attracting local white students to begin desegregation and as an HBCU, Tennessee State faced increasing scrutiny and criticism for its continued Black identification.

Two narratives emerged about the lack of white students enrolling at Tennessee State. To officials and administrators in the University of Tennessee system, the fault lay with Tennessee State. Dr. Roy Nicks, chancellor of UT-Nashville, called Tennessee State “a dying institution” in need of salvage because of its racial character. Nicks argued that if desegregation was to succeed, Tennessee State needed to abandon its historically Black identity. He cited the school’s declining enrollment from 5,600 to 4,000 students from 1969 to 1970 as evidence of failed efforts.<sup>262</sup> To state officials and University of Tennessee officers, Tennessee State’s history as a Black institution and continuing identification as an HBCU was the primary obstacle in desegregating Nashville.

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Frank Sutherland, “TSU ‘Dying Institution,’ Nicks Says,” *The Tennessean*, June 11, 1970.

For Tennessee State, the University of Tennessee system was responsible for any delays in progress. To administration and faculty, Dr. Nicks' appointment to a chancellorship in June 1970 was part of a troubling trend of upgrades to UT-Nashville. When Judge Gray denied the injunction against the extension center, it was grounded in the fact that UT-Nashville was not degree-granting and thus served a different purpose than Tennessee State. Yet after 1968 the University of Tennessee Board of Trustees increasingly invested in Nashville, funding a new engineering program and appointing a chancellor.<sup>263</sup> This culminated in 1971, when the Board of Trustees voted to promote the University of Tennessee-Nashville to degree-granting status. From 1968 to 1971, the student population of UT-Nashville had also grown from 1800 students to 3500, of whom 89% were white.<sup>264</sup> Though UT-Nashville still functioned primarily as an evening school for working adults, its status as a four-year, degree-granting institution meant that it now replicated courses available at Tennessee State and weakened its primary defense against the 1968 injunction. Tennessee State's already difficult task of attracting local white school students was made more difficult with increasing competition from the University of Tennessee and did not reflect a cooperative spirit in the pursuit of desegregation.

Even by other metrics, the burden of desegregation placed on Tennessee State was significantly higher than that of its predominantly white counterparts. For example, one of the major targets for desegregation was increasing minority faculty. From 1971 to 1972, Tennessee State increased the percentage of nonblack faculty from 19.3% to 25.4% and filled 15 of 27

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<sup>263</sup> "'Integration Will Suffer: TSU Faculty,'" *Nashville Banner*, June 1, 1970.

<sup>264</sup> United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, Appeal from the US District Court for the Middle District of Tennessee, April 13, 1979, 21, Frederick S. Humphries Collection, Box 6, Folder 66, TSU.

vacancies with white faculty. Comparatively, in 1973, white public institutions in the state had 2.1% minority faculty. Tennessee State efforts to recruit nonblack students faced similar scrutiny. From 1969 to 1973, Tennessee State increased its nonblack enrollment percentage from 44 students to 308, or 6.9%. At predominantly white institutions, the number of black students rose from 3,869 to 8,158 or 7.5% of the total student population.<sup>265</sup> Because Tennessee State was the only public HBCU, it bore the responsibility for matching desegregation numbers from multiple universities, most of which had larger enrollments. It became increasingly clear in the early 1970s that there was a fundamental tension between Tennessee State students', faculty, and administrators' desire to maintain the school's historically Black identity and the standards for desegregation being upheld by the district court.

Four years into the lawsuit, the lack of progress in desegregating higher education resulted in hints about increasingly radical solutions. In February 1972, Judge Gray singled out Nashville, and Tennessee State again, as the heart of desegregation issues in Tennessee. After reviewing progress reports, Judge Gray called for a desegregation plan that would substantially desegregate the faculty and the allocation of campus programs which would "ensure, in the opinion of defendants, a substantial 'white presence' on the campus." The court also raised for the first time the possibility of a merger between Tennessee State and UT-Nashville, under the control of either the Tennessee Board of Education, the Board of Trustees for UT, or a combination.<sup>266</sup> Judge Gray

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<sup>265</sup> "Progress Report on Implementation of Desegregation Plans," Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 3, Frederick S. Humphries Collection, Box 19, Folder 229, TSU.

<sup>266</sup> Memo from Andrew P. Torrence to Students, Faculty, and Alumni of Tennessee State University, May 30, 1972, 8, Andrew P. Torrence Collection, Box 1, Folder 2, TSU.

charged Andrew Torrence, president of Tennessee State, John K. Folger, president of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, and Roy S. Nicks, chancellor of UT-Nashville, with creating a plan for establishing a white presence at Tennessee State.<sup>267</sup> In a letter to Tennessee State students, faculty, and alumni, President Torrence noted the “awkward” position the university found itself in.<sup>268</sup> By court order, Tennessee State was to increase its white presence on campus, even as its own priority remained preserving its racial identity. But now that the possibility of a merger had been seriously raised, debate turned to what the merger would look like and, more importantly, who would control it.

In 1977, Judge Gray made the unprecedented decision to incorporate a predominantly white satellite campus of the state’s flagship university into a small, historically Black university. While the decision to dissolve UT-Nashville into Tennessee State did forestall one very real possibility of Tennessee State’s disappearance, the history of prior desegregation efforts and the tenor of debate around Tennessee State’s identity as an HBCU previewed the years to come. Tennessee State’s racial identity and proud, avowed Blackness stood at the heart of debates about desegregation and integration in Tennessee. And as the university acclimated to its new white students and faculties and fielded calls to become racially neutral, sport—as that potent symbol of Blackness and pride—became a central point of debate. This history has documented the tumultuous events of the desegregation lawsuit and its impact upon students, faculty, and administrators. It underscores the significance of the challenges facing the university and the

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<sup>267</sup> Frank Sutherland, “Panel Task: TSU ‘White Presence,’” *The Tennessean*, March 14, 1972.

<sup>268</sup> Memo from Andrew P. Torrence to Students, Faculty, and Alumni of Tennessee State University, May 30, 1972, 1, Andrew P. Torrence Collection, Box 1, Folder 2, TSU.

weight of its potential responses. And at a time when Tennessee State needed proof its achievements and potential, it turned not to its world champion Tigerbelles, but the Tigers.

## 5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that collegiate sport played a vital role in the formation of Tennessee State's public-facing identity and contributed to the nurturing of Black skill and leadership. However, the university administration's celebration of collegiate sport fell along deeply gendered lines. While the men's basketball and football teams received ample financial support for the domestic achievements and recognition as symbols of Black achievement, the women's track & field team remained an afterthought. The evolution of the Tennessee State Tigerbelles, under the dedicated care of coach Edward Temple, spoke to the university's desire to include physical activity as part of a well-rounded curriculum but the athletes' skill soon outstripped the university's financial support. Even as Tennessee State women competed on behalf of the United States in the Olympic Games and other international competitions, the university president refused to offer scholarships, increased compensation for Temple, or updated facilities. Any improvements for women's collegiate sport at Tennessee State stemmed from Temple's own ability to leverage his personal fame and connections and garner community support. By the end of the 1960s, the Tigerbelles had reached the height of their athletic achievements and Temple had secured some steps towards better treatment. But the introduction of the *Geier v. Dunn* desegregation lawsuit soon brought new pressures to bear on the administration and deepened disparities in the treatment of men's and women's collegiate sport at Tennessee State, even as Title IX's mandate for gender equality went into effect.

The history of collegiate sport at Tennessee State University sheds light on the ways that segregation and desegregation have in turn shaped the meaning of sport and the calculations of who was allowed to participate and succeed. Just as segregation was integral to the establishment of an avowed football culture in predominantly white universities of the south, so did HBCUs develop their own sporting communities that venerated the masculinity and achievement of men's football as representative of Black talent and equality. Though Black leaders and HBCUs had a more permissive attitude towards Black women participating in sport and could even take pride in their accomplishments, these women were still—with few exceptions—not considered as representative for the highest potential of what Black Americans could achieve. And as the ongoing pressure to desegregate and the merger with UT-Nashville increased pressure on the administration to proclaim its success and sustained Blackness, the Tigerbelles fell even further to the wayside in favor of the less successful and less notable men's football team. In the new world of women's collegiate sport that was emerging in the 1970s and 1980s, their previous dominance could not be sustained.

## **6.0 Under Fire: Blackness, Gender and Collegiate Sport in the Face of Integration, 1972-1992**

### **6.1 Introduction**

With a new track set for construction and enough scholarships for Temple to continue fielding a competitive roster, the future looked bright for the Tigerbelles in 1968. Theoretically, the passage of Title IX a few years later could have bolstered the program even further, forcing Tennessee State to invest in its already world-class women's athletic program to the same degree it invested in its men's sports. But the emergence of the desegregation lawsuit *Geier v. Dunn* in 1968 preempted any potential improvements and, once combined with Title IX's mandates in 1972, spelled the beginning of the end for the dominance of the Tigerbelles. As the university struggled to adapt to the fiscal and logistical challenges posed by integrating with UT-Nashville, university administrators chose to increase support for men's sport as a symbol of the university's commitment to its historically Black identity. The lack of investment in the Tigerbelles, combined with new competition from predominantly white universities now developing their own women's track & field programs, starved Ed Temple and his athletes of the resources needed to remain competitive.

This chapter argues that understanding the racial dynamics of Title IX and particularly its history at historically Black institutions can only come from analyzing the ecosystem that surrounded Black women's sport—their own teams, their athletic departments, their universities, and their competitors. Though the story of the Tigerbelles reflects common narratives of sporting integration in which the loss of talent diminished Black institutions, it also demonstrates how

Tennessee State's own prioritization of men's sport—shaped by the threat of desegregation—had equally deleterious effects. Present-day concerns about the low numbers of Black women who compete or work outside of a few overrepresented sports can be traced back to the implementation of Title IX. Though designed only to create opportunities for women's sport, its implementation within the rapidly changing landscape of higher education had inescapable racial dimensions as well, that resulted in opportunities for the most talented Black women at predominantly white institutions but contributed to the decline of Black institutional titans like Tennessee State.

The institutional history of Tennessee State is as fundamental to understanding the gradual dissolution of the Tigerbelles in the wake of 1972 as the national dynamics of collegiate sport that played out after Title IX. Though the entrance of well-funded predominantly white universities like the University of Tennessee did alter the dynamics of Tennessee State's relatively unchallenged recruiting process, the decline of the Tigerbelles can also be traced to an ongoing lack of institutional support. That lack of support stemmed both from a clear bias against women's sport in favor of men's sport that Ed Temple called out repeatedly and the new pressures that the UT-Nashville merger placed upon Tennessee State. As the foundational aspect of Tennessee State's identity—its status as an HBCU—came under intense scrutiny, its men's sports teams became a touchstone and a point of debate in the arguments over what racial equality in higher education quite literally looked like, leaving the Tigerbelles languishing.

This chapter is a first effort to fill in the gap that historians of Title IX have gestured towards but never adequately explained regarding Title IX's racial dynamics. For the past twenty years, scholars and cultural commentators have acknowledged that fewer Black women participate



in and benefit from collegiate sport than white women.<sup>269</sup> Even Cornell West, in his writing on the Tigerbelles in the Cold War context, briefly mentioned that Title IX was a likely culprit in the decline of the Tigerbelles' dynasty but devotes little analytic space to fleshing out its dimensions.<sup>270</sup> This chapter also contributes to the small literature on HBCU women's sport, though most focuses on contemporary rather than historical experiences of Black women in collegiate sport.<sup>271</sup> It draws on the theory and scholarship of Black feminist intellectuals on the intersection of race and gender to think critically about the overlap of desegregation and gender equality in the careers of and opportunities for Black women at Tennessee State.<sup>272</sup> Understanding

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<sup>269</sup> For media and news reporting see Green, "Recruiting Women of Color in Sports,"; "Women and Sports," 206; Abney and Richey, "Opportunities for Minority Women in Sport—The Impact of Title IX," 56-59; Butler and Lopiano, *The Women's Sports Foundation Report: Title IX and Race in Intercollegiate*, 10; Rhoden, "Black and White Women Far From Equal Under Title IX"; Ma and Brunt, "Title IX: Strides for women of color in sports lag under law." As previously mentioned, Suggs, *A Place on the Team* is most attentive to the racial disparities but offers little analytic space to addressing its causes.

<sup>270</sup> West, "The Tennessee State Tigerbelles: Cold Warriors of the Track," 69. West speculates about the dual impact of integration and Title IX but offers only a brief sentence about white universities and state funding for context.

<sup>271</sup> For scholarship on HBCU women's sport see Hawkins, Cooper, Carter-Francique, and J Cavil, eds., *The Athletic Experience at Historically Black Colleges and Universities*, particularly chapters 3 and 6 for contemporary perspectives; Dees, "Do the Right Thing," 219-290; Jeremy Cheeks and Akilah R. Carter-Francique, "HBCUs versus HWCUs: A Critical Examination of Institutional Distancing Between Collegiate Athletic Programs," *Race, Gender & Class* 22, nos. 1-2 (2015): 23-35; Dees, "Access or Interest," 1-13. The major exception to the contemporary work on HBCU women's sport is Rita Liberti's work on Bennett College, Liberti, "'We Were Ladies,'" 567-584.

<sup>272</sup> See King, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousnesses," 42-72; Taylor, "The Historical Evolution of Black Feminist Theory," 234-253; Dill, "The Dialectics of Black Womanhood," 543-555; Hill, "Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought," 745-773; Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," 139-166.

the history of the Black women athletes of Tennessee State requires grappling with how their sex and race intersected with the histories and contemporary realities of collegiate sport. These dynamics resulted in major changes to competitive sport for Black women, opening up new avenues and access for support, at the cost of the programs which had nurtured them for decades when opportunities were much harder to come by.

The chapter begins by establishing that the decision to institute a merger became a referendum on Tennessee State's identity as an HBCU. The UT-Tennessee State merger was the central mechanism for desegregation in Nashville. Some parties argued that if the merged institution remained identifiably Black that it would be an impediment to integration, because of assumptions about HBCU inferiority and a lack of appeal for white students. And because Tennessee State's Blackness was a central issue, its visibility as a Black institution came under heavy scrutiny. The rosters and schedules of men's basketball and football at Tennessee State came to represent the university's racial identity and progress towards desegregation, or the lack thereof. The chapter also begins with this debate around Blackness, desegregation, and men's sport to represent how dominant the issue was for the administration and how little women's sport factored into these conversations. The chapter then examines the decline of the Tigerbelles from the mid-1970s onward, looking at how the university's administration decisions starved the program of the resources it needed to compete and the external pressures of predominantly white universities responding to Title IX disrupted traditional recruiting practices. It concludes with a reflection on how the narrative of Title IX changes when the subjects of inquiry are Black women and Black institutions. Though Title IX was a transformative law for women in sport, Black and white, the inequalities it purported to address and the benefits it bestowed all fell along preexisting, unequal racial dynamics.

## 6.2 Athletics and Perceptions of Racial Identity in Integration

As the *Geier* lawsuit moved towards a merger as the solution to the desegregation of higher education in Nashville, the increased pressure on Tennessee State's identity as an HBCU intensified in the 1970s. Collegiate sport, long considered a valuable symbol of the university's Blackness and pride, became a critical metric in evaluating the university's progress or lack of towards integration with UT-Nashville. The racial composition of the football team came to signify the university's failure to retain white students, faculty, and staff. The administration's subsequent decision to invest heavily in men's sport in the late 1970s and early 1980s showed its commitment to operating as an HBCU and to using sport as a highly public venue for exhibiting Black achievement. But the veneration of sport as a symbol of pride in the context of the merger did not extend to women's sport and the Tigerbelles.

By 1977, Judge Gray had decided that nearly ten years of efforts were insufficient to desegregate higher education in Nashville and more aggressive measures would be necessary. The defendants had filed a motion for summary judgment in 1976, urging dismissal of the case on account of the progress made. In particular, the white enrollment at Tennessee State had increased from 10% to 12.2% from 1974 to 1975.<sup>273</sup> Judge Gray denied the motion, stating that the racial balances between Tennessee State and UT-Nashville were not sufficient to prove desegregation had been achieved. After months of hearings, on January 31, 1977, Judge Gray ordered the merger

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<sup>273</sup> United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, Appeal from the US District Court for the Middle District of Tennessee, Decided and Filed April 13, 1979, 12, Frederick S. Humphries Collection, Box 6, Folder 66, TSU.

of the University of Tennessee-Nashville into Tennessee State University by July 1, 1980.<sup>274</sup> For the Tennessee State community, it was a victory. For the University of Tennessee system, it was an outrage.

Proponents of the University of Tennessee blamed Tennessee State for any shortcomings in desegregation and placed the blame on its continuing identification as an HBCU. In a statement released the day of the verdict, UT-Nashville Chancellor Smith praised UT-Nashville's record of desegregation and said that no other higher education institution in the state could match its achievements.<sup>275</sup> The university counsel for the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, Thomas Wardlaw Steele, had stronger words in a letter to UT-Knoxville president Edward Boling. Steele argued that the court failed to set a standard for desegregation in the long-range plan: "The only conclusion to be reached from a reading of the opinion is that he condemned the Nashville area situation and ordered a merger because TSU was still predominantly black."<sup>276</sup> This formulation posited that UT's status as a PWI was as attractive to Black students as TSU's status as an HBCU was unappealing to white students. Despite these objections, the course had been set. The University of Tennessee-Nashville ceased operation within three years and became the downtown campus for Tennessee State University.

Judge Gray's 1977 decision set aside twenty years of precedent of how mergers typically affected Black and white educational institutions, at the primary, secondary, and postsecondary levels. Typically, these mergers meant that Black faculty and administrators were left behind as

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<sup>274</sup> "History of the Desegregation Case," February 1, 1977, Humphries Collection, Box 9, Folder 94, TSU.

<sup>275</sup> Statement from Charles E. Smith, January 31, 1977, 1-2, Humphries Collection, Box 2, Folder 19, TSU.

<sup>276</sup> Steele to Boling, February 2, 1977, 1-5, Humphries Collection, Box 2, Folder 19, TSU.

Black students entered predominantly white schools. Now, Tennessee State would remain intact while UT-Nashville's administration lost its standing. A merger of this magnitude had never been attempted in higher education before and has not been ordered since. It appears that Judge Gray had learned from the pitfalls of previous integration cases in his decision to preserve a Black institution.<sup>277</sup> But for Tennessee State University, the work was far from finished. Prior to the merger, the university heard arguments that its racial character was preventing white students from attending. With the potential addition of thousands of white students through the merger, the pressures to abandon its historically Black identity only increased.

Once Judge Gray declared Tennessee State would become an integrated university, debate erupted between those who believed Tennessee State should embrace a new identity as a colorblind institution and those who believed it should remain an HBCU, even after integration. That division fell along expected political lines, with former UT-Nashville and UT system administrators advocating for a new racial identity and Tennessee State faculty, students, administrators, and alumni arguing for an expanded, but still historically Black, Tennessee State University. Though the State Board of Regents appointed TSU's then-president Frederick Humphries to lead the merged university, advocates of a colorblind Tennessee State persisted.

As observers from the Nashville community and beyond weighed in on the complicated merger process, athletics became a highly contested symbol of the university's identity and a metric for measuring progress. A university is a vast institution and defining what made it Black or white was reflected in people. These discussions were apparent throughout the merger process,

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<sup>277</sup> See Fultz, "Displacement of Black Educators," 11-45 for a succinct explanation of the negative effects of integration on Black educators.

as progress was assessed through racial statistics about enrollment, promotion, and hiring. But in particular, collegiate sport teams, including both coaches and players, have functioned as public-facing icons of the university.<sup>278</sup> For both predominantly white and historically Black colleges and universities, athletics have been a way to attract positive attention, engage alumni support, and fundraise. Colleges and universities have also weathered a fair number of scandals stemming from admissions and eligibility issues, but overall schools continue to invest millions of dollars in building successful programs. And in the case of both schools, men's collegiate sport and football in particular had been instrumental in creating ideal masculinities and establishing racial pride and identity.

In the implementation and subsequent assessments of the merger, Tennessee State's sports teams represented a microcosm of the school's progress, or lack thereof, in integrating its campus. However, Tennessee State's relationship with athletics was complicated, as it was for many other schools. In a 1977 letter to the chancellor of the State Board of Regents, President Humphries wrote that athletics was the only area in which Tennessee State ever received positive media attention. He argued that "progress...has been stymied by a decade of controversy which the media have used to induce doubt and lack of support for the University."<sup>279</sup> For Tennessee State, the

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<sup>278</sup> Odenkirk, "Intercollegiate Athletics: Big Business or Sport?", 66. Odenkirk's work highlighted in 1981 the immense amount of money at stake in collegiate sport and the consequent close involvement of university presidents in decision-making. Nearly 40 years later in a 2017 article, Cooper et al term the economics and popularity of collegiate sport "unprecedented." Joseph N. Cooper, Tiffany J. Davis, and Shaun Dougherty, "Not So Black and White: A Multi-Divisional Exploratory Analysis of Male Student-Athletes' Experiences at National College Athletic Association (NCAA) Institutions," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 34, no. 1 (2017): 59.

<sup>279</sup> Humphries to Nicks, July 27, 1977, 10, Frederick S. Humphries Collection, Box 2, Folder 18, TSU.

public nature of athletics generated goodwill for the school, but also reinforced an image of the university that did not recognize its academic achievements, a common issue for HBCUs. The administration's desire to remain an HBCU was at odds with the goals of white observers to see the merged institution be racially neutral in character, renewing the university's desire for sport to be a potent symbol of Black pride.

Despite pressure from the University of Tennessee community, Tennessee State made its goal of maintaining a Black identity clear early in the merger process. On February 15, 1977, two weeks after Judge Gray ordered the merger, the Tennessee State University task force on the merger published its "Principles of Merger" document. The principles emphasized that the merger should "lead to an expanded TSU—a university with a history and symbolic meaning to the black community." Cecil M. Ryan, chairman of the Task Force, also emphasized that "this [was] not inconsistent with desegregation in higher education." Ryan drew a comparison to UT-Knoxville's desegregation, where desegregation had not destroyed "its historical and symbolic meaning to its constituency which has supported UTK prior to desegregation."<sup>280</sup> His argument was born out only a few days later at a State Board of Regents meeting on the merger.

Tennessee State alumni and students, state legislators, and local activists all publicly offered their support for maintaining a historically Black university. Rubin Perry, president of the Tennessee State national alumni organization, and Paula Rucker, president of the Nashville alumni chapter, emphasized the historic nature of the merger and requested that the current Tennessee State administration remain in charge. Kenneth Hawkins, president of the Tennessee State

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<sup>280</sup> "Tennessee State University Task Force, "Principles of Merger," February 15, 1977, 1-2, Frederick S. Humphries Collection, Box 2, Folder 19, TSU.

University Student Government Association, echoed their calls and presented a petition signed by the undergraduate student population. The petition explicitly demanded that Tennessee State “retains for all citizens of the State its cultural aspects and character.” State Representative C.B. Robinson, chairman of the Tennessee General Assembly’s Black caucus, called for state support in allowing Tennessee State to become a comprehensive regional university in league with UT-Knoxville or Memphis State University. The most ominous call for support came from Dr. Charles Kimbrough, president of the Nashville NAACP chapter, who warned against the removal of Black faculty or staff from the school to achieve desegregation in other parts of the state.<sup>281</sup> The State Board of Regents’ decision to keep Humphries as president thus satisfied the Black community and continued the trend of defying the usual patterns of desegregation which dismantled Black institutions.

But this decision also served as ammunition to those who believed integration was not possible if Tennessee State remained historically Black. After the State Board of Regents announced the decision to retain Humphries, the backlash was quick. A letter from Rhea Bowers, a member of the UT-Nashville Student Council and of a merger subcommittee, to the State Board of Regent’s merger implementation committee exemplified the colorblind position. Bowers wrote that “Dr. Humphries is a nationally recognized spokesman for the survival and enhancement of black colleges, and especially TSU, a posture which directly conflicts with the order of the court.” For Bowers and other supporters of UT-Nashville, the existence of a Black college constituted segregation and the Humphries decision thus completely negated the intent of Judge Gray’s order.

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<sup>281</sup> Statements presented to the State Board of Regents Special Meeting, February 17, 1977, Frederick S. Humphries Collection, Box 10, Folder 107, TSU.



Bowers concluded her letter by saying she did not think that the new president necessarily had to be white, only that the president should not be selected because of his identification with Tennessee State.<sup>282</sup> Though the merger was still planned, as evidenced by the numerous subcommittees committed to its development, dissent remained a prominent part of the process.

However, attempts to revoke the merger order ultimately proved unsuccessful. In 1979, the appeal filed against Judge Gray's order was denied by a panel of three judges in the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit. The decision came down 2-1, with Circuit Judge Engel providing the dissenting opinion. While Judge Engel agreed that higher education in Tennessee was segregated and that the presence of UT-Nashville did impede Tennessee State's progress, he disagreed that the merger was the appropriate solution because the issue lay with citizens making free choices about where to apply to college. Like Rhea Bowers, Judge Engel believed that Tennessee State's retention of its Black identity created an impediment to desegregation. However, Engel characterized his assessment as compassionate. He wrote that "Unfortunately, this factor has a strong deterrent effect upon its attractiveness to white applications," and that he remained sympathetic to the university and its supporters.<sup>283</sup> Though the dissidents' arguments failed in stalling the merger, they were prescient in predicting the problems that would plague Tennessee State in the 1980s and ultimately lead to the merger's failure.

Though the merger was proceeding, and Tennessee State remained the dominant institution, university administrators were aware that their own desire to claim Blackness as a point

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<sup>282</sup> Bowers to Martin, January 25, 1979, 1-2, Frederick S. Humphries Collection, Box 3 Folder 32, TSU.

<sup>283</sup> Judge Engel, Dissenting Opinion, 31-41, Appeal from the US District Court for the middle District of Tennessee, April 13, 1979, Frederick S. Humphries Collection, Box 6, Folder 66, TSU.

of pride conflicted with white perceptions of HBCUs as inferior. In 1980, a Tennessee State report on the issues that would face the university in the 1980s cited the merger as a central concern. In addition to the logistical issues accompanying the joining of two distinct student bodies, faculties, administrators, and physical campuses, the report highlighted identity as a key issue. The commission had found that unlike other universities, Tennessee State did not just serve the local geographic community, but also the broader Black community. It also argued that though the legal obligation by virtue of segregation to that community was gone, the university's moral obligation to serve minority and disadvantaged populations would remain intact. But to do so, commission chairman James H. Reeves wrote that "the badge of inferiority which is associated with blackness affects the public's perception of the value of the Tennessee State University degree" had to be changed.<sup>284</sup> This conclusion mirrored what Rhea Bowers and Judge Engel had written, that Tennessee State's continued Blackness was an obstacle to its ability to attract white students. While Bowers and others saw the solution as disengaging from Tennessee State's historically Black past, Tennessee State administrators fought to change perceptions about Blackness.

Amidst recommendations about management styles and academic programs, the merger commission targeted athletics as a way of changing perceptions. The commission's Recommendation #11 read that "Athletic programs should be strengthened by scheduling teams

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<sup>284</sup> "Report of the Commission on Issues for the Eighties," Tennessee State University, May 10, 1980, 2, 24-26, Frederick S. Humphries Collection, Box 18, Folder 217, TSU.

more interesting to the entire Nashville community.”<sup>285</sup> Though it was the only recommendation focused on athletics, it referenced a long history of Black collegiate football and the current problems facing the Tennessee State athletic program. The dilemma lay between what generated revenue for Tennessee State and the demands being made by both administrators and organizations like the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Games scheduled against other historically Black colleges attracted the most spectators, and thus revenue. But in order to meet requirements to compete as a NCAA Division I-A program, Tennessee State needed to play other Division I-A schools, none of which were Black.

To further reinforce its commitment to using sport as a symbol of Black ability, Tennessee State invested in access to white sporting communities. In the 1977-1978 academic year, even with all the other expenses and concerns in the university, Tennessee State had elected to pursue a Division I-A football classification amidst NCAA restructurings. It was the only HBCU in the division and required a considerable expansion of athletic offerings within the university. Division I-A status required eight male varsity sports to be offered in addition to the four already existing programs.<sup>286</sup> In 1979, Tennessee State was still the only Black school in Division I-A football and the chairman of the Athletics Committee reported they could not get other I-A schools to schedule matches against them.<sup>287</sup> Historian Derrick White observed that many predominantly white schools refused to schedule competitive Black programs for fear of losing prior to integration. To

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<sup>285</sup> Report of the Commission on Issues for the Eighties,” Tennessee State University, May 10, 1980, 23, Frederick S. Humphries Collection, Box 18, Folder 217, TSU.

<sup>286</sup> Tennessee State University Annual Report 1977-1978, 30, Frederick S. Humphries Collection, Box 17, Folder 201, TSU.

<sup>287</sup> Adams to Lewis, February 20, 1979, Frederick S. Humphries Collection, Box 1, Folder 13, TSU.

this day, Tennessee State has never played the University of Tennessee in football.<sup>288</sup> But in order to maintain Division I-A status, Tennessee State needed to have 60% of its men's football schedule and 85% of its men's basketball schedule feature divisional opponents, all predominantly white universities.<sup>289</sup> Athletics scheduling thus became heavily scrutinized as TSU opponents became a shorthand for desegregation. The basketball and football schedules exemplified the failures of integration that the larger university experienced, as well as the individual, rather than institutional approach, to athletic integration.

Internal memos from Tennessee State administrators in the early 1980s reveal their ongoing concern with athletics and integration. According to Ed LeJeune, an administrator in Tennessee State's continuing education program, the issues in attracting white enrollment stemmed "from the general perception that this is a black university... particularly encouraged by (1) various comments in the media...and (2) the extensive, well-deserved exposure given to the TSU sports program vividly illustrating to skeptical whites that all the athletes are black." LeJeune concluded that the university should refrain from calling itself Black and recruit some white athletes to address this problem.<sup>290</sup> LeJeune was correct that Tennessee State had few white collegiate athletes. The basketball team had signed its first white player, Russ Wingo Jr., in 1972.<sup>291</sup> A report on the racial composition of student groups from 1982-83 reveals that there was one white student participating in each of swimming, golf, tennis, band, and jazz ensemble, and

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<sup>288</sup> White, *Blood, Sweat & Tears*, 6-7.

<sup>289</sup> Adams to Lewis, February 20, 1979, Frederick S. Humphries Collection, Box 1, Folder 13, TSU.

<sup>290</sup> LeJeune to Cozy, April 1, 1981, Frederick S. Humphries Collection, Box 14, Folder 147, TSU.

<sup>291</sup> Mike Organ, "Tennessee State's first white basketball player Russ Wingo Jr. dies," *The Tennessean*, February 16, 2019.

two in choir. There were no white students on the rosters for men's and women's basketball, men's and women's track, and football, out of 471 students.<sup>292</sup> Tennessee State's sport teams were indeed representative of a historically Black institution.

By September 1981, Tennessee State finally had to admit defeat in its pursuit of Division I-A status in the NCAA. Local news coverage of the divisional switch claimed it was not a matter of talent, but instead still the issue of scheduling. The *Metropolitan Weekly* sports desk claimed that schools refused to schedule Tennessee State for fear of embarrassment, but also pointed to the growing impact of integration. Like Ed Temple faced with his Tigerbelles, white universities had begun recruiting Black players in earnest by the late 1970s and by the early 1980s, and the effects were being felt in the difficulties in recruiting "Black blue-chippers."<sup>293</sup> Though Tennessee State never returned to Division I-A classification, numerous attempts to do so were made throughout the 1980s. State Senator Avon Williams of Nashville proposed a bill that would require white universities such as UT-Knoxville, Eastern Tennessee, and Memphis State to schedule matches against Tennessee State, but it never passed.<sup>294</sup> These efforts to elevate Tennessee State men's sport to the highest levels of collegiate sport reflected the decades-long veneration of football and basketball as synonymous with the university's pride and racial identity. The project was inextricably linked to the university's moment of crisis concerning the merger and desegregation and mirrored its faltering.

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<sup>292</sup> Racial Composition of Students Groups at Tennessee State University, 1982-1983, Frederick S. Humphries Collection, Box 4, Folder 46, TSU.

<sup>293</sup> "TSU Confident of Return to Division I-A," *Metropolitan Weekly*, September 1981.

<sup>294</sup> Associated Press, "TSU opponents bill deferred in Senate," *The Tennessean*, February 27, 1986.

Just as its commitment to the NCAA had not resulted in an integrated playing schedule, by the early 1980s it seemed clear that the merger had not resulted in a racially integrated Tennessee State. In 1982, George Barrett, the attorney involved in the original *Geier v. Dunn* lawsuit, filed a petition to declare the merger a failure and Tennessee State resegregated. Though Barrett considered the whole state to have failed in its mission, primarily due to unclear goals and insufficient leadership, he pinpointed the issues in Nashville on Tennessee State's continued existence as a Black institution. Barrett wrote that "the present administration of TSU appears to have confused the Court's concern that the integrity of TSU not be destroyed with the preservation of the university's predominantly black character." He argued that because the State Board of Regents let Tennessee State make its own decisions regarding desegregation, the university prioritized its racial character over retaining white faculty or administrators or improving their students' academic performance. In a 1979 self-study, 27% of faculty and administration and 34% of students disagreed or disagreed strongly with the statement that Tennessee State maintained high academic standards. Barrett also pointed to the low retention rate for former UT-Nashville students or employees, and that the university had a higher percentage of Black administrators than prior to the merger. Finally, he highlighted the Tennessee State football schedule, which had only one non-Black opponent.<sup>295</sup> Athletics, despite its status as an extracurricular activity constituting a minor percentage of the university student population, was held as significant metrics on school-wide faculty or student statistics.

As the desegregation case returned to court in 1984, because of the lack of progress post-merger, attention remained on athletics. Dr. Wayne Brown, executive director of the Tennessee

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<sup>295</sup> George Barrett and Michael J. Passino, Petition, 1982, 8, 39-40, 59-61.

Higher Education Commission, articulated the position that the racial image of Tennessee State was projected in the community by three major features: the student body, the university president, and the athletic program.<sup>296</sup> In the same court action, in response to his own set of interrogatories, Frederick S. Humphries again emphasized that Tennessee State had attempted to schedule more predominantly white institutions in athletic competitions as part of the school's bid to compete in NCAA Division I-A, but ultimately failed.<sup>297</sup> Tennessee State's men's football team and schedule was a microcosm of the university's struggles to reconcile its historically Black identity and its desire to improve and expand itself in the face of white opposition.

In effect, the 1984 court mediation process admitted the 1977 merger order had failed and directly challenged Tennessee State's Black identity. Judge Thomas Wiseman, taking over from Judge Gray, wrote in his decision that "it is still possible to identify TSU as a black school by reference to its student body, the racial composition of its teachers and staff, the quality of its school buildings and equipment, and the schedules of its athletic teams." Wiseman definitively ruled that Tennessee State had resegregated, citing the rise in percentage of Black freshmen enrolled full-time from 69.7% in 1979 to 90.2% in 1983. The only remedy, in his eyes, was to achieve mathematical equality. Wiseman's decree set an objective of at least 50% white faculty and administration and 50% white, full-time undergraduates by 1989. There were no similar benchmarks set for predominantly white universities in Tennessee, though Judge Wiseman did

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<sup>296</sup> Response to Interrogatories, Dr. Wayne Brown, 1984, 1-3, Frederick S. Humphries Collection, Box 9, Folder 89, TSU.

<sup>297</sup> Response to Interrogatories, Dr. Frederick Humphries, 1984, 6-7, Frederick S. Humphries Collection, Box 9, Folder 89, TSU.

admonish their inadequate progress. Wiseman also noted that Tennessee State students and Black community leaders continued to advocate for Tennessee State's Black identity. He was disappointed that they did not understand what he termed "the paradoxical inconsistency of this position."<sup>298</sup>

Despite Judge Wiseman's decree, there was little change in the racial identity of Tennessee State. A letter to Tennessee's assistant attorney general in 1989 lists the numerous deviations from Wiseman's 1984 Stipulation of Settlement. Of the 32 faculty positions posted at Tennessee State, 25 had been filled with Black hires. Tennessee State still referred to itself as a Black university in official university publications and celebrated Black College Day.<sup>299</sup> Though Tennessee State had finally affiliated with a collegiate sport conference, the predominantly white Ohio Valley Conference in 1986, most of its revenue still came from games against other historically Black schools.<sup>300</sup> Its conference matches against other white schools did little to attract attention or revenue. Finally, the Supreme Court ruled in the 1992 case *United States v. Fordice* that the racial identity of a university was not a constitutional violation nor an obstacle to integration. States like Tennessee had a duty to eliminate the vestiges of dual systems of segregation, not just administer racially neutral policies. In the 1990s and 2000s, the parties of *Geier v. Dunn* entered a mediation process that defined concrete objectives for each institution as well as clear budget expectations. *Geier v. Dunn* was officially resolved until 2006, when Judge Wiseman granted a final notice for

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<sup>298</sup> Memorandum and Order, Judge Thomas A. Wiseman, *Geier v. Alexander*, 1984, 4-5, 7, Frederick S. Humphries Collection, Box 9, Folder 90, TSU.

<sup>299</sup> Norris to Modisher, March 7, 1989, 1-3, Otis L. Floyd Collection, Box 2, Folder 20, TSU.

<sup>300</sup> Tom Wood, "TSU presses rotation schedule," *The Tennessean*, October 14, 1990.



dismissal and declared that higher education in Tennessee had officially been desegregated.<sup>301</sup> Tennessee State remained an HBCU.

Tennessee State's collegiate athletic program reflected the tumultuous years of the desegregation process before and after the merger. Though the school had enjoyed success in the past, moving from historically Black opponents to participating in larger, predominantly white organizations was an expensive and ultimately failed venture in the 1970s and 1980s. Tennessee State could not schedule the needed opponents or challenge perceptions of the school's racial identity through athletics. Student-athletes were only a fraction of the student-population, but the emphasis that colleges and universities had put on intercollegiate athletics elevated their importance to Tennessee State's identity on a much larger scale. Tennessee State administrators' focus on men's athletics is also clear considering the external focus on the composition of their football schedule and the racial composition of their men's teams. Tennessee State wanted to retain its Black identity while engaging with white opponents and succeeding in a predominantly white organization like the NCAA, just as it did in the broader struggle to merge with UT-Nashville. While Tennessee State's Blackness did persist, so did its failure to enter these white spaces.

But while its focus on men's sport is understandable in the context of the merger and external critics pulling its focus back to football, reinserting women's sport and the new mandate imposed by Title IX shifts this narrative. It was not just the veneration of men's sport but the neglect of women's sport at a time when Tennessee State desperately sought positive

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<sup>301</sup> Carlos Gonzalez, "A Long Journey," *Tennessee Bar Association* 53, no. 12 (December 2017). <https://www.tba.org/index.cfm?pg=LawBlog&blAction=showEntry&blogEntry=29526>. Gonzalez was the mediator appointed by Judge Wiseman and writes on his personal history of the case.

representation and to prove its academic merits. As Ed Temple always boasted, all but one of his Tigerbelles graduated with a degree.

### **6.3 The Dual Impact of Title IX and Integration on Black Women's Sport**

The decline of the Tennessee State Tigerbelles was a gradual process. Though Temple was still the coach and Tigerbelles selected as Olympians through 1984, the program failed to evolve. Meanwhile, the rest of the collegiate sport world blazed new trails in women's athletics. The dynamics that had put Tennessee State so much further ahead of its counterpart institutions were soon outstripped by the changes wrought by the passage of Title IX. But unlike other, predominantly white, institutions making strides in women's athletics, Tennessee State was a key party to the statewide desegregation lawsuit centered in Nashville. Tennessee State was not only encumbered by the financial and administrative burdens imposed by desegregation but also more devoted to propping up men's basketball and football, as symbols of its Blackness, than improving women's sports. While Tennessee State's response to Title IX did not change its previous record of neglect with regard to the Tigerbelles, the university faced additional challenges that its white counterparts did not, complicating the story. As a result of the external changes to women's athletics and the international institutional priorities devaluing women's sport, the Tennessee State Tigerbelles found themselves out of the running.

Even before Title IX imposed a new reality on collegiate sports, integration had already transformed the landscape of Black collegiate sport. In a 1965 newspaper interview, Temple cited the growing emphasis on women's track in California leading many Black high schoolers to head

for Pepperdine, Los Angeles City College, and UCLA.<sup>302</sup> Temple had previously enjoyed much less competition in recruiting Black women athletes from the South. Though happening on a much smaller scale considering the relative positions of women's collegiate sport and men's, this new draw mirrored trends in men's football and basketball at predominantly white institutions in the north and south. Historian Derek White cites the years 1963-1968 as turning point for collegiate athletic integration, starting with the University of Maryland and ending with the University of Kentucky's move to integrate the Southeastern Conference, the mainstay of southern football.<sup>303</sup> Because most universities, historically Black or predominantly white, did not fund women's programs Tennessee State's history offers valuable insight into the effects of desegregation on women's collegiate sport at an HBCU and its intersection with Title IX. As Black athletes began competing on teams like the University of Tennessee-Knoxville's new women's track team in the 1970s, there was a clear negative impact on Tennessee State.

Beginning in the late 1960s, the Tigerbelles' presence in international competition began a gradual but steady decline. In 1968, the Tigerbelles still fielded a highly competitive roster, led by Wyomia Tyus. At the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City, Tyus defended her gold medal in the 100m sprint and anchored the 4x100 meter gold medal team. Teammate Madeline Manning also won a gold medal in the 800m. Neither woman, nor the other four Tigerbelles present at the Games, was involved in John Carlos and Tommie Smith's famous protest at the podium, but Tyus later said she would have given them her medals if either had been stripped of their

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<sup>302</sup> Fred Russell, "Recruiting Getting Tougher—Temple," *Nashville Banner*, August 2, 1965.

<sup>303</sup> White, *Blood, Sweat & Tears*, 166.

achievements.<sup>304</sup> Teammate Lucina Williams pointed to the Tigerbelles' preference to maintain their dignified, respectable image as Black women rather than engage in direct protest. As she concluded, "At the end of the day, we knew Mr. Temple had it right, we needed to get our degrees, compete hard, and be young ladies, we were going to get equality through our hard work."<sup>305</sup> The same philosophy that had guided Temple and the Tigerbelles through the racism and sexism of the mid-twentieth century remained in place even as other Black athletes began agitating for more radical change.

Though Wyomia Tyus' willingness to involve herself in such a highly visible political protest was unusual in the history of Tigerbelles, the streak of the Tigerbelles as prominent and successful Olympic symbols was in decline. In the 1972 Munich Summer Games, the Tigerbelles sent only Madeline Manning who won a silver medal in the 4x400m relay and at the 1976 Montreal Summer Games, Kathy McMillan won a silver medal in the long jump. Though the Tigerbelles would have sent four athletes—Brenda Morehead, Chandra Cheeseborough, Kathy McMillan, and Madeline Manning—to the 1980 Moscow Summer Games, the U.S. boycott precluded a resurgence of the Tigerbelle Olympic dynasty. In 1984, Cheeseborough was the last Tigerbelle Olympian, earning two gold medals and a silver. After 32 years, the Tigerbelle Olympic streak ended and signaled that Temple's golden age was nearly done.

In the 1970s, Ed Temple's personal success and the Tigerbelle name were sufficient to continue attracting top-level talent, but by the end of the decade, the impact of Title IX was

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<sup>304</sup> West, "The Tennessee State Tigerbelles: Cold Warriors of the Track," 69.

<sup>305</sup> Tracey M. Salisbury, "First to the Finish Line: The Tennessee State Tigerbelles 1944-1994" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, Greensboro, 2009), 146.

apparent in the increasing presence of predominantly white universities in competitions and recruiting. Though Title IX became law in 1972, the delay in writing its regulations and the grace period that the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare granted for athletic compliance meant that its true impact was not felt in most universities until the late 1970s.

The first hints of changes for the Tigerbelles came in 1975, when Temple discussed his recruiting for the 1975-76 season. He predicted that “his world-renowned Tigerbelles may be on the verge of taking on a distinctly local flavor for the first time ever,” with the signing of Teresa Baugh. Baugh was only the fourth Tennessean to run for the Tigerbelles and the first from Nashville since Temple’s first year as coach.<sup>306</sup> Temple framed this transition as a positive result from Title IX, because high schools were now developing girls into runners, and it was possible to start finding local talent. While Baugh’s signing on its own was not particularly noticeable, it was the first indication that Temple’s recruiting pool might be much different than in previous years. Tennessee State, in its general student population, mostly enrolled in-state students. Until the 1970s, the Tigerbelles had been an exception to that rule, but Temple’s record of signings showed a distinct inflection point by the end of the decade.

In addition to the external pressures that the Tigerbelles were facing in the 1970s, there were additional signs that Tennessee State itself was undergoing massive changes. In the same years that predominantly white schools were investing heavily in women’s sport, Tennessee State was wrestling with financial shortfalls and merging with university. Throughout the 1970s, the university had been trying to attract and retain white undergraduate and graduate students as part of desegregation efforts. This manifested in a variety of strategies, ranging from new hires to new

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<sup>306</sup> Jeff Hanna, “North’s Teresa Baugh Signs With Tigerbelles,” *Nashville Tennessean*, May 4, 1975, 9-D.

programs to new scholarships. But Tennessee State also faced a financial shortfall by the late 1970s. One memo from 1978 informed a group of majority Black graduate students that Tennessee State was reallocating funds for graduate education to target white undergraduate students instead.<sup>307</sup> A student petition from undergraduates about the university's "lingering problems" listed a series of demands ranging from an expanded library collection to cleaner windows, a cleaner cafeteria, fixing clogged showers and drains, and hiring insect extermination for the dorms.<sup>308</sup> While many institutions of higher education struggled with declining enrollments and financial shortfalls, Tennessee State's problems ranged from the details of daily life to sweeping institutional concerns.

However, Temple remained frustrated by the status quo of the athletic department regarding the treatment of men's and women's athletics. In 1976, Temple wrote a letter to President Frederick S. Humphries, continuing an ongoing exchange about his compensation. Temple stated that he had researched the salaries of head coaches of track in nearby universities to Tennessee State and the University of Tennessee, and he believed that Humphries had missed the impetus for his initial complaint: "First of all, none of these coaches have been at their positions for more than *ten* years...Secondly, all of the track coaches in the state of Tennessee combined cannot come close to matching my record of achievements." Temple enclosed a summary of his coaching resume and argued "No other coach in the state, the U.S.A. or the world can match it."

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<sup>307</sup> Memo from Homer R. Wheaton to Graduate TSU-SG Recipients, April 17, 1978, Frederick S. Humphries collection, Box 3, Folder 30, TSU.

<sup>308</sup> "Help Education's Lingering Problems, petition from Tennessee State University Students," Frederick S. Humphries collection, Box 4, Folder 42, TSU.

He concluded his letter by reminding Humphries that “I have not received a merit raise since 1967, and my salary is still lower than that of the *assistant* football coach...who has only been here for *twelve* years. I think my salary should be at least equal that of the *head*, football coach, who has only been here for *twelve* years.” Though Humphries’ reply was not archived, the financial situation at Tennessee State and the incipient merger both made it unlikely that Temple received the raise for which he advocated so passionately.

Temple’s letter was a direct reflection of the Tigerbelles’ second-class status in the larger universe of the university’s athletic department. Temple’s accomplishments and that of his team were unmatched by any coach or university. It also reflected the treatment of women’s athletics at most universities, even after Title IX. Temple, even as a head coach of twenty-six years, made less than an assistant coach for the football team. Men’s sports, no matter their record of success, were treated as inherently more valuable to the university administration and particularly in the moment of integration with UT-Nashville. Whether this prioritization was a purely result of symbolic value, maintained by the relationship between men’s sports and the university’s racial identity, the financial possibilities of ticket revenues, or simple sexism regarding women’s sport is impossible to determine conclusively. But it is also true that the true revenue potential for the Tigerbelles in terms of ticket sales was never explored, particularly not at the peak of their achievements in the 1960s.

Regardless of the reason, the university was not investing financial resources to support Temple and the Tigerbelles at a time when the university sought positive publicity in athletics. The track that Governor Ellington had promised to Ed Temple back in their 1968 meeting was finally close to construction by 1978 and funding came from outside of the university. The State Board of Regents contributed \$500,000. The Third National Bank, headquartered in Nashville, fundraised

an additional \$100,000 from local residents. Donations ranged from 25 cents to \$10,000.<sup>309</sup> Though Temple and the Tigerbelles' publicity to the university was never seen as an advantage with the local community to the same extent as football, the Third National Bank fundraiser indicated that women's sport was in fact seen as something worth supporting after the Tigerbelles' decades of achievement in Nashville.

Tennessee State's compliance with Title IX in the late 1970s came by forming a new women's basketball team in 1978, not in greater support for the Tigerbelles. The university's annual report described a "well-rounded women's athletic program," characterized by the addition of basketball, the new track, and the Tigerbelles' continued record of success. But the addition of one team and no material changes for the Tigerbelles was not close to achieving parity, particularly in comparison to the transformations to the men's program. The major change to athletics was Tennessee State's decision to classify its National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) football program as I-A. This classification was the most competitive division in the NCAA, and it meant that the school had to provide at least eight varsity sports. In 1977-78, the university offered football, basketball, baseball, and swimming, with plans to add men's track, soccer, tennis, golf, wrestling, and volleyball.<sup>310</sup> The disparity between men's and women's sports in these decisions reveals institutional priorities. Compliance with any number of endeavors was expensive, from Title IX to desegregation to Division I-A status. What Tennessee State spent its money on was football.

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<sup>309</sup> Temple, *Only the Pure in Heart Survive*, 133-134.

<sup>310</sup> Tennessee State Annual Report, 1977-78, 30-31, Frederick S. Humphries collection, Box 17, Folder 201, TSU.



In 1977, with the University of Tennessee-Nashville merger imminent and a nationally stagnant economic environment, how Tennessee State spent its money was indicative of its priorities. In an article titled “If You Had 15 Minutes With President Carter, What Would You Tell Him About Your Priorities for Higher Education?”, the cost of equality was a prominent theme. An assistant chancellor from North Carolina State University complained that “Faculty members devote too much of their creative time to determine how to comply with Title IX, the Buckley Amendment, or Section 504...while all of these regulations have praiseworthy purposes...they do nothing to enhance the basic purpose of higher education.” The Vice President of the Institute for Services to Education concurred, arguing that “The commitment to providing equality of opportunity is a national one and not necessarily acceptable to every locality.”<sup>311</sup>

Though no administrator from Tennessee State explicitly espoused these views, the administration’s decisions and language regarding Title IX compliance speak more to the costs than the benefits of the pursuit of equality. A list of institutional problems written up prior to the UT-N merger stated “Additional revenue sources must be identified to enable the University to satisfy Title IX and NCAA Division I requirements,” but made no direct mention of women’s sport.<sup>312</sup> Direction from the State Board of Regents mirrored this framing, instructing Tennessee State that “Additional revenue sources other than state appropriations could increase the total athletic budget proposals. Appropriate emphasis should also again be directed toward compliance

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<sup>311</sup> “If You Had 15 Minutes with President Carter, What Would You Tell Him About Your Priorities for Higher Education?” *Change* (September 1977): 54-55.

<sup>312</sup> “Institutional Problems—Tennessee State University, 1977,” 14, Frederick S. Humphries collection, Box 2, Folder 18, TSU.

with Title IX.” What was more important to the university were the challenges posed by racial equity and desegregation, where football played a key role, rather than seriously engaging with and addressing issues of gender equity.

The decision by Tennessee State administrators to so blatantly favor men’s sport in the project of reinforcing the university’s Blackness during the merger process was not a new policy decision but took on additional dimensions in the wake of Black Power. Much has been written about the particular challenges faced in negotiating the gendered dynamics of Black Power with a focus on the Black Panther Party. Though more recent scholarship has recovered the critical intellectual and practical efforts of Black women within both movements, many Black women also faced at best sexism and worst chauvinism. Some Black men did believe that women’s role in the revolution was to support men and bear children and did not respect them as revolutionaries in their own right. Black women rarely received the publicity or recognition for their own efforts on behalf of racial equality. This dynamic of Black men as the public symbol and leaders of civil rights and racial equality had its own history in the civil rights movement and beyond.<sup>313</sup> Thus,

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<sup>313</sup> See Kimberly Springer, “Black Feminists Respond to Black Power Masculinism,” in *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*, ed. Peniel E. Joseph (New York: Routledge, 2006), 105-118; Cynthia Griggs Fleming, “Black Women and Black Power: The Case of Ruby Doris Smith Robinson and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee,” in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, eds. Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 197-213; Tracye A. Matthews, “‘No One Ever Asks What a Man’s Role in the Revolution Is’: Gender Politics and Leadership in the Black Panther Party, 1966-71,” in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, eds. Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin (New York: New York University

the treatment of Black women like the Tigerbelles in the context of Tennessee State's battle for Blackness and Black pride was well in line with the broader political dynamics of the time.

Men's collegiate sport, symbolic of institutional identity, was held not only above women's collegiate sport but also the general student body at times. The university chose to invest in promoting itself to Division I-A football at a time when students were complaining about basic hygiene in the physical plant. Though the attempt to compete in I-A ultimately failed, and Tennessee State moved down to Division I-AA in 1981, Tennessee State connected these efforts to desegregation. To qualify for competition in I-A, the NCAA required that 60% of the opponents scheduled in football should compete in the same division. Tennessee State was the only historically Black university in Division I-A and this change would have been a significant departure from its usual HBCU opponents. However, the university's difficulties in scheduling predominantly white schools contributed to Tennessee State's inability to remain in I-A and became a scapegoat for explaining the lack of progress in desegregation. By tying football to desegregation, which defined Tennessee State's fortunes in the 1970s and 1980s, the university was able to continue and justify its disregard for women's collegiate sport, even with the passage of Title IX.

At the heart of this story is the question of why Tennessee State chose to invest in men's sports so heavily in the same years that gender equity became a major, enforceable issue in higher education. Did the university truly believe that investing so heavily in men's sports to achieve I-A status would bring greater recognition and improve Tennessee State's reputation with white

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Press, 2001), 230-256; Ashley D. Farmer, "'Abolition of Every Possibility of Oppression': Black Women, Black Power, and the Black Women's United Front, 1970-1976," *Journal of Women's History* 32, no. 3 (Fall 2020): 89-114.

observers across the state? Probably. But this decision came at the expense of limiting funds available for women's sport and continued a decades-long trajectory of severely underinvesting and undervaluing the Tigerbelles. This decision in the late 1970s, when the Tigerbelles were still attracting talented prospects, was not the only factor at play in the Tigerbelles' decline, but certainly contributed.

Looking back at the late 1970s and early 1980s, Temple reminisced about what attracted talented runners to Tennessee State as their options broadened in the age of Title IX. He said of Kathy McMillan that "UCLA and UT had magnificent facilities to offer, and at the time we had the poorest. But here was a girl who overlooked all of that and wanted to come where the program was." Though Temple did not state it overtly, he was clearly aware that he was the draw for talented runners. In the final chapters of his autobiography, he lamented his peers and predecessors in coaching, naming Joe Robichaux in Chicago and Cleve Abbott at Tuskegee as two individuals who built programs that disappeared after their deaths. He concluded with a gloomy assessment: "But you see, the people in charge were really glad to be rid of them."<sup>314</sup>

Temple did not retire until 1994 and the Tigerbelles did not disappear from competitive sport immediately in the mid-80s. But worrying signs for the entire Tennessee State athletic landscape appeared soon into the 1980s. Before the 1982-83 season, Temple revoked two scholarships from rising seniors, both from Memphis. Temple said that neither was providing "the necessary leadership."<sup>315</sup> It was an ominous sign for the future of local recruiting. In 1983, the entire athletic infrastructure was upset by the resignation of the celebrated head football coach

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<sup>314</sup> Temple, *Only the Pure in Heart Survive*, 41-42; 135.

<sup>315</sup> "Temple drops grant for Pollion, Pernell," *Nashville Banner*, August 11, 1982.

John Merritt. By 1984, President Humphries and the athletic administration began discussing whether the independent Tennessee State should align with a conference to have a more consistent schedule and hopefully more consistent revenue.<sup>316</sup> However, the decline had continued across the university. 1988 was the first year in school history that there was a losing record for both football and basketball.<sup>317</sup> In 1989, the athletic department reported that it was \$203,540 in debt after bad conditions at home football games affected ticket sales.<sup>318</sup>

By the 1990s, Tennessee State sponsored six women's sports, motivated by its alignment with the all-white Ohio Valley Conference in 1986, but the same equity issues that had plagued Temple continued. A renewed push for gender equity in the NCAA, twenty years after Title IX's passage, pushed the Tennessee Board of Regents to address issues like pay discrepancy: "...last year, the women's head basketball at Tennessee State, Austin Peay, Memphis State, and East Tennessee State all made less money than did a men's assistant at their respective schools." Tennessee State women's basketball coach Teresa Lawrence made \$1,677 less than a men's assistant basketball coach at TSU. The notable exception to this list of schools was the University of Tennessee. In the same year the University of Tennessee signed its head women's basketball coach Pat Summitt to a five-year, \$110,000 salary, which was \$10,000 more than her counterpart for men's basketball.<sup>319</sup> The story of Title IX at Tennessee State was far from universal. Tennessee State struggled with financial problems born of out of its history as an HBCU, which were

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<sup>316</sup> Joe Biddle, "Lee represents changing of guard at TSU," *Nashville Banner*, July 17, 1984.

<sup>317</sup> Joe Burris, "Tennessee State drops SID Stephens from staff," *The Tennessean*, June 16, 1988.

<sup>318</sup> "Athletics at TSU in debt \$203,540." *The Tennessean*, September 23, 1989.

<sup>319</sup> Tom Wood, "Schools looking at gender equity in coaching pay," *The Tennessean*, June 30, 1993.

compounded by desegregation, and it showed no interest in investing its superstar women athletes or world-class coach in women's track. Predominantly white institutions like the University of Tennessee-Knoxville not only started from a better financial position but directly benefitted from the pressure to desegregate, intersecting with Title IX to create integrated, nationally dominant programs.

## 6.4 Conclusion

At a gathering of women honoring women's athletics in 1979, Coach Pat Head Summitt presented Ed Temple with the Cable Club's first annual award for "training, promoting, and encouraging women's athletics." She saluted Temple "as a man who had fought to keep the women's track program at Tennessee State alive during times when it was a tough struggle, and not necessarily a popular one."<sup>320</sup> In the forward to Temple's autobiography, Wilma Rudolph wrote that "I feel that he is the foundation which women's track and field has been built upon. I also feel that he set the major cornerstones for the likes of Title IX..."<sup>321</sup> Temple was a major force in women's athletics at the domestic and international levels, for decades. But Title IX was not a piece of legislation that benefitted him, his athletes, or his university in the long run.

In this chapter I have argued that the pursuit of gender equity at Tennessee State was inextricable from the project of desegregation and racial equality and that Tennessee State's

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<sup>320</sup> F.M. Williams, "Women Must Support Women," *The Tennessean*, 1979.

<sup>321</sup> Temple, *Only the Pure in Heart Survive*, i-ii.

decisions put them at odds. The desegregation lawsuit and subsequent merger with University of Tennessee-Nashville monopolized the university's focus and funding. It also bolstered the university administration's obsession with football. Combined with the administration's apathy to its already successful women's track team, the advent of Title IX did little to improve the Tigerbelles' fortunes or increase opportunities for women to compete at Tennessee State. Instead of giving Temple additional funding to attract top athletes to his program, the university focused almost exclusively on men's sports. Title IX's impact at other universities, mainly predominantly white, created greater competition for recruiting and coopted Tennessee State's traditional talent pool with better facilities and competitive scholarship offers.

The story of Title IX at Tennessee State, a historically Black university, is a vital piece of the legislation's history that has been missing from its scholarship. Title IX did not benefit women's athletics evenly in the United States and its intersection with efforts to desegregate in Tennessee helped to deconstruct a sporting dynasty. The universities most able to benefit from Title IX were the ones with the funding, the incentives, and the flexibility to prioritize women's athletics.

Though no other school can boast the same achievements as Tennessee State, its history is still instructive for reassessing narratives of both Title IX and women's collegiate sport more broadly. Tennessee State's identity as a historically Black university and the way that Black women's bodies were considered less fragile meant that university administrators felt less concern over the physical consequences of sport for athletes like the Tigerbelles. In the years prior to Title IX, when white women's collegiate sport disappeared from fears over damage to white women's bodies, Black women took sports like track & field by storm. Black women were not subject to the same restrictive attitudes towards their bodies. But this apathy manifested differently in the

wake of Title IX. White women were able to rejoin the intercollegiate sporting world, their bodies protected by the maintenance of sex segregation and emboldened by shifting cultural norms about sport in the 1970s. Black women also benefitted from these changes and combined with racial integration were able to forge new paths within collegiate sport. For Black women, the realities of women's collegiate sport were largely unchanged before and after Title IX. The desegregation of higher education was a more impactful change to their opportunities, both positively and negatively, as in the case of Tennessee State.



## 7.0 Conclusion

While Title IX is and has rightfully been lauded as a landmark piece of legislation for gender equality and collegiate sport in the United States, centering the histories of Black women and Black institutions in its legacy illuminates how its implementation in higher education revealed deeply embedded legacies of race. The same ideas of white women's fragility that reined in women's collegiate sport at the turn of the century were preserved in Title IX with sex-segregated teams and divisions. The fact that Black women were not regarded as physically fragile compared to white women created opportunities for Black institutions like Tennessee State to foster highly successful Black teams. But the university's lack of investment in women's sport and increasing competition from white institutions ultimately drained the program of resources to remain competitive. What was ultimately most transformative to women's collegiate sport were the changes that had come to higher education in the twentieth century. It is also important to prioritize the histories of individual institutions and the broader history of higher education in histories of Title IX. Decisions about women's sport were not made in a vacuum. University administrators were balancing any number of factors, from men's collegiate sport to broader federal mandates around equality, undergraduate enrollment statistics, and the budget. By writing a history of women's collegiate sport that engages with how universities themselves changed, as well as their relationship with men's collegiate sport, the story of Title IX is not only one of ideology or equality, but the determinative, mundane details of bureaucracy.

Through engaging the wider universe of women's collegiate sport, both before and after Title IX, the inequalities that persist today can be better understood. The racial undercurrents present in Title IX deserve more research and are particularly illuminated in comparing the history

of a school like Tennessee State with the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. Their divergent histories, hinging around the overlapping projects of Title IX and desegregation, reveal how much more complex our histories of women's sport and gender equality must become.

But beyond the recent reassessments of Title IX on its merits, this dissertation argues that there is immense value to be had through engaging Title IX in several new ways. Rather than regarding Title IX purely as a change from the dearth of competitive women's intercollegiate sport in the mid-twentieth century, I have argued that Title IX's maintenance of sex segregation within collegiate sport reaffirmed nineteenth-century ideas of gender and women's bodies. Though there were undeniable changes post-1972, an underlying philosophy of protectionism remained dominant and unchanged and played out in the battle between the NCAA and AIAW for control of women's collegiate sport. Second, by centering the histories of Black women and Black institutions in the histories of Title IX and women's collegiate sport, the triumphalist narrative of Title IX becomes murkier. The revival of women's collegiate sport at predominantly white universities is rightly regarded as a positive outcome, but the dominance of HBCU programs like Tennessee State, the Tuskegee Institute, and Bennett College in the 1930s-1960s refutes such a simple history. The histories of the women competing at these institutions is comprehensible through the other side of the racialized protectionist philosophy that guided the earliest days of women's sport in the United States and reemerged with Title IX. Black women were less restricted by these fears of physical damage than the strong ties between sport and Black masculinity at HBCUs. Before 1972, the focus on Black men as the agents of racial uplift created opportunities for Black women even if it denied them veneration as heroes, by and large. After 1972, these strong associations between HBCUs and masculinity that contributed to the neglect of historic programs

like the Tennessee State Tigerbelles in the face of desegregation's threat to the university's racial identity and in an era of Black Power.

This dissertation argues that institutional histories and particularly comparative histories offer critical insight into women's collegiate sport history and Title IX. The two major modes of engagement for histories of Title IX have been at the national scale or the individual institutional scale. Institutionally focused works better represent the decision-making apparatuses that undergird university athletic departments and administrations, and there are greater depths to be explored through comparative histories and a serious engagement with the history of higher education. The shifting of norms around both racial integration and gender equality, inside and outside of sport, was not an isolated process. Understanding the emergence of new women's collegiate sport powers like the University of Tennessee requires reckoning with the internal dynamics of schools like Tennessee State. The new patterns of movement for women athletes were about what was happening at both Black and white schools, their priorities, and their budgets. That also means incorporating the histories of men's collegiate sport at these institutions, outside the usual debates over Title IX's negative impact. I have argued that a comparative history delineated along clear racial lines illuminates how each institution's positioning in the landscape of higher education was critical to the development of its sporting history.

The histories of collegiate sport at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville and Tennessee State University are exemplars in the landscape of U.S. collegiate sport history and the dynasties built by athletes under the direction of Pat Summitt and Ed Temple are paramount within women's sport history. But as I have shown, their rise and falls are also instructive in reassessing women's collegiate sport history. At the University of Tennessee, sport maintained the same power dynamics that venerated men's programs and kept men in charge of collegiate athletics, even as

white women, and Black men and women could now participate. Though Title IX reinforced sex segregation, the university's whiteness provided sufficient resources for women's sport to develop and grow and eventually win championships. Racial integration brought talented Black athletes, men and women, to Knoxville but their presence on campus was not indicative of radical changes to the power structures of either the athletic department or the university. At Tennessee State University, the lack of protectionist rhetoric left Black women free to pursue sport, but the gendered dynamics of racial uplift offered little glory or support. The deep ties between HBCU men's sport and Blackness also functioned to exclude women athletes like the Tigerbelles in the face of a threat to the university's historically Black identity. Combined with the growth of women's sport at wealthier, predominantly white universities, Tennessee State could not compete, and its lauded program declined rapidly in the wake of Title IX.

Investigating the historical roots and legacies of Title IX remains vital in the face of its ever-shifting meaning but continued relevance to current students. In recent years, Title IX has taken on new relevance in conversations around sexual assaults on campus and in the inclusion of transgender athletes within the NCAA. As this dissertation has demonstrated, ideas about women's bodies and sex segregation have always been essential to the establishment of women's sport. Interrogating the complexity of Title IX will continue to take on new dimensions as collegiate sport continues to evolve. But even as new debates arise and Title IX takes on new significance, it is critical to understand the inequalities and advantages that have been present in women's collegiate sport since its inception and shaped women's collegiate sport before and after Title IX. Despite its benefits to millions of women over the past fifty years, work remains to achieve equality for all women, regardless of race.

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