

City's role in American racial struggles. The city's leaders had once upon a time condemned Brundage and his allies for failing to adequately defend the civil rights of American athletes against Nazi racial policies. A coalition of Catholic and Jewish leaders from New Orleans vigorously opposed Brundage's claim that participating in the 1936 Olympics did not offer aid and comfort to Nazi segregationists and white supremacists. At the same time, those same eloquent champions in the fight against religious and ethnic discrimination encouraged by the Third Reich worked tirelessly to keep African Americans out of their own white sporting institutions. Sometimes they were outspoken apostles of white supremacy, boycotting events where they faced black challengers. Sometimes they were discreet defenders of the segregated status quo, a regiment in the army of bureaucrats who maintained the machinery of Jim Crow.

In the 1960s, as the world around them changed and they found it impossible to keep even a modicum of power and prestige as long as they kept color lines intact in their beloved Sugar Bowl track carnival and in their Southern Association meets, they acquiesced to the surges of social transformation. Of course, the floodtide of the 1960s did not instantaneously vanquish all of the residues of segregation in the Crescent City and in the Southern Association. The New Orleans Athletic Club, the elite institution that once counted the likes of Fitzpatrick and Di Benedetto on its membership rolls, did not permit black members until 1986. Still, that was three years before the venerable New York Athletic Club—an institution that counted on its rosters many of the AAU's national leaders who had stood firm against the efforts by New Orleans and the SAAAU to draw color lines in national meets—finally in 1989 added the first African-American member to its roster.<sup>82</sup>

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

## Called Off, On Account of Darkness

### *The AAU, the AFL, and Civic Development in Jim Crow New Orleans*

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In 1927, the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) canceled its scheduled national track and field championship in New Orleans because city officials refused to allow black athletes to participate. In that incident, the city's white population was in agreement with its government, as civic officials willingly took a hit to the city's economy and reputation in order to uphold the racial line. Thirty-eight years later, the American Football League's All-Star Game was scheduled to be played in New Orleans, but the virulent and overt racism of whites in the city led black athletes to threaten a boycott unless the game was moved. Just as they had in the 1920s, civic leaders had sought the AFL All-Star Game in a specific, targeted effort to boost the city's reputation and economy. This time, civic leaders agreed that racial inclusion should not be a hindrance to progress, but the city's white population went the other way. A vocal segment of New Orleanians were not yet ready for that kind of change and precipitated the boycott with their overt racism. The fiasco was not a federal court seeking to impose integration on a population, and that group fighting back with the aid of its city government. Instead, it was a city government itself seeking that imposition, leaving the citizens themselves to take matters into their own hands.

Examining these two incidents together demonstrates two different paces of racial change, one for officials seeking notoriety and economic growth, one for white citizens who had been taught their entire lives to uphold the racial line because the racial line put a premium on whiteness. Most studies of southern regimes during Jim Crow interpret a symbiotic relationship between white



After the players threatened to boycott the AFL All-Star Game, the league moved the contest to Houston's Jeppesen Stadium. This is the cover of the program for the game after its move to Texas. It unsurprisingly featured a white player catching a pass. Program cover in the public domain.

leaders and the white governed, with politicians playing to their most virulently racist base to gain political advancement and maintain power. Dan Carter's famous *Politics of Rage*, for example, describes the life of George Wallace, who combined a working-class white populism with an overt, pragmatic, segregationist racism that kept him beloved by those who could vote without incident.<sup>1</sup> New Orleans's two sports segregation fiascos demonstrate a different dynamic, one where city officials ready to move away from segregationist politics for the sake of postwar Sunbelt civic improvement could not escape the monster they had created over previous Jim Crow decades.

The national AAU track and field championship was one of the largest, most prestigious sporting events in the country in the first three decades of the twentieth century. As Mark Dyreson explains in his broader study of the Southern Association of the Amateur Athletic Union in Chapter 10, New Orleans had managed to host the event once before, in 1910, a lily-white affair that went off without real controversy. In 1926, with an expanded media presence driving an increased interest in sports and a local desire to showcase New Orleans as a pre-Sunbelt example of southern civic development, the city made a bid to host the 1927 championship, winning the honor in November. The games had not been lily white for a number of years, but leaders assumed that the presence of the games in the Deep South would act as its own warning to keep black athletes from the competition. Those assumptions would be wrong, and the games would be defined by racial controversy.<sup>2</sup>

Hopes, however, remained high in the early months of 1927. The national AAU indoor championships were held in early March in Madison Square Garden, a city and venue that hosted everything of consequence. That was the company that New Orleans wanted to keep. Knowing that Louisiana would be hosting the larger outdoor championships in July, New Orleans newspapers covered the event assiduously, both as a preview of the kinds of athletes that the city would see in the summer and a preview of the features of hosting a good tournament. The city was so invested in the tournament that the mayor, Arthur J. O'Keefe, also served as President of the Southern Association of the AAU and chairman of the executive committee of the national AAU track and field championships.<sup>3</sup>

In early March, the city petitioned the national AAU to change the scheduled dates of the tournament from July 1, 2, and 4 to July 8, 9, and 11. The Fourth of July was on a Monday in 1927 and officials were worried that the city would largely clear out for trips to the coast over the holiday weekend. The event was a national showcase for New Orleans, a showcase that would become far less effective with sparse crowds in the grandstands.<sup>4</sup>

It was a busy Spring for the Southern Association of the AAU and its secretary Lawrence di Benedetto, with New Orleans hosting both the regional gymnastics and wrestling championship in May, the men's track and field regionals in Houston, the girls' track and field regionals at Loyola in early June, and continued work taking place to prepare for the men's track and field nationals.<sup>5</sup>

The city had more than forty AAU clubs, all of whom were joining forces to work for a strong showing at the crowning achievement of the city's events,



the national track and field championships. Organizing committees planned a campaign to raise \$15,000 for the tournament, led by the mayor who spanned both civic and athletic worlds. When officials from the national organization arrived in late February to inspect the facilities at Loyola University, where the contest would be held, they were incredibly pleased. "You have a wonderful track," said Tom Thorpe of the AAU's New York office, "and I look for many records to be broken." With O'Keefe's responsibilities extending to the entire city government of New Orleans, Di Benedetto was the day-to-day point man preparing for nationals. He assured everyone that preparations were progressing smoothly and that "world's record-holders and national champions" would be participating, the "cream of the nation's athletes."<sup>6</sup>

In early April, the committee in charge of the meet, led in name by O'Keefe, held a working luncheon at the Elks' Club to discuss preparations, with another scheduled for the April 17 and general meeting scheduled for April 20 in the council chamber of City Hall. To interest people in the event, the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* began running profiles of athletes expected to attend, athletes like Charlie Paddock, former USC standout, world champion, and Olympic gold medalist sprinter. It was working. Even though the fundraising campaign was not scheduled to start officially until April 25, it had already earned almost \$2,000 by April 10. The luncheon meeting on April 17 reported positive results and optimism about the progress of the fundraiser and preparations for the tournament.<sup>7</sup> And then everything collapsed.

The beginning of the end came after William DeHart Hubbard, Olympic gold medalist and University of Michigan standout submitted his entry form, and Frederick W. Rubien, president of the Metropolitan Association of the AAU, told southern officials that black athletes had to be allowed to compete.<sup>8</sup>

DeHart Hubbard was a superstar, the first black man to win an Olympic gold medal in an individual event when he won the long jump competition in the 1942 Paris Games. He was the world record holder in the event, a three-time NCAA national champion and seven-time Big Ten champion. Though he was one of the best athletes in the country, however, and though no legitimate contest of track and field superiority could be judged without his presence, he was black. City officials responded by conferring with representatives of the AAU, an easy process considering that Mayor O'Keefe was president of the group's Southern Association. Initially, city leaders considered asking Hubbard not to participate, but other applicants were planning to attend, as well, all hoping to compete in the Deep South for the first time. Syracuse's Cecil Cook, champion

of the quarter mile, Olympic gold medalist Ned Gourdin, St. Bonaventure high jumper Charles Major, Morgan State's Charles Drew, national junior hurdle champion, and Wesley Foster, national junior sprint champion, all planned to participate. Thus the city and tournament organizers decided that the national event and the economic boon that accompanied it were not worth the racial trouble, cancelling the event and leaving AAU officials to scramble for a new location.<sup>9</sup>

The meet was "called off, on account of darkness," in the words of *Times-Picayune* columnist William McG. Keefe. Hubbard, he admitted, might have had worthy athletic prowess, but his "color and social standing would not permit Southern athletes measuring strides with him." The cancellation was, thus, in the mind of Keefe, all Hubbard's fault. "The apparent determination of Northern institutions to force negroes into amateur competition with white youths of the South is one of the biggest obstacles in the way of inter-sectional games," he wrote, citing an earlier incident when Tulane's football team travelled to Northwestern and refused to play until its black player was benched. "The negro has no place in competition with whites in Dixie," he concluded. "Southern negroes, who are sensible, realize that; they get along much better and are happier."<sup>10</sup>

Keefe's article was blasted by the *Chicago Defender's* Frank A. Young, who took apart the racist column bit by bit. "He forgets that every year southern high schools enter northern interscholastic games where our boys walk off with many of the first places," wrote Young, "and we dare say if the gods of fate haven't washed away all their coin, many southern institutions will send men to the Penn relays, where loads of our boys will not only be seen warming up, but will be out there after first places." Young praised the national AAU for not compromising on race, the group "being well acquainted with the fact that the southern white man fears real competition."<sup>11</sup>

Charles E. Parker of the *New York World* joined his counterparts in the black press in praising Rubien's stand for racial fairness and assured his readers that "if messages received yesterday at the local headquarters of the Amateur Athletic Union are indicative, every section of the land except the far South heartily approves of the action of the AAU in refusing the request of New Orleans authorities to bar Negro athletes."<sup>12</sup>

"The sunny south is a very romantic land, with colonels and golf links and all that," wrote Paul Gallico in the *New York Daily News*, "its hospitality is famous and its sportsmanship is not so hot. It is a much more youthful section

of the country though not from the point of view of physical age. Spiritually it falls short of the adult class in many cases." Racial trouble was the given reason for the withdrawal, wrote Gallico, but "it is the holler that the superior white gentleman can be counted on to raise whenever he is on the point of not giving his colored brother a square deal." For Gallico, "the unforgivable breach of sportsmanship is not the barring of the colored athlete from New Orleans," as cities had the right to make such decisions, but instead it was to bid for the AAU championships, "the greatest title meet the country has to offer, and then propose to bar from competition some of the most brilliant and loyal athletes in the country."<sup>13</sup>

There was relatively long history of the kind of southern athletic intransigence displayed by New Orleans officials. In 1907, Penn runner John B. Taylor was threatened with lynching if he competed at the AAU meet at Jamestown, Virginia. He did, however, and broke a national record in the process. In 1910, white southerners again protested the participation of black athletes in AAU meets and again were thwarted. They tried again and failed to bar black competitors in 1914 when the championships were held in Baltimore. New Orleans, however, was not on the South's periphery, not in the upper South. It was the first Deep South location to host such an event, and it was not ready for black participation.<sup>14</sup>

"I had hoped that such a stand would never be taken in America," said Fred Rubien. "Colored men in the past have competed for the United States in the Olympic games abroad and have won high honors there. What a strange situation to refuse them the right to compete in the national games of their own country."<sup>15</sup>

The *Daily News* explained to its readers that "the city of New Orleans would have the world believe that the colored man of New Orleans is only waiting for DeHart Hubbard to make a winning jump in the gulf city to pick up his machete and automatic and go fantee." The newspaper was certain that the city "has not yet attained its mental majority."<sup>16</sup> The *Boston Globe* lamented that "because of Southern feeling against negro athletes," the city and "the South loses the most popular and interesting general sports event held in America."<sup>17</sup>

Bids to host the short-notice meet came from Boston, Baltimore, Chicago, New York, and other locations. After a vote by telegraph in early May, however, the event was finally awarded to Lincoln, Nebraska and the facilities at the University of Nebraska. The only representatives not to vote for Lincoln's bid

were those from the Southern Association, who stubbornly lodged a protest vote for New Orleans.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile, white amateur athletes from New Orleans began making their way to Houston for the Southern Association meet, held at the stadium of Rice University. Lawrence di Benedetto (who would rise to the national organization's presidency in 1939 and carry the AAU into the war years) arranged for Texas governor Dan Moody to serve as an honorary referee. New Orleans mayor O'Keefe would be there as well, in his capacity as president of the Southern Association.<sup>19</sup>

Only one New Orleans athlete, however, won his event in Houston and qualified for the nationals in Lincoln. Lloyd Bourgeois was an employee of the Southern Pacific Railroad and was part of the company's AAU team. A husband and father of two, Bourgeois was an unlikely champion who had not gone to college, though he trained at Tulane Stadium and at a local track near his Algiers home. He went to Houston and dominated his chosen event, the triple-jump. His dedication to the craft would lead the following year to Bourgeois becoming the city's first representative in the Olympic Games in Amsterdam. In 1927, however, the nationals at Lincoln would be the most prestigious tournament in which he participated. Just as in Amsterdam in 1928, he would be the only New Orleanian there.<sup>20</sup>

In the run-up to the event, Roland Locke, world-record holder in the 220-yard dash and University of Nebraska standout known as the Nebraska Flyer, told an interviewer that he planned on skipping the national tournament in New Orleans, much to the dismay of many who hoped to see him race USC's Charley Borah, another star collegiate sprinter. The hopes of those awarding the games to Lincoln was that the move would convince the school's star runners to participate in the event. It would.<sup>21</sup>

The Lincoln championships were an unqualified success, for the city, the university, and the successful athletes at the competition. The governor of Nebraska joined roughly twelve thousand others to see the games at Lincoln. Hometown University of Nebraska star Fait Elkins won the all-around competition. Known as "Chief," Elkins was an Indian often lauded as "another Jim Thorpe."<sup>22</sup> New Orleans probably would have accepted Elkins, the legacy of Thorpe and the particular contours of southern racial lines, which emphasized blackness as the cardinal form of inferior difference, facilitating that willingness to stomach the presence of an Indian athlete, but it is still significant that a



non-white star dominated the contest that otherwise would have taken place in New Orleans.

New Jersey's Johnny Gibson, a white hurdler, broke the world record for the 440-yard hurdles, another laurel not going to New Orleans. In the final of the 440-yard relay, held in two heats on the closing day of the Lincoln meet, four of the teams broke the world record in less than five minutes. Meanwhile, DeHart Hubbard, whose application began the process of venue change, won the broad jump at 25 feet 8¾ inches, breaking the AAU record while nursing a sprained tendon.<sup>23</sup>

In 1967, two years after the city's second racial media fiasco, sociologist Harry Edwards began organizing a black boycott of the 1968 Olympics. Among the goals of the effort was to have Avery Brundage removed as president of the International Olympic Committee. Brundage had a long history of racism and anti-Semitism, but in answering new charges brought by the Edwards boycott, Brundage cited in particular his time with the national AAU in 1927, claiming that he removed the national track and field championships from New Orleans because the city "would not accept negro entries." Like so many of Brundage's other racial statements, that, too, was intentionally misleading. While Brundage was AAU vice president in 1927 and would become president in 1928, the national AAU president was Murray Hulbert and the point-person for the track and field nationals was Metropolitan Association president Fred Rubien.<sup>24</sup>

More importantly, Brundage's prevarications masked the larger truth: that it was New Orleans officials themselves who made the decision not to keep the games if the games were going to include black athletes. There was no space between city government and Southern Association leadership. Mayor O'Keefe was president of the Southern Association. Responses from that organization were also official responses from the city. The decision to forfeit the games was, despite the rhetoric of Brundage and the newspapers that celebrated the city's demise, solely the result of the racial intransigence of New Orleans civic leadership. That would not be the case a generation later.

The United States Supreme Court spoke for the judiciary in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, proclaiming that separate could never be equal, thus deeming public schools segregated by race unconstitutional. Then the legislature passed and the president signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which officially outlawed segregation in those areas where it still existed. With the death of Jim Crow came the birth of new political and social norms. Hundreds of stories

exist where these changing generational patterns in wake of *Brown* produced a struggle between the races. One of those struggles involved the American Football League's scheduling of its yearly 1965 All-Star game in New Orleans. The city once again had a legitimate chance to promote improved race relations and its own civic standing when two professional squads, with almost half of both rosters filled with African American players, met on the gridiron, an event that New Orleans hoped would serve as a showcase that would ultimately lead to a permanent professional football franchise of its own. If New Orleans impressed the AFL, the league might consider locating a team, along with all the grandeur and money that came with it, in the Deep South. Nevertheless, the city's history, and the 1927 AAU track meet in particular, demonstrated that age-old norms, stubbornness, and an inability to accept and promote change often overcame progressive ideals and new and lucrative business and entertainment ventures. While accounts of the infamous AFL All-Star game and the city's pursuit of a professional team have been told ably but separately by others, the two events were fundamentally linked, as professional sports in the 1960s provided much the same cache and civic validation that the AAU national championships provided in the 1920s.

Unlike the older, more recognizable National Football League, the American Football League actively scouted and drafted African-American athletes from its inception. Although the Los Angeles Rams of the NFL signed Kenny Washington and Woody Strode to its roster in 1946, the move did not lead to immediate and widespread integration. While it took the NFL seventeen years to complete its task of integrating black players into its league, the new AFL accomplished the feat during its first season in 1960, when seven of its eight teams had at least one black player. By the start of the 1962 campaign, forty-seven African Americans were on the eight rosters. The league's practice of incorporating black players, however, could not completely overcome generations of bigotry. Stacking occurred regularly, as black athletes did not fill the positions that some coaches thought required more decision-making ability and responsibility than other roster spots. In 1960, for example, only five-and-a-half percent of linebackers and guards were black; none played regularly at center, kicker, punter, or quarterback. Coaches and personnel responsible for filling AFL squads "established an unwritten policy that created a positional system of racial quotas and set-asides." Even with the still discriminatory system, however, the American Football League created opportunities that the NFL closed. As historian Charles K. Ross notes, "black players brought a new

style of play to the football field, one born of pride in their accomplishments, an increased assertiveness because they were no longer tokens, and a rise in levels of self-esteem brought about by the black social revolution."<sup>25</sup>

New Orleans had hoped that the promise of positive treatment of African-American players would create a welcome environment for professional football. The city experienced what officials considered something of a renaissance in race relations just a few weeks before the AFL All-Star game when the 1965 Sugar Bowl between Syracuse and Louisiana State University became the first integrated football game of national importance in the state since the legal end of segregation. Jim Hall of the *Louisiana Weekly*, New Orleans's African-American newspaper, praised the event, writing that the year's classic "will be sweeter because some brown coloring has been added to the mixture in the bowl. The flavor will make the pigskin dish more tasty to all." It was a milestone, however, long in coming.<sup>26</sup>

Unlike the Rose Bowl, which from its first contest in 1916 never discriminated against African-American athletes, the Sugar Bowl did not allow black players to participate in its New Year's classic until 1965. The brainchild of the Mid-Winter Sports Association, the first Sugar Bowl took place on January 1, 1935, with a ban on black players on the field and a segregation of fans in the stands. Coupled with the already prevalent de facto residential segregation in the Big Easy, such race-fueled practices created a Sophie's choice for northern colleges and universities. Southern schools forced visiting squads from the north to bench their African-American players or leave them home. Demonstrating the power of southern collegiate football at the time, many southern schools even demanded black players not play in contests that took place during away games at the northern school's stadium. Segregationist policies in the South, however, did not only affect student athletes. By the late 1940s, a ticket to the Sugar Bowl contained a disclaimer: "This ticket is issued for a person of the Caucasian race." And while most northern teams did not have black players on their squads, African American students increasingly became involved in the ancillary factions of football, such as cheerleading and the marching band.<sup>27</sup>

The Mid-Winter Sports Association found it increasingly difficult to attract exciting match-ups to its New Year spectacle. Southern legislators continued to make the task more arduous after the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown*. The case, which famously desegregated the nation's public schools, ran counter to the prevailing notions of the White South and its ideal of a pre-Civil War

paternalistic society. Sugar Bowl officials, realizing the need to keep their January tilt prevalent, loosened the racial restrictions on the bowl game by inviting an integrated University of Pittsburgh team to play Georgia Tech in the January 1, 1956 contest. The Pitt squad had one African-American footballer, Bobby Grier, who was "sufficient to alarm rabid segregationists in both Georgia and Louisiana." Georgia Tech's athletic department accepted the bid, but it knew passing the decision by boosters and the governor would be necessary. After receiving numerous complaints from donors and fans of Yellow Jackets' football, Georgia Governor Marvin Griffin reversed his original support for the squad playing in the game. He also urged the board of regents to rescind the invitation. "The South stands at Armageddon," he said. "The battle is joined. We cannot make the slightest concession to the enemy in this dark and lamentable hour of struggle. There is no more difference in compromising the integrity of race on the playing field than in doing so in the classroom. One break in the dike and the relentless seas will rush in and destroy us." Even if officials wanted to desegregate their bowl games for the sake of competition and money, clearly state actors had other things in mind.<sup>28</sup>

For many southern collegiate campuses, the most progressive voices came from students themselves, and Georgia Tech's students went out of their way to express disapproval of the governor's decision to keep the team out of the game. Students burned images of Griffin in effigy while organizing a group of nearly two thousand students into a march to the Georgia state capitol and the governor's mansion. Eventually, the university system board of regents reversed its decision and agreed to allow the team to compete in New Orleans for the bowl game. They did, however, note that officials would uphold the traditions of the sovereign state of Georgia at future home football contests. The "Georgia Tech Riot" did nothing to make New Orleans more appealing to professional sports leagues, especially football leagues. For a city that was hoping to present itself as a beacon of post-war diversity and progressivism, the idea of integrated sporting events taking place in The Big Easy seemed like a pipe dream. The Louisiana legislature of the 1950s did all it could to prevent desegregated contests in all sports. The Sugar Bowl's unwillingness to allow African-American players to compete hurt other sports as well. The annual collegiate basketball tournament that accompanied the football contest, for example, remained an all-white regional affair between southern teams. Northern schools also began canceling regularly scheduled matchups with Deep South schools in basketball as well as football.<sup>29</sup>



Eventually, in one of many showdowns between the federal government and the South, the United States Supreme Court would deal yet another death blow to Jim Crow. In 1958, United States federal courts invalidated the Louisiana law segregating athletic competition, and the United States Supreme Court upheld the decision in May 1959. The lower court case, *Dorsey v. State Athletic Commission*, began as a suit from an African-American prizefighter.<sup>30</sup> The court ultimately declared that the *Brown* ruling applied to athletic contests. The Louisiana State Athletic Commission's act of preventing an African-American boxer from competing violated the Constitution. The Commission's argument that the state had the right to prevent black prizefighters from competing within its borders as a constitutional use of the state's police power fell on deaf ears to the three federal judges, led by Judge Minor Wisdom. The Constitution did limit that police power, Wisdom argued, if a state took away a constitutionally protected right. The judiciary continued the work of desegregating sports by ridding the South of the last vestige of segregated athletics, segregated fan seating, in January 1964.<sup>31</sup>

Many in New Orleans hoped that the first desegregated Sugar Bowl would represent a bright future for race relations and a welcome stage for big-time professional football. The introduction of integrated games would only make the city's image as a potential home for a national football franchise, either from the NFL or the AFL, that much more attractive. Officials in New Orleans, especially Dave Dixon of New Orleans Professional Football, Inc., figured their best option for bringing professional football to the city was the younger AFL. Dixon hoped to use the upcoming All-Star game as New Orleans's best chance at attracting an expansion franchise to the Crescent City. Sporting his best pair of glasses with rose-colored lenses, he claimed that New Orleans set itself apart in the area of progressive race relations: "New Orleans is a different kind of a city," he claimed, ignoring the AAU debacle of 1927. "New Orleans was a better city about race than any other Southern city because of a long tradition of people living right on top of each other. I lived in a pretty nice home, and we were never more than two or three blocks from black families. We had no problems in New Orleans at all."<sup>32</sup>

That was, of course, a lie, but one in service to civic development, even though that development seemed far-fetched in the racial climate of the city a decade after *Brown*. In interviews with reporters during the week of the 1965 Sugar Bowl, Dixon expressed little faith in the NFL giving New Orleans a club. "All we ever get from Pete Rozelle and the NFL is politeness," said Dixon, not

wanting to offend a league that could still have New Orleans in its sights. "He acts as interested in New Orleans as an Eskimo visiting here in the middle of the summer. Joe Foss [commissioner of the AFL]," however, "looks more kindly towards New Orleans." Dixon hoped to fill Tulane Stadium, which seated 80,000 fans, for the AFL All-Star Game. Realistically, he figured about 45,000 fans would attend the event, which would still double the average annual attendance at previous years' matches. The largest crowd of the past three AFL All-Star games, for instance, numbered 25,500 at an event in San Diego. Dixon also hoped a great All-Star game would add to the two successful AFL exhibitions already on the city's resume. Compared to Houston's regular-season attendance figures, New Orleans totaled around 21,000 paying attendees. Dixon and other optimists thought little stood in New Orleans's way of impressing Joe Foss and other AFL officials when they considered expansion.<sup>33</sup>

The game was to take place on January 16, 1965. The players slated to participate in the contest only increased the interest of Louisianans, both black and white. Three players hailed from Grambling State University. Ernie Ladd of the San Diego Chargers, Buck Buchanan of the Kansas City Chiefs, and Willie Brown of the Denver Broncos would be on the field playing for the West squad. The league named Ladd and Brown unanimous All-Pro selections. Kansas City selected Buchanan with its first pick in the 1962 draft. Other local stars included LSU legend and Heisman Trophy winner Billy Cannon. Drafted by the Houston Oilers in 1960, he now played for the Oakland Raiders. Johnny Robinson of LSU would also be on the field. Anticipation and excitement kept building for New Orleans and its officials hoping to bring professional football to the city on a more permanent basis.<sup>34</sup>

The emotional high of all involved in the concerted effort to bring pro football to Louisiana, however, died quickly. Black players on both the East and the West squads complained of widespread discrimination and poor treatment from New Orleans citizens and business owners. According to some, that mistreatment began at the airport. Ernie Warlick told of African-American players having to wait almost an hour to hail a cab from the Moisant International Airport to their hotels. "It seemed that if Negro players were with several white players they were serviced by the cab drivers," he said. "But the ones who were not with white teammates were refused service."<sup>35</sup> While Warlick never experienced trouble at the airport, transportation from the hotel presented another set of obstacles. "Several cab drivers outside the Fontainebleau refused to take me," said Warlick. Halfback Clem Daniels of the Oakland Raiders stated that

he was part of a group that had to wait about twenty minutes for a cab outside of the hotel. "There were five or six cabs lined up outside the hotel but the divers began getting out of their cabs and walking away rather than service us," stated Daniels. He continued, "Finally, we stood in the middle of the street and a cab stopped rather than run us down." Dick Westmoreland, a defensive back for the San Diego Chargers and West squad alternate, said that one cab driver stopped and "told us he couldn't take us because he'd be arrested if the police saw him carrying Negro passengers. He suggested that we call a Negro cab." While black players had to physically hail cabs in unheard of ways, taxi drivers were not the only New Orleanians giving the players grief.<sup>36</sup>

Westmoreland also spoke of owners and personnel preventing them from entering certain clubs and bars in the French Quarter. "We weren't looking for trouble. We were just sightseeing. Doors were shut in our faces as we attempted to enter several establishments and some people hurled insults at us," he said. "We could plainly see that we were not wanted and felt it best to return to the hotel but being unfamiliar with the city we didn't know the way." Warlick told reporters that the treatment took the players by complete surprise. "We were led to believe that we could relax and enjoy ourselves in New Orleans just like other citizens. Maybe if we had been alerted to the fact that we wouldn't have the run of the town, we could have avoided this unpleasant situation." The African American players eventually met with each other at the Roosevelt Hotel to discuss matters.<sup>37</sup>

White player Ron Mix, concerned about the black players' feelings and their solutions to the problems faced on the streets of New Orleans, decided to walk over to the Sunday, January 10 meeting at the Roosevelt as well. Mix "felt something was wrong about what the Negro ballplayers were doing. Not wrong to protest, but wrong in method. An action such as this must lead to a favorable result. What would be accomplished by their actions? Nothing that I could see." While discussing methods with the players, Ernie Warlick interrupted and brought up previous poor treatment black players received in Atlanta. "A definite action must be taken," he said. Art Powell agreed. "Look, we know we aren't going to change these people. But neither are they going to change us. We must act as our conscience dictates," he told the room. "I suppose it would be better to stay here and by doing so, imply that we accept such treatment for ourselves and our people? Do you want us to condone that?" he asked. The players became even more candid in speaking to Mix. Abner Hayes told a story of asking a taxi to take him to a nightclub; the cab driver

instead drove him to one that Hayes claimed "is a hangout for perverts." He wasn't the only one. "Ernie Ladd, Dick Westmoreland and a couple of others had been turned away from one Bourbon Street club by a man who indicated he had a gun." Mix sympathized with the players even if he did not agree with their methods of protest. In the end, however, he made it known that he would stand next to his fellow players and not participate in the All-Star game if they chose to sit out.<sup>38</sup>

Later at that meeting, the African American players announced that they would present a united front and boycott the game as scheduled in New Orleans. Most of the players arranged to leave the city as soon as possible. Ernie Warlick served as the spokesperson for the group and made an official statement on its behalf. He stated that being a part of such a progressive sports league regarding African American participation meant that the black players should not play in New Orleans that Saturday. The players felt they could not perform one hundred percent in the contest. "With the exception of the hotels where the squads were quartered," Warlick said, "recreational facilities and transportation were not available to the Negro players and service was refused." Commissioner Joe Foss, called that night by the protesting group, assured them that the league would stand behind whatever decision they made. The commissioner officially announced the decision the next morning.<sup>39</sup>

The AFL, siding with its disgruntled players, moved the game to the 37,000 seat Jeppesen Stadium in Houston, Texas. Foss, on the phone all night before making the decision, agreed that the players had adequate reason to walk out. African Americans across the city and state agreed with the decision, as well. Jim Hall of the *Louisiana Weekly* wrote that New Orleans probably lost pro football altogether due to the treatment of the players. "This shocking blow, knocked New Orleans down the ladder in its bid to reach the top," wrote Hall. "The years of work to push the city into 'Big Time' sports went down the drain Sunday, when the racial discrimination snake in the French Quarter and the local cabs sank its ugly fangs in the Negro players here for the game." There would be no way to stop the racial downpour, as Hall called it, "and because of the 'hate' shower, which has been continuous in certain quarters, New Orleans chances of being a sports center, have been drowned."<sup>40</sup>

Ernest N. Morial, the New Orleans NAACP president, also agreed with the players' decision. He met with the black players during their afternoon meeting in response to an invitation from the protesting players. Morial told players that he would support whatever they decided to do, but that they



should consider giving the city twenty-four hours to determine if officials could do something to keep the game in New Orleans. The affected parties attempted to make contact with New Orleans Mayor Victor H. Schiro, but he could not meet with them that night due to illness. Morial told them that the NAACP would continue to push for changes in the city, regardless of the decision they made. The city's black leadership presented a solid front in support of their fellow African Americans' actions and their attempts to enlighten the community to their plight.<sup>41</sup>

The white leadership of New Orleans and Louisiana, meanwhile, solidly opposed the actions of the black players. Mayor Schiro, for example, began his official statement by saying that "if these men would play football only in cities where everybody loved them, they would all be out of a job today. Their reaction would only aggravate the very condition they are seeking, in time, to eliminate. We are a very cosmopolitan and tolerant city, but we are also a Southern city, and there are times when personal reaction is unpredictable." The mayor used the recent Sugar Bowl as an indication that integrated sports do have a place in New Orleans, even though Syracuse had only eight African American players and LSU had none. Schiro continued by stating that the players who walked out "should have rolled with the punch. Almost all of them are educated, college men, who must be aware that you cannot change human nature overnight." He criticized them as doing "themselves and their race a disservice by precipitous action. Not to mention the irreparable harm they inflicted on the future of professional football in New Orleans." Schiro, unlike O'Keefe a generation prior, had no position of authority in athletics decisions and, barred from helping choose the city's fate, instead lashed out at the players, only adding further fuel to the racial fire. Importantly, however, Schiro was not doing so in aid of a desire to keep the game and the players in New Orleans. He was clumsy and frustrated in his handling of the debacle, but he was not taking a roundly white supremacist stand.<sup>42</sup>

Chairman E.M. Rowley of the Citizens' Special Committee expressed a similar regret, though better expressed, especially since, in his opinion, New Orleans was making great strides in race relations since the passage of the Civil Rights Act. Nicholas Tedesco, director of the City Cab Bureau, injected a little realism into the city's response. While stating that those cabs with Negro permits could carry whites and white-permit cabs could now carry African Americans, individual drivers did not have to cater to them. Section 12-91 of the city code still gave individual permit holders the right to carry only those

passengers that their permit designated. The discussion of these city leaders merely reinforced the uncertainty of race relations following the Civil Rights Act and the problems the city would face in the future.<sup>43</sup>

A *Times-Picayune* sports editorial stated that the players should have fulfilled their obligations to their employers and to the city. The writer mentioned an issue he had with getting a cab in New York City to the Aqueduct racetrack to cover the Belmont Stakes, wherein the driver refused him service not because of his race but because of the location of the track. The writer went on to praise Dave Dixon for the work he did in procuring the contest for the city and told citizens of New Orleans to keep their heads held high, for a chance for the Crescent City to get a professional franchise still remained. Governor John McKeithen, speaking at a Chamber of Commerce luncheon in New Orleans, stated that he was proud of Louisiana and its racial progress. The players acted unreasonably, in his opinion, because they did not tell the mayor or himself that they were leaving. McKeithen declared that the "black players should have given the city a chance. There are some clubs on Bourbon Street that won't even let our D.A. in."<sup>44</sup>

It was a good line, and very likely true. But blame for the game's absence belonged solely on white New Orleans. The boycott of New Orleans by black AFL players represented a milestone for civil rights in sports. While other African-American athletes had protested against discrimination before, this hugely powerful move forced the league to move its All-Star game due to player concerns. The players' efforts also hammered the last nail into the coffin of American Football League action in New Orleans.<sup>45</sup>

Ultimately, professional football would march into New Orleans, but it would not be a team from the American Football League. Louisiana utilized its political muscle in wrangling a professional football franchise for the Big Easy via the National Football League. Dave Dixon's dreams finally materialized due to the political clout of the state's representatives in the United States Congress. NFL owners did not mind early on keeping their numbers small, as a lucrative profit-sharing agreement kept their pockets full. But the league's practice of absorbing smaller leagues before they became competitive enough to take away from the NFL's spotlight eventually led league officials to the AFL. Owners knew, however, that they would not be able to get a merger as large as the NFL-AFL past federal trade regulators unless they had an antitrust exemption. Major League Baseball had such an exemption, but earlier efforts at the NFL gaining something similar fell short.<sup>46</sup> The league would finally get

that congressional exemption through the efforts of Louisiana's Senator Russell Long and Congressman Hale Boggs. As a reward for their efforts, the newly-created NFL, which had absorbed its AFL rival and now had two conference components, the National Football Conference and the American Football Conference, awarded a franchise to New Orleans.<sup>47</sup>

It was a post-*Brown* story that began with hope—hope from the Mid-Winter Sports Association that its Sugar Bowl could become the draw of the nation's eye, pitting two of the best collegiate football squads in competition, and hope from Dave Dixon and others that New Orleans could become the beacon of success for southern Jim Crow cities to emerge from the ashes and become the phoenix of progressive race relations. But the city did nothing to create a welcome environment for professional sports in Louisiana. The actions and reactions of both African Americans and whites involved in the AFL's boycott of New Orleans demonstrated how far the Crescent City still had to go in achieving improved race relations after the passage of the Civil Rights Act. Officials in New Orleans hoped the game would serve as a stage for the city to show off progressive race relations to the nation and those in control of the AFL, but for a segment of the city's population the continued mistreatment of blacks and the maintenance of segregation outweighed the importance of the city gaining a professional football franchise.

Despite Schiro's clumsy, vindictive response to the boycott, the incident demonstrated a situation where a southern metropolitan government attempting to establish itself as a Sunbelt power was ahead of its population on race relations. These politicians were not playing to the racist whims of their citizens like white populist leaders in statehouses across the region. Instead, they were attempting to remedy the problems that occurred at events like the 1927 AAU national track and field championships. While civic leaders had made the changes to remedy the city's early failings, a segment of their citizens had yet to come around. That the pace of change between governments and governed would not be uniform is not a radical notion, of course, but the history of post-*Brown* southern populism demonstrates that usually the politicians followed the racial whims of a given constituency to curry favor and maintain power. The progression of New Orleans from 1927 to 1965, however, told a different story, one where the city government, in an effort at civic development, had learned from past mistakes and sought to put racial differences behind it while a vocal part of its citizenry stayed behind. The differentiation would not produce

electoral consequences for Schiro because the city was still able to secure the Saints two years later, but it was differentiation nonetheless.

Such is not to say that all white citizens of New Orleans were atavistic racists. Demonstrating the lack of monolithic uniformity in the city's racial thinking, two years after the AFL All-Star Game debacle, in 1967, the fully-integrated Saints played their inaugural season in the city. Two years after the AAU track and field debacle, in 1929, New Orleans industrialist and Assistant Secretary of the Navy Ernest Lee Jahncke became a United States representative on the International Olympic Committee, a tenure that would end in 1936 when Jahncke refused to support the location of the summer Olympics in Hitler's Berlin. Jahncke became the only man in the twentieth century to be "fired" from the IOC after his moral stand against the Nazis. Jahncke was very much part of the New Orleans elite that produced O'Keefe and the other civic leaders who turned against an integrated AAU meet, but racial thinking was never uniform in New Orleans.<sup>48</sup>

That reality makes understanding the pace of racial awakening between government and governed all the more significant. Civic leaders had no moral epiphany by the time of the AFL All-Star Game. There was instead an economic epiphany, one that average white citizens could not see as being in their interest. A team of their own like the Saints, however, was a legitimate carrot, not just for civic boosterism, but for disaffected white citizens who could fold the new team into their own self-identity. The pace of such racial awakenings, then, was never about moral reckonings. It was instead about proximity to tangible economic benefits, a proximity that would always redound to civic leaders and thus skew the pace of racial change in the city.



of the North American Society for Sports History, California State University, Fullerton, Fullerton, California, 28 May 2017. I am indebted to Dr. Moore, associate professor of history at Grand Valley State University, not only for sharing his paper with me but also for sharing several *Louisiana Weekly* stories from the 1960s that I use in this essay.

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74. N. Charles Wicker, "What's What," *New Orleans Times Picayune*, 22 September 1963, 6–7.

75. "Negro Will Run in Sugar Meet," *New Orleans Times Picayune*, 18 December 1964, 2–12; "Tan Thinclads in Sugar Meet," *Louisiana Weekly*, 26 December 1964, B-1; "Negroes in Sugar Bowl Meet," *New York Times*, 19 December 1964, 35; Jerry Pierce, "Sugar Bowl Track Meet Will Stay on the Ground This Year," *New Orleans Times Picayune*, 27 December 1964, 6–3; Nate Cohen, "Theron Lewis is Outstanding Star," *New Orleans Times Picayune*, 30 December 1964, 4–3; "Tan Cindermen A 1st Sugar Bowl Event," *Chicago Daily Defender*, 30 December 1964, 22; "Lewis Sets Mark in the 400-Meter Run," *New York Times*, 30 December 1964, 38; Butch Curry, "Lewis Steals Show in Sugar Bowl Track Meet," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 9 January 1965, 22; and "Lewis Smashes Record in Sugar Bowl's 400-Meters," *Louisiana Weekly*, 9 January 1965, 10.

76. Jim Hall, "Time Out," *Louisiana Weekly*, 9 January 1965, 9.

77. Letter from John O. Brown, Dillard University Track Coach, to the Lee Early, President of the SAAAU, October 27, 1966; file of uncertain provenance . . . folder, n.d., 232–17; NOAC Collections.

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## Chapter 11

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2. *New York Times*, 16 November 1926, 30; *Pittsburgh Courier*, 30 April 1927, 18; and *Boston Globe*, 26 April 1927, 14. See also Mark Dyreson, "'No Room for Such a Club in Our Organization': The Southern Association of the Amateur Athletic Union's Long Fight for White Supremacy in New Orleans and the South," in this volume. For more on the machinations of the AAU in this period, see Arnold William Flath, *A History of Relations Between the National Collegiate Athletic Association and the Amateur Athletic Union of the United States, 1905–1963* (Champaign, IL: Stipes Publishing Co., 1964), 51–98.

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6. *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 6 March 1927, 3, 27 March 1927, 3.

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9. New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, 22 April 1927, 15; New York *Herald Tribune*, 22 April 1927, 1; Pittsburgh *Courier*, 30 April 1927, 18; Chicago *Tribune*, 22 April 1927, 19; and Baltimore *Afro-American*, 30 April 1927, 15. For more on Hubbard, see William DeHart Hubbard Collection, Mss 1067, Cincinnati History Library and Archives, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.
10. New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, 22 April 1927, 15.
11. Chicago *Defender*, 30 April 1927, 9.
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16. Daily News quoted in Baltimore *Afro-American*, 30 April 1927, 15.
17. The *Globe* also used New Orleans's failings to boost its own bid for the event, claiming, "There is no better track city in the good old USA." Boston *Globe*, 23 April 1927, 14, 25 April 1927, 10.
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19. New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, 10 April 1927, 5, 6 May 1927, 17, 18 May 1927, 15.
20. Chester Hingle, another New Orleanian, won the broad jump in Houston, thus qualifying for the national meet, but did not make the trip to Lincoln. New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, 7 June 1927, 13, 13 June 1927, 13, 12 July 2012, B1.
21. Los Angeles *Times*, 7 April 1927, B1; and New York *Herald Tribune*, 26 June 1927, A4.
22. Chicago *Defender*, 9 July 1927, 9; and New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, 12 July 1927, 11.
23. New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, 5 July 1927, 14, 9 July 1927, 10; and Chicago *Defender*, 9 July 1927, 9.
24. Maynard Brichford, "Avery Brundage and Racism," *Fourth International Symposium for Olympic Research, Global and Cultural Critique: Problematizing the Olympic Games* (October 1998): 132. Brundage's papers offer no evidence of his involvement in the process of the 1927 track and field championships' move to Lincoln. See Avery Brundage Collection, 1908–82, 26/20/37, University of Illinois Archives, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
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37. *Times-Picayune*, 11 January, 1965, 1, 5.
38. Ron Mix, "Was This Their Freedom Ride?" *Sports Illustrated*, 18 January 1965, 24–25.
39. New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, 11 January 1965, 1, 5.
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41. Louisiana *Weekly*, 16 January 1965, 1; and New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, 12 January 1956, 1, 3. For more on Schiro, see Edward F. Haas, *Mayor Victor H. Schiro: New Orleans in Transition, 1961–1970* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014); and Folder 56: 1966 Stadium and National Football League franchise, folder 56, Box 12, Victor H. and Margaret G. Schiro papers, 1904–1995, LaRC/Manuscripts Collection 1001, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library Special Collections, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.
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43. *Times-Picayune*, 12 January 1956, 1, 3.
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## Chapter 12

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