

The Heritage Fallacy: Race, Loyalty, and the First Grambling-Southern Football Game

Thomas Aiello

The lost cause of the Civil War has never really gotten out of our souls. Football, with all of its battle-related language, has long been an expression of our Southern militarism.—David Sansing, white Southerner, former director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, University of Mississippi

In the East, college football is a cultural exercise ... On the West Coast, it is a tourist attraction ... In the Midwest, it is cannibalism ... But in the South it is religion ... And Saturday is the holy day.—Marino Casem, black Southerner, former director of the Department of Athletics, Southern University and A&M College

In the 1920s and 1930s, Americans celebrated November 11 with parades and parties. With bright-colored streamers and the soft, patient reflection that comes from winning a major war. But throughout the country—and throughout the South in particular—they also celebrated with sports. Armistice Day was for football. Special high school and college games were scheduled throughout the country for the national holiday.

On Armistice Day 1932, the Southern University Bushmen football team left Baton Rouge and traveled to Monroe, LA—a burgeoning cotton and natural gas hub in the northeast corner of the state—to play the Tigers of Louisiana Negro Normal and Industrial Institute for the first time. Normal was far younger than Southern. It was a two-year junior college in the northeast cotton town of Grambling, and its football team was less than a decade old. Southern was the pride of the state's black population, serving the traditional role that larger southern state universities played for the white population—a source of identity for populations with few cultural, economic, or political advantages. To that end, larger white schools such as the University of Alabama, the University of Arkansas, and Louisiana State University played select home games away from campus, giving other parts of the state a chance to see the team. In Depression-era Louisiana, the Bushmen held similar sway for the state's African-American population.

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The team played games in Shreveport and other population centers. And though the game in Monroe made Normal the de facto home team, the fans came to see Southern.

The contest received no coverage in segregated Monroe's white dailies, and Monroe's black weekly no longer survives. But the scant sources that prove the game took place demonstrate the power of sport for a depressed population stifled by Jim Crow. They demonstrate that the identity phenomenon of state universities—often attributed to white Southern conceptions of honor and loyalty—was not necessarily a white phenomenon at all. More simply, they tell the story, however incomplete, of the first contest in what would become by the end of the century the most culturally significant black football rivalry in the nation.

The Development of Black Higher Education in Louisiana

The rudiments of modern black education in Louisiana developed during Reconstruction, when the Freedmen's Bureau promoted secondary, normal, and industrial education in the former Confederate states. When the postwar Constitutional Convention met, black delegates urged educational improvements, noting that black illiteracy topped 40 percent in New Orleans, and was even lower in rural outlying areas, where there was not a significant free black population before emancipation. But while the government did create Union Normal School in New Orleans, the rest of its efforts were focused squarely on elementary and secondary education. Three small private colleges—Leland University, Straight University, and New Orleans University—all opened in the early 1870s, largely the creatures of northern religious investment. Leland, for example, was sponsored by northern Baptists, who used the school in the years following Reconstruction as the flagship of fifteen primary education academies throughout the state. Each affiliated academy then funneled students to Leland, who provided secondary, normal, and college courses. The network existed entirely independently of the state government, who saw the school as "over-bookish." Black education should train students for work, the state argued, not for higher thinking. When white legislators had their chance to once again dominate the legislature, they would try to create a school better suited to the perceived needs of their black charges.¹

¹Straight was the creation of the American Missionary Association, founded in 1868. New Orleans University grew out of Union Normal. Charles Vincent, *A Centennial History of Southern University and A&M College, 1880-1980* (Baton Rouge, LA: Charles Vincent, 1981), 3-6; and Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the*

And so Southern, unlike its private forebears, would instead be a creature of Reconstruction's demise. As a component of the Compromise of 1877, which gave the presidency to Ohio Republican Rutherford Hayes, the federal government removed the last vestiges of martial law from Louisiana. Worried about the legacy of black Louisiana's Reconstruction political power, white Democrats courted the support of former African-American lieutenant governor P. B. S. Pinchback. Governor Francis Nicholls would support black education if Pinchback supported Nicholls. Pinchback agreed, and as a member of the 1879 Constitutional Convention's Committee on Public Education, he initiated and passed the article providing for a state-funded black university in New Orleans. As promised, Nicholls gave the appropriation his endorsement. Southern University opened the following year in 1880.²

In 1914, Southern moved to Scotlandville, 5 miles north of Baton Rouge. The possibility had been debated for five years. Joseph Samuel Clark, president of the Louisiana State Colored Teachers Association, first broached the subject of moving the state's public university to a location more accessible to the predominantly rural black population of Louisiana. After being named Southern's president in September 1913, he began seeking new locations for the school. His first choice, ironically enough, was to move the campus to the small north Louisiana town of Grambling, where a fledgling industrial school already existed. White resistance kept Clark away, and eventually Scotlandville was chosen from three potential locations on the outskirts of Baton Rouge. Various controversies and disagreements ensued, but eventually the state government sanctioned the move, adding a significant agricultural component to the university's mission now that it would be housed in a rural setting. Clark became the school's new president, but the initial trials of the university move took their toll. Funding and facilities were inadequate in the new location, leaving Clark and the Board of Trustees to scrounge for private donations to begin the necessary addition projects soon after the new school opened.³

Segregated South (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2007), 192. See also, Dwight Oliver Wendell Holmes, *The Evolution of the Negro College* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934); and Henry Bullock, *A History of Negro Education in the South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967).

²Pinchback also served briefly as Louisiana's governor during Reconstruction. Vincent, *A Centennial History of Southern University and A&M College*, 6–12; and "The New Southern University for the Education of Colored Students," *Louisiana Journal of Education* 2 (January 1881): 269–72.

³Vincent, *A Centennial History of Southern University and A&M College*, 63–91. See also, James M. Frazier, "The History of Negro Education in the Parish of East Baton Rouge, Louisiana" (MA thesis, State University of Iowa, 1937).

Of course, Baton Rouge was not immune to white resistance. In the years preceding the move, race riots often erupted. The city responded by calling out the cadets of the Louisiana State University ROTC. The incidents made LSU a particular focus of black ire, as poor, uneducated black residents squared off against wealthier white collegians. This became a particular cause of concern for the government, who wondered aloud whether adding more black residents to the area—and temporary residents, at that—would be tenable for racial peace in the region. State Superintendent of Education Thomas Harris warned Clark about the nightmare scenario, with Southern students and LSU students battling in the streets. And, of course, it would surely all be the fault of the new black population. Clark's response was swift and convincing. "Mr. Harris, I have more faith in education than that. I believe that an educated white man and an educated Negro can get along much better than an uneducated white person and an uneducated Negro."⁴

The successful reputations of Clark and Southern grew symbiotically. Clark was not only an education activist and president of the university. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover appointed him Chairman of the Combined Colored Relief Forces for Louisiana, Mississippi, and Arkansas in the aftermath of the devastating 1927 Mississippi River flood. He served the U.S. Department of Education as an advisor on "Negro Colleges in America." When Hoover became president, Clark began to receive federal special commission appointments. Southern, meanwhile, became the most important black institution in the state. Shelby Jackson, state superintendent of Public Education, estimated in 1960 that from 1924 to 1936, "seventy-five percent of all negro schools, fifty percent of all principals, eighty percent of all home demonstration agents, ninety percent of all agriculture workers in the State were graduates of Southern." He also noted that the majority of black professionals, doctors, and nurses had attended Southern as well.⁵

Athletics had always been part of university life. Southern joined an intercollegiate baseball league while still in New Orleans with its three counterparts—Leland, Straight, and New Orleans—but chronically failed to produce any nineteenth-century athletic success. The new

⁴John B. Cade, *The Man Christened Josiab Clark* (New York: The American Press, 1966), 96–99.

⁵Clark served as Southern's president until 1938, when his son Felton took over. Vincent, *A Centennial History of Southern University and A&M College*, 111–16; Cade, *The Man Christened Josiab Clark*, 157–64; and Shelby M. Jackson, *A Historical Sketch of Louisiana State Colleges*, vol. 2 (Baton Rouge: State Superintendent of Public Education, 1960), 24.

Southern University at Scotlandville revived baseball in 1916, but the effort was overshadowed by another development that season. In 1916, Southern began playing football. The team's first game, on Thanksgiving Day, was a blowout 20-0 loss to New Orleans, leaving the school's pride in tatters. It would play only intramural games until 1919. In its early development, the team played local high schools, as well as the private black colleges in New Orleans. But as the years progressed, Southern's ability—and thus its state stature—blossomed. By 1932, Southern was the state's major power, the grandfather of Louisiana's African-American academic institutions.⁶

Louisiana Negro Normal's 1932 status was far more tenuous. Historian Michael Hurd has described the early situation of Normal as a "student body of rural poor [in] the shadow of elitist all-black Southern University." That it was. But the geneses of Normal and its hometown were rooted in their rural natures. Grambling began as a settlement of former slaves following the Civil War. Freedmen in north Louisiana—most from neighboring plantations outside of Ruston—bought small tracts of land from their former masters and established a farming community designed to stave off the harsh realities of Reconstruction and Bourbon Louisiana. In 1896, reformer and farm relief organizer Lafayette Richmond convinced Grambling's residents to found the North Louisiana Colored Agricultural Relief Association Union. It was the Relief Association that decided the town needed industrial education, and to that end, early in 1901, Richmond and other leaders wrote to Booker T. Washington at his Tuskegee Institute, asking for a qualified candidate to help them establish and operate a school. Washington chose recent graduate Charles Phillip Adams.⁷

Adams began as a reluctant leader. Though a Louisiana native, he planned to attend Howard law school after his graduation, but was convinced by Washington to do otherwise. "Tuskegee is educating men and women to stay in the South and do their work here," explained Washington. "If you study law you will have to leave the South in order to practice it. The race needs your service right here in the South." And so Adams arrived in August and opened the new Allen Green Normal and Industrial Institute, three teachers strong, soon after. Internecine disputes between board members and Adams led to a split four years

⁶Michael Hurd, "Collie J": *Grambling's Man with the Golden Pen* (Haworth, NJ: St. Johann Press, 2007), v; Cade, *The Man Christened Josiah Clark*, 142-43; and Vincent, *A Centennial History of Southern University and A&M College*, 27-28, 133-35.

⁷In the late 1880s, Alfred Richmond leased a tract of land to white entrepreneur P. G. Grambling for a sawmill, and the community ultimately took his name. Doris Dorcas Carter, "Charles P. Adams and Grambling College" (MA thesis: Louisiana Tech University, 1971), 10-15.

later. The Association wanted more religious instruction, while Adams clung desperately to the Washington model of pragmatic industrial education. The philosophical impasse prompted Adams and his supporters to relocate the college to Grambling's present-day location. There, in 1905, opened the North Louisiana Agricultural and Industrial School.⁸ The school operated on private funds until 1912, when funding was taken over by the Lincoln Parish School Board.⁹

In 1928, Huey Long was elected governor. Robert B. Knott was elected state senator for a district that housed Lincoln Parish. After Adams convinced Knott to sponsor legislation making the school a state institution, both lobbied Long, using as a carrot the political support of black north Louisiana. Long agreed, and in 1928, the now-named Louisiana Negro Normal and Industrial Institute became a state college.¹⁰ Still, though the institute now fell under state auspices, the state provided no funding. The Lincoln Parish School Board still purchased textbooks. The faculty and students pooled money to buy athletic equipment for the football team, and what funds they did provide proved inadequate to the task of fully outfitting the squad. As of Fall 1932, the semester of Normal's first game against vaunted Southern, the institute did not yet have full water and electric facilities. The state provided a US\$9,000 appropriation that year, the first of any such funding to reach Grambling, Louisiana, but more was needed. "One year the state simply left us out of the budget," said Calvin Wilkerson, a 1932 graduate. "They said, 'Sorry, we forgot. Do the best you can.' So, the faculty just stayed and worked for nothing."¹¹

State spending on Grambling's Institute was far from rare for Louisiana's white legislature. During the 1929–1930 school year, for example, Louisiana's per capita expenditure for white students was US\$40.64. For black students it was US\$7.84. Still, the state's black schools made significant progress. In 1890, the black literacy rate in Louisiana was 27.9 percent. By 1930 it was 76.7 percent. But as the

⁸Allen Green, meanwhile, continued to operate—now under the auspices of the Baptist church—until 1929. Carter, "Charles P. Adams and Grambling College," 17–25; and Hurd, *Collie J*, 87–88.

⁹Carter, "Charles P. Adams and Grambling College," 17–25.

¹⁰Adams' alliance with Huey Long kept him employed, and when the state's most powerful politician was assassinated in September 1935, the writing appeared to be on the wall for Grambling's president. In 1936, the school board asked for his resignation. Hurd, *Collie J*, 88–89.

¹¹In all of its various incarnations in these early years, Normal was a two-year institution. O. K. Davis, *Grambling's Gridiron Glory: Eddie Robinson and the Tigers' Success Story* (Ruston, LA: M&M Printing Co., 1983), 16; Carter, "Charles P. Adams and Grambling College," 30–36; and Hurd, *Collie J*, vi.

funding numbers shrank and the literacy rates rose, football remained a constant.¹²

Though the two-year school was smaller and younger than the mighty four-year Southern, and though it was located far from the big city in the small cotton-farming town of Grambling, it managed in 1926, two years before its conversion to a state institution, to field its first football team and form the Tiger Marching Band. The architect of Normal's fledgling athletic program was Ralph Waldo Emerson Jones. Charles Adams hired Jones, seemingly by mistake, to teach and coach at the Institute. Jones graduated from Southern in 1925, one of a graduating class of five. Adams came to interview all five. "He believed in size," said Jones. "He was about 6–10 and 300 pounds and I was tiny, about 125 pounds or less at that time. He just said a few words to me trying to be polite and went on his way. But when he went back home, he got all of us confused, and later he sent for me."¹³

Jones not only coached. He taught math, biology, chemistry, and physics. He acted as registrar. He hauled firewood. Still, there was, as of yet, no team. Jones was responsible for culling a group of players, finding equipment, even piecing together the rudiments of a marching band. Of course, with inadequate academic funding, athletic funding was even scarcer, generally running on private and faculty donations. The importance of college football to Southerners—of any color; of any cultural heritage—is obvious in these spending discrepancies. Even with a poor student body and inadequate state funding, Normal and Southern both maintained football teams.¹⁴

The First Bayou Classic

Eddie Robinson, who in 1941 would become the Grambling football coach, often discussed the draw and magnetism of Southern and LSU. He

¹²This phenomenon was by no means limited to Louisiana. Even on the major college teams of the CIAA and SIAC conferences, student-athletes often paid for their own equipment. Often student-body fundraisers helped defray the cost of keeping the school's football team solvent. Henry Allen Bullock, *A History of Negro Education In the South: From 1619 to the Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 172, 180–81; and Ryan J. Davis and Marybeth Gasman, "Path of Racial Uplift or Status Quo?: The Role of Sports at Historically Black Colleges and Universities," in *The Hidden Gifts of Black Colleges*, ed., Jason De Sousa (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishers, forthcoming; unpublished manuscript in possession of the author), 5.

¹³Davis, *Grambling's Gridiron Glory*, 15; New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, 30 January 1977, p. 15. See also Frances Swayzer Conley, *Prez Lives!: Remembering Grambling's Ralph Waldo Emerson Jones* (Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 2006).

¹⁴Davis, *Grambling's Gridiron Glory*, 15; and Grambling State Alumni Foundation, *Grambling: Cradle of the Pros* (Baton Rouge, LA: Moran Publishing, 1981), 1. See also <http://www.gram.edu/about/history.asp>

would attend the games of both as a high school player. They were the state's premier teams. Still, one was white, one was not. "Southern," said Robinson, "kept having good clubs without so many coaches."¹⁵ But though there was a discrepancy in facilities, funding, and coaching, Southern was the premier black state university just as LSU was the premier white state university. The week before their Armistice Day contest with Normal, Southern lost a game 12-7 to the Alabama State University Hornets in Montgomery. It was, reported the school's newspaper, "Southern's first defeat in two years and the second in three years."¹⁶ And so, flush with success and following the lead of LSU, Southern University embarked on a practice of playing select games in Shreveport, usually corresponding with the late November state fair. In 1932, the Bushmen, like LSU's Tigers, came to Monroe, but unlike LSU, they could not play in white-dominated Brown Stadium, the new home of Monroe's Ouachita Junior College football team. Black traveling baseball games, boxing matches, and other events all took place in the city's Casino Park.

Of course, Grambling was much closer to Monroe, Louisiana than was Baton Rouge. Founded in 1820, Monroe developed into the largest city in the northeast portion of the state and a supply and shipping hub for the region's cotton farmers. The bulk of its prosperity, however, came from gas. Home (at alternating intervals, ever competing with a similar formation in Texas) to the largest natural gas field in the world, Monroe became a hub for carbon black and other petroleum derivatives as well. It brought hundreds of jobs for black and white workers in the region, and it brought oil and gas men from throughout the nation. One of them, entrepreneur Fred Stovall, spent his profits and his free time building a black baseball team, the Monroe Monarchs, first using his gas-worker employees, then moving on to purchase the talents of some of the country's best players. They had a team house on Magnolia Street, their own cook, three Fords for road games, and Casino Park, which they shared with the rest of the black community. Not only was the park reviewed as one of the nicest black facilities in the South, it also featured an adjoining pool and dance pavilion.¹⁷

Stovall built Casino Park—at a cost of approximately US\$75,000—for the larger black community, partly for profit, but partly because he

¹⁵Robinson even briefly tried to play for Southern before moving to smaller Leland College in nearby Baker, Louisiana. Davis, *Grambling's Gridiron Glory*, 3.

¹⁶*Southern University Digest*, 1 November 1932, p. 1; 14 November 1932, p. 4, John B. Cade Library Archives, Southern University and A&M College, Baton Rouge, LA.

¹⁷Stovall, already an experienced oil man, moved to the area in 1917 from the Spindletop region near Beaumont, Texas. Judith Walker Linsley, Ellen Walker Rienstra, and Jo Ann Stiles, *Giant Under the Hill: A History of the Spindletop Oil Discovery at Beaumont, Texas, in 1901* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2002), 1-4, 211-12; "Fred A. Stovall," in *Eastern Louisiana: A History of the Watershed of the Ouachita River and the Florida Parishes*, 585-86; and Ollie Burns, interview with Paul J. Letlow, 13 May 1992.

employed so many black workers. “He didn’t have to do that,” said DeMorris Smith, son of Hilton Smith, hall of fame pitcher who played with the Monarchs before moving on to greater fame with Kansas City. It was, argued baseball historian Robert Peterson, a donation to the black community, an act of generosity. Of course, Stovall was a businessman, and the baseball entry fees of twenty-five and fifty cents and the stadium rental fees for boxing matches and football games demonstrated that profit was also a motive.¹⁸

The ballfield was situated just outside of Monroe’s city limits in what had come to be called the town’s “Booker T. Washington” district. Segregation left the most valuable land in the city in white hands, and since the most valuable land was downtown, black citizens were pushed to the margins. So it went in every Southern city in the early century. In Monroe, the invisible line fell between St. Matthew’s Catholic Cemetery and Monroe Colored High School, moving down Desiard Street to the ballfield, putting it just out of range for fire insurance mapping.¹⁹

The park’s dimensions were modest compared with many parks of the day, when spacious outfields and long fences dominated stadium construction. At 410 ft in center, 337 ft in left, and a 266- ft short field in right, the park was perhaps ideally suited for twenty-first century baseball. But, importantly, the grounds were far large enough to be converted for football play. The stadium sat 3,500 and was often compared with the best contemporary white minor league fields.²⁰

¹⁸The date of Casino’s opening is unknown, but one of Stovall’s companies purchased the land in 1927 and the first reported activities at the facility appear in the local papers in 1930. On June 30, a 16-year-old girl drowned in the swimming pool of “the Negro amusement park two miles east of the city” after being “struck by a chair that fell from the lifeguard’s tower in the center of the pool.” This is the first mention in Monroe’s daily *Morning World* of what could be Casino Park. *Memphis World*, 18 September 1932, p. 5; *Monroe Morning World*, 27 June 1930, p. 1; 1 July 1930, p. 2; 14 July 30, p. 9; 10 October 1958, p. 5A; Robert Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White: A History of Legendary Black Players and All-Black Professional Teams* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 122; DeMorris Smith, interview, 2 September 2004; *Pittsburgh Courier*, 9 April 1932, p. 4; “The Realty Investment Co. Ltd. to J. M. Supply Co. Inc.—Mortgage Deed, Sale of Land,” Record 79482, 23 April 1927, Conveyance Record, Ouachita Parish, Book 157, pp. 775–78, Ouachita Parish Clerk of Court; “J.M. Supply Co. Inc. to The Realty Investment Co. Ltd.—Mortgage Deed, Vendor’s Lien,” Record 79482, 23 April 1927, Mortgage Record, Ouachita Parish, Book 129, pp. 707–10, Ouachita Parish Clerk of Court; “J.M. Supply Co. Inc. to Fred Stovall—Cash Deed, Sale of Land,” Record 139386, 21 May 1930, Conveyance Record, Ouachita Parish, Book 20, pp. 435–56, Ouachita Parish Clerk of Court; and *Who’s Who in the Twin Cities* (West Monroe: H.H. Brinsmade, 1931), 167.

¹⁹*Insurance Map of Monroe and West Monroe, Louisiana, 1932* (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1932), Composite, 18:28–30, 19:26; and “Property of the Heirs of William Thomas; Section 76, Township 18N, R4E” (maps) Plat Book, Ouachita Parish, Book 2, p. 2, 12, Ouachita Parish Clerk of Court.

²⁰Baseball historian Philip J. Lowry cites these dimensions as of 1940. Ten years later, the fences were extended to 360 ft in left, 450 in center, and 330 in right. Philip J. Lowry, *Green*

Of course, in early November, baseball season was over and the stadium had been commandeered—as it customarily was—by the Monroe Colored High football team.²¹ Baseball, however, still lingered. The 1932 season saw Stovall's Monarchs reach the Negro World Series with the Pittsburgh Crawfords, giving Monroe and Casino Park the broadest national and state sports exposure that either had ever received. It was, more than likely, that exposure that convinced promoters to bring the Southern-Normal football game to Monroe. The local white press covered the baseball contests between Pittsburgh and Monroe with far more depth than any other white newspaper in the nation.²² But it did not even mention the Southern-Normal contest, much less report on the game (contributing in large measure to the relative anonymity of the event).²³

Cathedrals: The Ultimate Celebration of Major League and Negro League Ballparks (New York: Walker & Co., 2006), 135–36. Lowry's information came from interviews conducted with Negro League veterans at a 1982 Negro League Players Reunion in Ashland, Kentucky. Email correspondence with the author, 2 November 2006.

²¹Herein lies another discrepancy in the historical record. The *Southern University Register*, the Bushmen's school newspaper, noted that the game was to be played at night. Casino Park did not have lights. But the only other option was Forsythe Park, the stadium used for Monroe's white minor league baseball team. That stadium was also the home of Neville High's Tigers. More than likely, Southern's expectation that the game would take place at night was not fulfilled. Casino Park seems the only logical venue for the event. *Monroe Morning World*, 14 October 1932, p. 7; 24 December 1932, p. 6; 25 December 1932, p. 9; 26 December 1932, p. 6; 27 December 1932, p. 6; and *Southern University Digest*, 1 November 1932, p. 1, John B. Cade Library Archives, Southern University and A&M College, Baton Rouge, LA.

²²See Thomas Aiello, "Black Newspapers' Presentation of Black Baseball, 1932: A Case of Cultural Forgetting," *NINE: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture* 17 (Spring 2009): 31–44; Thomas Aiello, "The Southern against the South: The Chicago Conspiracy in the 1932 Negro Southern Baseball League," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 102 (Spring 2009): 7–27; Thomas Aiello, "The Composition of Kings: The Monroe, Louisiana Monarchs, 1932," *The Baseball Research Journal* 35 (Spring 2007): 1–14; Thomas Aiello, "Negroes Are Different in Dixie: The Press, Perception, and Negro League Baseball in the Jim Crow South, 1932," *The Hall Institute of Public Policy—New Jersey* (April 2007), <http://www.hallnj.org>; and Thomas Aiello, "The Casino and Its Kings are Gone: The Transient Relationship of Monroe, Louisiana with Major League Black Baseball, 1932," *North Louisiana History* 37 (Winter 2006): 15–38.

²³Monroe's two dailies, the *Monroe Morning World* and the *Monroe News Star*, were not the only newspapers to ignore the game. In fact, Shreveport's black weekly, the *Shreveport Sun*, would be the only state newspaper to announce the existence of the game. The *New Orleans Times-Picayune* ignored the game. The *Baton Rouge State-Times* covered the LSU freshman team in depth, providing sustained analysis of the team's game with Ouachita Junior College, but never mentioned that the city's other team was also in Monroe for the Armistice Day holiday. The *Ruston Daily Leader*, Lincoln Parish's largest newspaper, mentioned nothing about the game in its Armistice Day coverage. The paper's only Negro coverage on Armistice Day was a crime report recounting the actions of Robert and Henry Bass, "negro[es] living in Ward 7, on a charge of stealing hogs." *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 12 November 1932, p. 9; *Baton Rouge State-Times*, 10 November 1932, p. 18; 11 November 1932, p. 11; 12 November 1932, p. 8; and *Ruston Daily Leader*, 10 November 1932, p. 1; 11 November 1932, p. 1.

It would be tempting to attribute the lack of local mainstream newspaper coverage and the unavailability of Brown Stadium to racism. And racism did palpably dominate the segregated region and Monroe in particular. In 1919, in response to a spate of racially motivated violence, the *New Orleans Item* referred to the town as the “lynch law center of Louisiana,” and the well-earned reputation remained throughout the next decade.²⁴ But though Monroe was unquestionably a bastion of racism, the town’s two white dailies did cover the Negro World Series two months prior. Those games were played in front of a sold-out stadium of white and black fans. Certainly racism played a role in newspaper coverage choices, but the lack of reporting by the *Monroe Morning World* and the *Monroe News Star* was also surely influenced by the consideration that a white city readership would be uninterested in a football game between two black teams from out of town.

As to venue consideration, Brown Stadium was already booked. The Ouachita Junior College Indians spent Armistice Day afternoon playing against the LSU freshman team. The white grandstands filled to capacity to see the locals suffer a humiliating 49-0 defeat. The Baby Bengals (as they were called) only allowed the Indians five first downs. A much smaller white crowd traveled to local Neville High to see the Tigers defeat the Rayville High School Hornets 20–14 on the strength of a dramatic late game touchdown. For Monroe’s black population, however, there was only one game that mattered.²⁵

“All eyes will be focused on the grid battle to be played Armistice Day,” wrote Ralph Jones in the *Shreveport Sun*, “between the mighty Bushmen of Southern University and the Tigers of LA. Colored Normal.” Ralph Waldo Emerson Jones was not a reporter for Shreveport’s black weekly. He was Normal’s head football coach, and his report made it clear that he thought his team capable of giving the Scotlandville powerhouse a run for its money. He noted that his team ran the “famous military shift, made so by the footballers of New York University,” which would counter Southern’s “squirrel-cage shift,” used to greatest effect by the University of Southern California. Jones cited

²⁴*New Orleans Item*, 6 May 1919, p. 8. See also, Thomas Aiello, “The Proximity of Moral Ire: The 1919 Double-Lynching of George Bolden,” *Ozark Historical Review*, 35 (2006): 20–33.

²⁵Meanwhile, in Louisiana Negro Normal’s home parish, Lincoln, Ruston High School played Ouachita Parish High School at home that Armistice Day, losing 19-0. Outlying high schools in Dubach and Lisbon played to a scoreless tie. The Louisiana Tech freshman team defeated Louisiana (white) Normal 2-0. The other college team in Lincoln Parish, Louisiana Tech, played the day following Armistice Day at Mississippi College in Clinton. They lost 20-7. *Monroe News Star*, 1 November 1932, p. 6; 9 November 1932, p. 7; 10 November 1932, p. 8; 11 November 1932, p. 12; 12 November 1932, p. 6, 7, 8; and *Ruston Daily Leader*, 9 November 1932, p. 1, 2; 11 November 1932, p. 1; 15 November 1932, p. 1.

the punters of both teams as being valuable strengths, arguing that “the outcome of the game may depend largely upon the toe of one of these great punters.” In a final admission, Jones acknowledged (in the third person) that he was, in fact, a Southern alum, “but he expects to come out of the battle with the scalp of the Bushmen tied to his belt.”²⁶

And then there was silence.²⁷ The teams met at Monroe’s Casino Park as scheduled on November 11 in front of what was, most probably, a packed house. The stadium had remained full for baseball season, and Normal’s proximity and Southern’s largesse surely made the contest compelling for the locals. Normal did its best to mimic the offense of NYU. Southern was more successful at running through the paces of USC. Halftime of the contest more than likely included a “rabble,” a common feature of early twentieth century black football contests where students of each university joined their respective band on the field—many with their own instruments—to dance and perform for those in the stands. Rabbles eschewed the symmetry and precision of traditional university marching bands in favor of an organized chaos.²⁸ But Jones’s obscure reference on the sports page of an obscure black weekly is almost the only evidence that the game existed. Southern University coach Cliff Purnell did not write a promotional article about the game. He did not have to. His team was the darling of the state’s black community, en route to a 3-3-1 season. The Bushmen entered the Armistice Day contest with only one loss (their first defeat in two years), having trounced their only other state opponent, New Orleans University, 41-0 to open the season.²⁹ They tied Arkansas A.M. & N. and defeated Bishop College. Normal, meanwhile, played local black high schools more often than they played universities. Ralph Jones’s confidence would not be able to compensate for the discrepancy in talent and experience. The Bushmen won 20-0.³⁰

²⁶*Shreveport Sun*, 22 October 1932, p. 5.

²⁷Southern University’s school newspaper reported on the contest before the game. “November 11, Armistice Day, will find the Bushmen in Monroe, facing Coaches Jones and Joyner with their Louisiana Normal aggregation. This game will be played at night and the business fans of the City of Monroe and neighboring towns will have an opportunity to witness the gridiron battle.” But the paper, published every other week, used the space allotted for football to lament the school’s loss to Alabama State the week prior. Though it acknowledged the game’s existence, it did not report on its outcome. *Southern University Digest*, 1 November 1932, p. 1; 14 November 1932, p. 4; John B. Cade Library Archives, Southern University and A&M College, Baton Rouge, LA.

²⁸Davis and Gasman, “Path of Racial Uplift or Status Quo?” 7; and 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 (Summer 1995): 119.

²⁹Op cit note 46 for New Orleans university distinction.

³⁰They would finish the season with losses to Texas College and Langston College. “Football Record, 1932,” Southern University of Baton Rouge Athletic Department; and *Shreveport Sun*, 29 October 1932, p. 1, 8.

The Paradox of White Southern Mythology

Though attendance figures have not survived, and though Grambling was only 37 miles from Monroe, the crowd was probably pleased with the game's result. The Bushmen represented the largest and most celebrated black educational institution in the state. The team constituted for black audiences what Louisiana State University did for whites—it was a source of state pride and identity. On Monday, March 21, 1932, Southern's President Clark made the trip from Scotlandville to speak at Monroe Colored High School, accompanied by the Southern University Quartet. The auditorium was full.³¹ Clark's stature among the African-American population of Louisiana was supreme, both feeding from and contributing to the stature of Southern itself. He was a friend of President Hoover. But he was also the leader of the school that held the state's largest, most successful black football team. Eight months after his Monroe speech, Clark's football team would make a similar trip to similar aplomb.³²

The practice was far from rare. State universities bore a mythical burden for their fans, particularly in the South and other areas without economic success, professional baseball, or other cultural/economic points of pride. A state's identity became inextricably linked to its college football team. This trend began in the South in the early century, but became a full-blown phenomenon on January 1, 1926, when the University of Alabama's Crimson Tide traveled to southern California to participate in the Rose Bowl against the University of Washington Huskies. After the underdog Tide upset the northwestern powerhouse, they were feted along the route home by Southerners waiting at train depots to celebrate their defense of Southern football, of Southern honor, of the South. The following year, 1927, the Georgia Bulldogs traveled to New Haven, Connecticut to meet once-mighty Yale. They

³¹Here exists a slight discrepancy in the historical record. Clark had given the annual Founder's Day speech—celebrating Southern's anniversary—on May 9. But the April 1 *Southern University Digest* noted that Clark had contracted malaria soon after. According to the student newspaper, his illness kept him away from the university for ten days, with Clark finally recovering on 28 March 1932. More than likely, the student newspaper's diagnosis of "malaria" was an illness less dire, disallowing Clark his fuller university schedule but allowing him to make the Monroe speech. *Louisiana Weekly*, 26 March 1932, p. 3; and *Southern University Digest*, 15 March 1932, p. 1; 1 April 1932, p. 1; John B. Cade Library Archives, Southern University and A&M College, Baton Rouge, LA.

³²The legacy of Clark's influence still exists in the home of his football team's first contest with Grambling in the form of the J. S. Clark Magnet School, one of several similarly named schools throughout the state.

won and returned to similar celebrations. Success only fueled Southern interest in its adopted sport.³³

With state devotion firmly in place, teams often played a select number of games each season in other towns of the state, giving residents from other areas a chance to see their favorite team play. The Crimson Tide played some games in Birmingham. The Arkansas Razorbacks played (and still play) games in Little Rock. In Louisiana, the LSU Tigers played select games in Shreveport and, in 1932, Monroe—an event made possible by the 1931 founding of Ouachita Junior College and the construction of the school's Brown Stadium. LSU now had a place to play in northeast Louisiana. In October, "Old Lou" (a team nickname designed to counter that of rival Mississippi's "Ole Miss") met the Mississippi State Aggies at Brown. The LSU marching band, the Golden Band from Tigerland, marched up Monroe's Desiard Street, and the football team defeated Mississippi State in front of a sold-out stadium.³⁴

Neither professional football nor major league baseball arrived in the South until the 1960s, making its college football teams all the more important. Its coaches became heroes—mythic figures like Bear Bryant, John Vaught, Sugg Jordan, Vince Dooley, and Frank Broyles. Much of the devotion stemmed from the desolation and poor stature of the region. Of course, desolation and poverty were not limited to the South. A similar football identity phenomenon occurred at Notre Dame, a small Catholic university in northwestern Indiana. Following World War II, Oklahoma would embrace its Sooner football team in much the same manner. But Southern fandom spanned an entire region, with the combination of state loyalty and a broader region-wide inferiority complex feeding a unique devotion to the game. Historians and commentators have thus tried to pinpoint the antecedents of a particularly Southern version of college football obsession.

White Southerners had always seen violence and honor as twin concepts, whether in the lower-class eye-gouging brawls of the Virginia backcountry or the more "sophisticated" duels that developed in the upper echelons of society. Through a distinct oral tradition based on kinship and personal contact, those brawls grew magnanimous in legend, fed by the folklore used to instruct students in the basic rudiments of right and wrong. The passage of time only further embedded the myth in the understood

³³John Sayle Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 144.

³⁴The "Old Lou" would eventually fade as an L.S.U. moniker. Mississippi State would eventually abandon the nickname "Aggies" in favor of "Bulldogs." And that year, 1932, Ole Miss would hold a student body election to select a mascot. With Tigers, Aggies, and Razorbacks around them, "Ole Miss" seemed inadequate. The students chose "Rebels." *Monroe Morning World*, 15 October 1932, p. 1, 8; 16 October 1932, p. 1, 8.

identity of the white South.³⁵ But, importantly, these brawlers did not become distant heroes, interesting tales to pass away slow afternoons. Life in the Southern backcountry was filled with suffering, tragedy, and—increasingly—class alienation. Thus, the celebration of strength over weakness inherent in the brawling legend became more than an enthusiasm. It became the focus of identity.³⁶

And as that traditional understanding of violence as a defining element of “Southernness” grew over time, honor always remained as part of that definition, even when honor was nowhere to be found. “In place of the code duello, the traditional expression of violence in the Old South,” explained C. Vann Woodward, describing the late-nineteenth century transition to a New South, “gunplay, knifing, manslaughter, and murder were the bloody accompaniments of the march of Progress.” But even as murder totals skyrocketed in the early century South, honor was ever-present as a prime mover. The integrity of one’s name and family, the social hierarchy of a region, the understood ethics of a community, all served as a model for citizens of every class, and thereby created not only a standard of propriety between all white citizens, but also a unifying element that bridged class divides.³⁷

Historians and commentators have come to various conclusions as to why this particular identity developed. Grady McWhiney has famously argued that the resort to violence, particularly in the defense of honor, resulted from a cultural legacy coming from various stages of migration from the Celtic regions of Britain. John Temple Graves argued the opposite, noting that it was the lack of ties to any native land that allowed the white South to develop such a dynamic and vitriolic regional devotion. Journalist Dorothy Thompson cited poverty. She had seen the relationship between poverty and violence in Germany, and

³⁵Interestingly, though the myth became part and parcel of white Southern identity, the oral tradition itself was distinctly multiracial. Elliot J. Gorn, “Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch’: The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry,” *American Historical Review* 90 (February 1985): 18–23, 27. See also Dewey W. Grantham, *The Regional Imagination: The South and Recent American History* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1979).

³⁶Gorn, “Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch,” 27–33. Freudians would likely see in this phenomenon at least a de facto form of introjection—a shift in identity based on a perceived need. Introjectors take on the personality of friends, icons, sports teams in order to recover from a suspected lack in themselves. See Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XIV (1914–1916), *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology, and Other Works*, ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), 236–38.

³⁷C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 158–60; and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), vii, xv–xvi.

feared the dangers that lurked in segregated bars and bus stations. Erskine Caldwell blamed ignorance, adding another voice to the multitude of commentators who saw the South's relative dearth of education as willful. W. J. Cash found "complacency and illusion" at the Southern core. H. L. Mencken argued that the great "Sahara of the Bozart" had failed to develop culturally and artistically. The white South had a limited capacity. So it settled for lower entertainments and vices.³⁸

But though they disagree on the causes of the complex, they agree on the fact of its existence. And so Southern devotion to college football, historians argue, comes in part from a distinct Southern values system developed since the original migration of the cavaliers and their servants of indenture. It is, in other words, a distinctly *white* Southern devotion.

In 1910, Vanderbilt traveled north to play powerhouse Yale. Coach Dan McGugin framed the contest as a chance for his players to avenge the South's Civil War defeat. Many of the players had grandfathers buried in Northern cemeteries. It was the grandfathers of the Yale players who put them there. Thusly inspired, Vanderbilt played the heavily favored Yale team to a 0-0 tie. "Football, with all of its battle-related language, has long been an expression of our Southern militarism," explained historian David Sansing. "To some, football elevates war to a higher art with its marching bands and the large crowds. It's like sitting on the hillside looking down on the Battle of Gettysburg." The white South was poorer than the North, less educated, with less high-culture outlets. But the South could always play football. After Georgia went to Ann Arbor and defeated the Michigan Wolverines in 1965, coach Vince Dooley received correspondence from all over the South, echoing Sansing's metaphor. "To go up there and invade the North and come back a winner was the

³⁸Graves also noted, as have others, that the South has been the theater for many wars—and the Civil War in particular. With the resentment of Reconstruction and the "attack" of northern capital into the South following its 1865 defeat, that feeling of assault never abated. The resulting defensive mentality made the atavism of the violence-honor paradigm almost inevitable. Grady McWhiney, *Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988), 23–50, 146–70; John Temple Graves, *The Fighting South* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1943), 5, 14, 15–18; Marion K. Sanders, *Dorothy Thompson: A Legend in Her Time* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), 159–66, 184–87; W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941), 424–28; and H. L. Mencken, "The Sahara of the Bozart," in *The American Scene: A Reader*, ed. Huntington Cairns (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 157–68. For more on the Southern marriage of violence and honor, see Richard M. Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Postbellum Thought* (Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 1989), 43–56; and George B. Tindall, "Southern Mythology," in *The South and the Sectional Image: The Sectional Theme Since Reconstruction*, ed. Dewey W. Grantham, Jr. (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 8–22. For more on this critique, and on the critique of Cash in particular, see Charles W. Eagles, ed., *The Mind of the South Fifty Years Later* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992).

greatest thing for a lot of people. It was as if we had had a chance to go to Gettysburg again.”³⁹

Of course, Michigan’s team was integrated. Georgia’s was not. The Southern dedication to proving its football mettle usually included a willingness—in the decades following the first Grambling-Southern game—to play integrated teams, as long as those games occurred in opposing stadiums. Though SMU played an integrated Penn State in the 1946 Cotton Bowl, the practice was considered ultimately taboo. Still, the Southern devotion to its football, and the identity it craved from success, meant that it would have to bend to the liberalism of the dominant non-Southern teams. The great test would be the 1956 Sugar Bowl, the crown jewel of Southern football played annually in New Orleans’ Tulane Stadium. Georgia Tech was scheduled to play the University of Pittsburgh. The Sugar Bowl extended the bid to the integrated Panthers—the first time it had ever done so—because it wanted the best possible competition. It agreed to provide segregated seats for black fans. It assured Pitt that black players could play. Georgia Tech, for its part, had played integrated teams before, but always outside of the South. Georgia’s segregationist governor railed against the idea, but the students, alumni, fans, and team all eagerly participated. Tech won 7-0.⁴⁰

The white South was violent. It was chauvinistic. And those traits made white Southerners preternaturally disposed to developing an almost filial loyalty to a violent, chauvinistic game like football. “Welcoming strangers, taking risks at cards or sport, and defending personal honor were all characteristics that Southerners eagerly seized on to identify themselves,” argues historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown. “Although Southerners boasted loudly enough about these inclinations before the Civil War, afterward they became articles of sacred memory.”⁴¹

³⁹Tony Barnhart, *Southern Fried Football: The History, Passion, and Glory of the Great Southern Game* (Chicago: Triumph Books, 2000), 7–8.

⁴⁰Watterson, *College Football*, 316–18; and Al Kuettner, *March to a Promised Land: The Civil Rights Files of a White Reporter, 1952–1968* (Sterling, VA: Capital Books, 2006), 23–24. Though some major Southern college teams integrated in the 1960s, integration in something more than a token form came in 1971, when Alabama’s Paul Bryant integrated the Crimson Tide football team. On 12 September 1970, integrated USC trounced Alabama at Birmingham’s Legion Field. It was all the convincing Bryant needed. And as Alabama went, so went the rest of “white” Southern football. Barnhart, *Southern Fried Football*, 8–9.

⁴¹Watterson, *College Football*, 293; and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 327. For more on the white Southern relationship with sport in the Old South see Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 339–61. See also Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

This analysis seems both useful and reasonable, but it contains within it two important paradoxes. First, the regional identity of the solid football South breaks down on gameday. As journalist Richard Ernsberger, Jr., has noted, “When the time comes to tee up the pigskin, the South stops being a region and reverts to earlier times: it becomes a collection of hugely competitive states, each with an overweening pride in its major-college football team.” He notes, as do many other commentators, that most fans of major Southern college football programs are not graduates of the school. It is a matter of state—not alumni—pride, and states within the region are often pitted against each other.⁴²

The second paradox inherent in the white Southern tradition analysis is more problematic. Many Southern college football fans are not white. In the twenty-first century, perhaps, the gentrification of major college athletics, the rise in black admission rates to Southern state universities, and the number of black players on Southeastern Conference football teams might tend to mitigate against the historical whiteness and white backcountry tendencies of these universities and those who identify with them. But the Southern black population was not barred from the state identity phenomenon until integration. Even in the Jim Crow South, African Americans formed meaningful relationships with their favorite college teams.

Black colleges would seem to reconcile the early twentieth-century race paradox. They are distinctly Southern. They are a source of identity and pride for a dispossessed community.⁴³ But reconciliation is not that simple.

⁴²Ernsberger, Jr., *Bragging Rights: A Season Inside the SEC, Football's Toughest Conference* (New York: M. Evans and Co., 2000), 3, 5. See also Warren St. John, *Rammer Jammer Yellow Hammer: A Journey Into the Heart of Fan Mania* (New York: Crown, 2004). For a contemporary analysis of the current state of this paradox, see Clay Travis, “Taking ‘The’ as a Spoil of Victory,” <http://sportsline.com/spin/story/10567328/2> (accessed 18 January 2008), addressing the phenomenon of Southeastern Conference football teams chanting “S.E.C.” after major victories against teams from outside the region. It may also be useful to note the consistency with which historians and commentators use religion as a metaphor for explaining mainstream Southern college football. Journalist Tony Barnhart compared it to “that old-time religion.” So too have Christopher J. Walsh, Clyde Bolton, Richard Ernsberger, Jr., Clay Travis, and countless others. See Tony Barnhart, *Southern Fried Football: The History, Passion, and Glory of the Great Southern Game* (Chicago: Triumph Books, 2000), 6, 11; Christopher J. Walsh, *Where Football Is King: A History of the SEC* (Lanham, MD: Taylor Trade, 2006), 4; Clyde Bolton, *Unforgettable Days in Southern Football* (Huntsville, AL: The Strode Publishers, 1974), 11; Richard Ernsberger, Jr., *Bragging Rights: A Season Inside the SEC, Football's Toughest Conference* (New York: M. Evans and Co., 2000), 2–3; and Clay Travis, *Dixieland Delight: A Football Season on the Road in the Southeastern Conference* (New York: Harper, 2007), 2–3.

⁴³For more on the development of Southern black higher education, see James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975); Charles V. Willie and Ronald R. Edmonds, ed., *Black Colleges in America: Challenge, Development, Survival*

Organized intercollegiate athletics at historically black colleges began in the 1890s. Rivalries soon developed between Howard and Lincoln Universities, between Atlanta and Tuskegee Universities, but the early development of black college football did not include the state-loyalty component of their white counterparts. The contests were disorganized, the talent and game knowledge of the players was substandard. The mainstream (white) press either ignored the games or treated them with overt cynicism. "When competent physical directors and equal training facilities are afforded the colored youth," cried black commentator Edwin B. Henderson in 1911, "the white athlete will find an equal or superior in nearly every line of athletic endeavor." Those training facilities would come slowly, hurt particularly by inadequate funding from white Southern congressmen. But things were beginning to change. That same year, Henderson chose the nation's first black All-America football team. In 1912, the Colored Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA) became the first athletic conference for black universities, followed by the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (SIAC) in 1913.⁴⁴

Still, though the developing intercollegiate athletic system had improved, state-identity formation among fans had not. Howard was a federally funded institution in Washington, DC, Atlanta, Morehouse, Clark, and Morris Brown were all situated in and around Atlanta. Tuskegee, Alabama State, Alabama A&M, and Talladega competed for loyalty in Alabama. Fisk, Tennessee State, and Knoxville were in a similar situation in Tennessee. The pattern was similar in every Southern state east of the Mississippi River. Black schools were small and underfunded, with an alumni base in no position to donate massive sums to support the home team.⁴⁵

Even with this litany of disadvantages, the schools were still in a far more advantageous position than their counterparts west of the

(New York: Teachers College Press, 1978); The Commission on Colleges, *Black Colleges in the South: From Tragedy to Promise* (Atlanta: Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 1971); and Julian B. Roebuck and Komanduri S. Murty, *Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Their Place in American Higher Education* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993). Most of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century black universities have also commissioned works individually examining school history.

⁴⁴Arthur R. Ashe, Jr., *A Hard Road to Glory: Football: The African-American Athlete in Football* (New York: Amistad, 1993), 6–10, 23–25; Monroe H. Little, "The Extra-Curricular Activities of Black College Students, 1868–1940," *The Journal of Negro History* 65 (Spring 1980): 143–44; and Edwin B. Henderson, "The Colored College Athlete," *Crisis* 2 (July 1911): 115–19.

⁴⁵Davis and Gasman, "Path of Racial Uplift or Status Quo?" 7; and Ashe, *A Hard Road to Glory*, 7–8, 23–24. For more on the development of black college football in the twentieth century, see Michael Hurd, *Black College Football, 1892–1992: One Hundred Years of History, Education, and Pride* (Virginia Beach: The Donning Co., 1993); and Oceania Chalk, *Black College Sport* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1976).

Mississippi. In 1920, six colleges from Texas formed a conference of their own, the Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC). Southern University was a common nonconference opponent for member schools such as Wiley, Paul Quinn, and Bishop Colleges, but would not officially join the group until 1934. Straight University, the University of New Orleans, and the Roman Catholic Xavier University of New Orleans each participated in the Gulf Coast Athletic Association, a conglomeration of small schools in Louisiana and Mississippi, but their size and urban location never allowed them to challenge Southern for state supremacy.⁴⁶ Unlike their counterparts to the east and west, Southern served as an uncontested state institution—the locus of identity and pride on par with similar white institutions.

Of course, that is not to say that Southern existed in a vacuum. Like colleges to the east and west, Louisiana's black universities were shaped by the dominant academic and athletic thinking of the day. And in the early century, that thinking was predominantly positive. Sport instilled discipline in students and built racial pride. It demonstrated competitive equality with whites. It even attracted students to college who otherwise "would have been plowing and mating in the countryside."⁴⁷ In addition, intercollegiate athletics fostered a unity among the students and faculty, eroded over the years by increasing enrollment, the development of student societies and clubs, and the adoption of elective curricula.

But in the decade before Southern and Normal's first meeting, controversy dominated black college football, leading many commentators to call for reform. "There is need," reported George Streater, "for a national code of ethics for Negro college athletics." Though conference organization had systematized scheduling, it had ceased to fully regulate team and player eligibility conduct. In many instances, conference organization had encouraged it. "The problem of colored college football is and has always been complicated by the playing of college and high school men on the teams." Since many black universities included secondary schools, they pulled from a wide assortment of potential players. At the same time, players continued to

⁴⁶The early century University of New Orleans was a Methodist institution unrelated to the current University of New Orleans, founded as an integrated university in 1958. In 1935, Straight and New Orleans would combine to form Dillard University. George W. Streater, "Football in Negro Colleges," *Crisis* 39 (April 1932): 129–30, 139, 141; "SWAC History," <http://www.swac.org/ssp/history> (accessed 18 January 2008); and Bennett H. Wall, *Louisiana: A History* (Wheeling: Harland Davidson, 2002), 211, 290, 346.

⁴⁷Miller, "To 'Bring the Race along Rapidly,'" 112–14; Edwin B. Henderson, "Sports," *Messenger* 8 (February 1926): 51; and Little, "The Extra-Curricular Activities of Black College Students, 1868–1940," 144.

participate well after their college graduation. Streator and others cited instances of graduates from one institution moving to play football for another college after commencement, most for monetary compensation. "It is not easy," remarked a frustrated Streator, "to define a Negro 'college team.'"⁴⁸

Streator's criticism emphasized the CIAA and the SIAC, the two premier black college football conferences, with the Southern Conference receiving the bulk of the national criticism. 1932, the year of the first Southern-Normal football game, proved pivotal in both conferences' transition to legitimacy. The CIAA played the 1931 season under a new rule disallowing high school players. The SIAC had just instituted the rule as the 1932 season began. Neither Southern nor Normal, however, were affected by major conference regulations. Both schools had secondary education components, and both more than likely used players who would be disqualified under the changing major conference standard. But because of Louisiana's position, situated as it was between the major conferences in the southeast and the SWAC in the west, Southern and Normal remained immune from broader regulatory developments.⁴⁹

The Legacy of the Southern-Grambling Game for Black and White Louisiana

On Saturday, following the 1932 Armistice Day game, the *Ruston Daily Leader*—Lincoln Parish's largest newspaper—advertised a new movie playing in town. *That's My Boy* starred Richard Cromwell, Dorothy

⁴⁸W. E. B. Du Bois, "Postscript," *Crisis* 37 (June 1930): 209–210; George Streator, "Negro Football Standards," *Crisis* 38 (March 1931): 85–86; and George Streator, "Football in Negro Colleges," *Crisis* 39 (April 1932): 129–30. This critique of black athletics came amidst a broader critique of the black college in general. "There cannot be the slightest doubt but that the Negro college, its teachers, students, and graduates, have not yet comprehended the age in which they live," argued W. E. B. Du Bois in 1930. "It seems to me that we are getting into our Negro colleges considerably more than our share of plain fools." W. E. B. Du Bois, "Education and Work," in *The Education of Black People: Ten Critiques, 1906–1960*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1973), 66, 67. See also W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Field and Function of the Negro College," in *The Education of Black People: Ten Critiques, 1906–1960*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1973), 83–102.

⁴⁹That said, the conferences surrounding Southern and Normal generally had better reputations than their larger counterparts. The Southwestern Athletic Conference remained largely uncontroversial, but the lack of criticism was surely due in part to the league's national irrelevance. The nearby Gulf Coast gained a measure of infamy for instating a rule that disallowed the suspension of a player if a formal protest was not made within seven days of the alleged infraction. Miller, "To 'Bring the Race along Rapidly,'" 122–124; Streator, "Negro Football Standards," 86; and Streator, "Football in Negro Colleges," 130.

Jordan, and Mae Marsh. Even the USC football team made an appearance. It was, the advertisement promised, “a *different* football story.” The movie told the tale of “a football hero who traded the love of two women for the cheers of the mob!” But in Depression-era Louisiana, the majority of movie-goers—black or white—would not have found the story so different at all. The cheers of the mob were the driving force behind a new kind of Southern pride, football the reliquary of positive identity in a time and place with few such sources of anything positive.⁵⁰

The year 1932 would be the last year of coaching for Ralph Jones. He was replaced by Ira Smith, who was replaced by Joe Williams, who was replaced by Osiah Johnson. In 1935, Emory Hines became the Normal head coach, serving until the 1941 hiring of Eddie Robinson, who would lead the Grambling football team to 408 wins until his retirement in 1997. In 1933, the season after their first contest, Southern and Normal played again. Again Southern shut out the Tigers 20-0. “Southern was always larger,” said sportswriter Russell Stockard, “and it was close to Baton Rouge, the state capitol ... Southern always seemed to have an advantage.” The school’s dominance led the series with Normal to languish until the 1940s. Normal’s schedule through the 1930s, for example, would continue to include Monroe Colored High, a team against whom they could be far more competitive.⁵¹

But there would be change. In 1936, Ralph Jones—who had remained at the Institute as a teacher—would become Normal’s president. That year, the two-year school had 120 students and seventeen faculty members. By the early 1940s, Normal had become a four-year institution—Grambling College—with rising admission and graduation rates. Still, the school’s fundamental disadvantages remained. After hiring Eddie Robinson as football coach in 1941, Jones provided a word of warning. “I remember one of the first days I was there,” said Robinson. “President Jones came up to me and said it’d take a long time to build a winner around Grambling.”⁵²

Southern, too, would undergo change. In 1934, the university would join the expanding Southwestern Athletic Conference, finding a new regional legitimacy outside of the state. In 1936, the Bushmen also

⁵⁰*Ruston Daily Leader*, 12 November 1932, p. 4.

⁵¹Davis, *Grambling’s Gridiron Glory*, 11; Hurd, “Collie J,” 179; and Grambling State Alumni Foundation, *Grambling: Cradle of the Pros*, 1–2.

⁵²“Prez” Jones, as he came to be called, would stay at Grambling until 1977, overseeing the exponential growth of the small two-year school into a full-fledged university. Hurd, “Collie J,” 179; Grambling State Alumni Foundation, *Grambling: Cradle of the Pros*, 1–2; and Davis, *Grambling’s Gridiron Glory*, 5. See also Frances Swayzer Conley, *Prez Lives!: Remembering Grambling’s Ralph Waldo Emerson Jones* (Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 2006).

found themselves playing under a new nickname. Historian Patrick Miller has argued that most black colleges sought familiar mascots in order to usher their teams into the American mainstream. Lions, tigers, and bears were popular, as were Trojans and Aggies. Here again Southern fell outside of the black college athletics paradigm.⁵³ The “Bushmen” became the “Cats” in 1936, and those Cats would later transmogrify into Jaguars. That same year, Arnett Mumford would take over as head coach of the Southern football team. He would stay until 1961, becoming the university’s most successful coach with a record of 169-57-14. The year 1936 also saw Southern return to Monroe to engage Texas’s Jarvis College. In this contest, with no white events scheduled in Brown Stadium and with the Monroe Monarchs now defunct, the team played the game in Brown, defeating the Tigers 74-7.⁵⁴

And then, in 1947, Southern and Grambling would renew their rivalry in Baton Rouge. “A pall of gloom enshrouded the moss-hung bayous of Louisiana today,” wrote Grambling sports information director Collie Nicholson, “and the usually reliable Southwest Conference, deflated but unbowed, rallied to regain its momentum after the Grambling College Tigers ambushed Southern University’s Jaguar Cats, 21-6.” Grambling’s first victory over Southern did more than just salve a wounded regional pride. “That victory helped get us in the Southwestern Athletic Conference,” noted Legolian Moore, quarterback for the 1947 team. “They couldn’t keep us out because we had beaten most of the other teams in the conference.” Grambling would not officially join the SWAC until 1958, but the team’s ability to compete with both Southern and the conference’s Texas members would ultimately usher it into the burgeoning organization.⁵⁵

The rivalry would continue at both Grambling and Southern—the contests alternating venues each season—under the auspices of the

⁵³Miller, “To ‘Bring the Race along Rapidly,’” 118.

⁵⁴By 1936, Ouachita Junior College had become Louisiana State University Northeast Center. *Monroe News Star*, 17 November 1936, p. 7; 20 November 1932, p. 11; 22 November 1932, p. 12; and Hurd, “*Collie J.*,” 176–77.

⁵⁵There would also be other changes surrounding the institutions and organizations surrounding that 1932 season. Casino Park would become a white minor league baseball park in the 1940s before being razed the following decade. Louisiana State University Northeast Center, nee Ouachita Junior College, would undergo a series of name changes, eventually becoming Northeast Louisiana University, then the University of Louisiana at Monroe. Their mascot, too, would change, from the Indian to the Warhawk. Grambling would also undergo a final name change in the 1970s, becoming Grambling State University. LSU, like all major universities under the auspices of the NCAA, would abandon its freshman football team, USC would abandon its “squirrel-cage shift,” and New York University would abandon football all together. Davis, *Grambling’s Gridiron Glory*, 7; and *Pittsburgh Courier*, 11 October 1947, reprinted in Hurd, “*Collie J.*,” 180.

Southwestern Athletic Conference football schedule through the next decade. But in the 1970s, the game would take on a new significance.

In 1966, the two dominant American professional football leagues merged to form one National Football League (NFL). The merger required a federal antitrust exemption, and the legislators spearheading the effort to secure it were Senator Russell Long and Congressman Hale Boggs, both of Louisiana. To reward those efforts, NFL Commissioner Pete Rozelle awarded an expansion franchise in the newly organized league to New Orleans, prompting the construction of a new domed stadium in the city. Construction of the Superdome, however, would be fraught with controversy. The pace of construction was slow. The budget for the stadium ballooned to more than US\$160 million. In 1972, understandably worried about the progress of construction, Rozelle sent a delegation to New Orleans to track the Superdome's progress. Among the delegation members was Grambling's Collie Nicholson. Seeking an opportunity to create a higher-profile (and, thus, a higher-revenue) game with Southern, Nicholson used his position on Rozelle's advisory delegation to begin lobbying for an annual Grambling-Southern football game in the new stadium.⁵⁶

Southern, of course, had far less to gain from a neutral site game. It was a big-city university that consistently sold out its stadium. It had a significant home-field advantage. In 1973, however, the scheduled contest between the two teams was a Grambling home game, and Nicholson used the prerogative of the home team to divert the contest to Shreveport, to demonstrate to Southern the benefits of a neutral-site game. It was a success, and the following year the teams met in New Orleans for the first game designated the "Bayou Classic." The game was played at Tulane Stadium (the Superdome was not yet ready) in front of 76,753 fans. Grambling won 21-0. The teams, like those in 1932, played a neutral-site game. There was a shutout. But the stakes and the audience had changed. In 1990, the schools signed a broadcast contract with NBC, and the game remains the only annual black college football game on national broadcast television.⁵⁷

The significance of the Bayou Classic is unprecedented in black college athletics. It serves as a significant source of revenue for the universities, New Orleans, and NBC. But it is, at base, the same state rivalry it was in 1932. "To appreciate the rivalry," noted Grambling's Eddie Robinson, "you have to realize Grambling and Southern fans are

⁵⁶Michael S. Martin, "New Orleans Becomes a Big-League City: The NFL-AFL Merger and the Creation of the New Orleans Saints," in *Horsehide, Pigskin, Oval Tracks, and Apple Pie*, ed. James A. Vlasich (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2006), 123-25, 128-29; and Hurd, "Collie J," 183-85.

⁵⁷Hurd, "Collie J," 183-86.

close friends, as well as relatives.” But the rivalry did not begin in 1974. It did not begin after Robinson found success at Grambling. It began quietly, decades prior, in the northeast corner of the state.⁵⁸ It was this first game of 1932 in the “lynch law center of Louisiana” that stoked Grambling’s resentment of its larger rival and exacerbated Southern’s confidence that it was truly the state’s dominant black university—phenomena that would define the rivalry for decades.

Furthermore, it served as a showcase in microcosm of black southern state identity formation through football, arguing with every squirrel-cage shift and cheer from the crowd that southern devotion was not solely a white phenomenon. The white South was atavistic. It had a legacy of Civil War defeat it never managed to shake. It lacked the economic and cultural superiority of its northern counterpart, which only seemed to stoke the flames of its frustration about the Battle of Gettysburg and other similar defeats. So it manufactured new Gettysburgs.

Such an interpretation is undoubtedly true. But the Grambling-Southern rivalry demonstrates that such interpretations miss a very important aspect of southern devotion to college football. Black fans are Southerners, too, and have an equal claim to the legacy of the South and all its attendant meanings. And though their historical bent is to side with the Gettysburg victors, they demonstrate their claim to that legacy every autumn Saturday. The “white Southern violence and honor” analysis is not wrong. But the 1932 Armistice Day game in Monroe’s Casino Park demonstrates, at the very least, that it is incomplete.

⁵⁸Ibid., 182; For a general account of the event since its inception as the “Bayou Classic” in 1974, see the game’s official website, http://www.statefarmbayouclassic.com/history_theevent.shtml. See also Hurd, “*Collie 7*,” 173–88.