In the Shadow of Jim Crow: The Benching and Betrayal of Willis Ward

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Tyran Kai Steward, M.A.

Graduate Program in History

The Ohio State University

2013

Dissertation Committee:

Hasan K. Jeffries, Advisor

Kevin Boyle

Judy Tzu-Chun Wu
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Abstract

This dissertation provides a historical study of Jim Crow in the North via the interplay of race and sport. It analyzes the 1934 benching of Willis Ward, an African-American football player at the University of Michigan and reveals the racialized social order maintained by Michigan’s famed Athletic Director Fielding Yost. This study probes how Ward’s benching affected his career, especially his work directing hiring practices at the Ford Motor Company. It also explores Ward’s conservative politics and his espousal of policies and practices aimed at maintaining the racial status quo. This project also chronicles how racism toward Ward shaped the politics of his teammate and future U.S. President Gerald Ford who supported affirmative action and civil rights legislation but opposed busing as a means to carry out school desegregation.

A significant body of scholarship has examined the history of Jim Crow in the South. This dissertation, in contrast, provides an opportunity to examine the North’s separate but unequal practices. This previously unstudied history of Ward and other black athletes at Michigan offer four significant insights regarding Northern race relations: it demonstrates how Northern institutions maintained segregationist practices without having the same legal underpinnings that existed in Southern states; it emphasizes the opposition that black athletes faced and exposes how institutions such as Michigan actively engaged in constructing racial barriers that constrained African American performance and
compelled these players to exceed standard athletic expectations in order to earn spots on top college teams; it underscores how racial intolerance toward black athletes catalyzed resistance, created race advocacy and opposition, and contributed to a long history of black conservatism; and finally, it stresses how the racism black athletes met on the court and gridiron mirrored the racial prejudice they and other African Americans experienced in their interactions on campus, in the community, and throughout the country. By probing the entrenched restrictions that African Americans encountered in the North, this study provides a more comprehensive view of race relations in America.
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to Tamanika, Niara, and Saniya.
Acknowledgments

This dissertation represents the long road traveled in research and writing to turn an idea into a meaningful historical study. Along this road, I have been blessed to have interacted with so many wonderful persons who have contributed to this project, to my development and growth as a scholar, and to my life. Thus, I owe the deepest gratitude to a broad community of persons who have supported my scholarly aspirations: those persons who have rigorously trained me as a historian; the family and friends who have offered encouragement and love throughout this process; and every single individual who has inspired a thought, stirred reflection, or produced an idea that caused me to fall in love many times over with this vocation in the life of the mind.

From the formative stages of this dissertation to the final draft, I owe an immense debt of gratitude to my advisor, Professor Hasan K. Jeffries. Your belief in this project from day one has been inspiring and enabled me to see the study as vital to the existing historiography in race relations. I am equally indebted to my committee members. Professor Boyle, you have challenged me to research, think, and write better. You always seem to know the right questions to ask and have guided me to new ways of thinking about my research and the history profession. Professor Wu, there are not enough words for me to express the enormity of my appreciation for your friendship, guidance, and support. Your encouragement as well as the insight you have provided to me on three
separate projects is deeply valued. You are all exemplary and tireless scholars who I wish
to emulate as I begin my career as a professional historian.

I wish to thank the entire Department of History at Ohio State University. I
especially want to thank Professors Robin Judd and Kenneth Goings. I also wish to thank
several scholars who have supported my endeavors from a distance: Theresa Runstedtler,
Patrick Jones, David Trowbridge, Allyson Hobbs, Glenda Gilmore, Robert Citino, Robert
Perry, and Philip Schmitz.

I want to thank the Graduate School at Ohio State University. I also wish to thank
the archivists and repositories that have supported my research endeavors. I am truly
grateful to Bertha Ihnat of The Ohio State University Archives and to Douglas Smith.

There are persons for whom words just cannot express the debt of my gratitude. I
wish to thank the members of my family who remain an incredible blessing to my life:
Gregory Steward, D’Ondra Steward, Darice Coleman, Darius Coleman, Dionte Steward,
Cade Rhone, Jon Wilson, Ronald Wilson, Tanae Wilson, Laura Terry, Willie Terry,
Catherine Moore, Alberta Wiggins, Shaka Terry, and Hodari Terry. I also wish to thank
the following friends: Jacquelyn Taylor, Andre Taylor, Tigwa Davis, Dorothy Jones-
Davis, Delia Fernandez, and Kyla Young.

Finally, I want to give thanks to the four most important persons in my life. First,
I wish to thank my mother, Emma Wilder. The encouragement, love, and sacrifices you
have made throughout my life have motivated me to aim for success. I adore you and
hope that this dissertation reflects your efforts to raise me to be the best person I could be. I want to thank my two daughters, Niara and Saniya. Thank you for your love and for your patience, for giving daddy the space to work, and for providing me with a laugh and a smile when I needed it most. I cannot explain fully how much you two mean to me and how each day I strive to make you proud even if you do not quite understand why daddy has spent so much time working on the computer. Last, but certainly not least, I want to thank my wife, Tamanika (Terry) Steward. I esteem you for your love, your patience, your sacrifice, and your tolerance of books, papers, and scraps of papers all over the house. You are my best friend and the first person I look to for insight and inspiration. I cherish your companionship and compassion. I earnestly feel that I am a better human being because of your presence in my life and feel that I could not have accomplished this monumental achievement without you standing by my side.
Vita

May 1996 .........................................................Marietta High School

May 2000 ............................................................B.A. Sociology, Morehouse College

April 2009 ............................................................M.A. History, Eastern Michigan University

September 2010 to present ..............................Graduate Fellow/Presidential Fellow,

Department of History, The Ohio State

University

Publications

ARTICLES

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INCLUSION AT OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY,” OHIO HISTORY 121 (MARCH 2014)

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Fields of Study

Major Field: History
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INTRODUCTION

The Mason-Dixon Line is a convenient but an often misleading geographical division. It has been used not only to distinguish the Old South from the North and the Confederacy from the Union but to dramatize essential differences in the treatment of, and attitudes toward, the Negro—to contrast southern racial inhumanity with northern benevolence and liberality. But the historian must be wary of such an oversimplified comparison, for it does not accord with the realities of either the nineteenth or the twentieth century.1

Jim Crow is dead. So true is this statement that Michelle Alexander referred to the American dilemma of mass incarceration as the new Jim Crow, almost as to eulogize and reincarnate the system of racial caste that permeated America from the end of the Civil War through the mid-1960s in a single breath. In the former sense, Alexander is correct. Formal segregation was purged through legal and legislative decisions that remedied the laws, which accustomed African Americans to confronting pervasive racial inequality, particularly in the areas of education, employment, housing, public access, and voting. But Alexander’s latter point is a tad more complicated to resolve. In her book, The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness, she announced, with conviction, that “the clock has been turned back on racial progress in America, though scarcely anyone seems to notice.” As startling as this statement is, it is also a bit specious. It presumes that at some point, America’s racial clock had been winded forward, or that Jim Crow left no vestiges in the wake of its metaphorical death. Yet, for all the racial discrimination and disparities that landmark cases and lawmaking helped to reform by 1
crushing *de jure* segregation, a simple truth has remained: America’s *de facto* racial practices have outlived the laws that underpinned Jim Crow and, by this virtue, have also made African American’s quest for full equality elusive. Insomuch as progress has been gained, the residue of an American society awash in Jim Crow lingers.²

The idea of a *new* Jim Crow undermines the historical understanding of America’s racial practices. What *appears* new is old—older than the laws that buttressed the American racial hierarchy. The historical gaze at the ending of formal segregation, however, has obscured the awareness of how ongoing racial practices persist and have preserved the “old order” delineating the races. The racial bigotry within America’s prison industrial complex, thus, is mature. In fact, it is as elderly as the mindsets of Americans whose racial practices both enabled the Jim Crow system to come into existence and managed to survive those set of laws after they were reversed.

**The Benching and Betrayal of Willis Ward**

This dissertation does not render a critique of Alexander’s treatise, which rightfully inscribes the systemic racism that leads to the criminalization of African Americans and other minorities. As David Levering Lewis has stated, Alexander’s book is “a stunning work of scholarship.” This study, in contrast, provides a treatment of America’s race relations. It depicts northern racial practices from the onset of the Great Migration through the end of Gerald Ford’s White House tenure. Specifically, it probes Jim Crow in its northern variety through the interplay of race and sport, and relates the North’s racialized social order to contemporary understandings of how racial practices continue to permeate American culture.
At the center of this study is Willis Ward, a black college football player and teammate of Gerald Ford, whose benching at the University of Michigan on October 20, 1934, incited backlash and ignited a robust though ultimately unsuccessful protest campaign to remedy Jim Crow practices at a northern institution. In keeping with the segregationist dictates of the South, Michigan’s opponent Georgia Tech had a “Jim Crow” clause, which prohibited its all-white squads from competing against teams that featured black players. Georgia Tech, however, did not act alone in forcing Ward to the sideline. Michigan was also complicit. Led by famed Athletic Director Fielding Yost, the university deliberately scheduled the game a year in advance despite knowing Tech’s position on the race issue. Thus, Ward’s benching was also a part of Michigan’s own Jim Crow tradition.

Studying Jim Crow through the lens of sport is beneficial since athletics have been characterized historically as avenues of both racial integration and social mobility. The Ward incident, however, complicates that history and demonstrates how societal racial barriers were reconstructed in collegiate athletics. In the South, teams were completely segregated and the color line was never crossed. In the North, integrated teams randomly subjected black athletes to benching if whites on the opposing team objected to playing against a Negro. Ward’s benching also emphasizes the role sport performed in the structuring of racial exclusion as athletic arenas, like railroads, schools, restaurants, movie theaters, and other public sites, helped construct what Historian Grace Elizabeth Hale has termed the “culture of segregation.”
Although the benching of black athletes in the North was widespread, there is noteworthy significance to studying the Ward incident. On the whole, this study is important for its examination of Michigan’s racial intransigence and its implications for influencing the professional lives of two significant individuals: the well-known Gerald Ford, who later became the 38th President of the United States, and the less-recognized Willis Ward. This dissertation probes how Ward’s benching shaped his own career-related efforts to remedy racial discrimination. He refused to participate in the 1936 Olympics despite besting Jesse Owens in track and field several times. Ward, instead, became an employee of Henry Ford, directing company hiring practices for nearly a decade before working as a lawyer, a chairman of the Michigan Public Service Commission, and a Wayne County probate judge. Yet, the racism he encountered at the University of Michigan did not fully transform him into a race advocate. On the contrary, Ward’s tenure at the Ford Motor Company was fraught by his willingness to maintain the racial status quo and his penchant for treating black workers with contempt. His actions, in part, spurred a labor counterattack by frustrated black workers and white union radicals detonating the modern civil rights movement. As a lawyer and judge, Ward continued to decelerate the push by African Americans to prohibit racial exclusion, espousing a belief that the movement toward full equality needed to be pursued at “all deliberate speed.” Ward’s form of racial accommodationism and his efforts to undermine racial progress instilled the ongoing freedom struggle with a rare but implacable black foe, revealing the incipience of what Ronald Walters has termed, “the new Black Conservatism.”
Gerald Ford was also affected by Ward’s benching and publicly protested Michigan’s decision to acquiesce to Georgia Tech’s segregationist demands. Witnessing Ward’s shameful encounter with racial prejudice is one of the reasons why Ford, though a Republican, supported affirmative action and civil rights legislation. But his congressional and presidential record on civil rights vacillated. Ford diluted his own civil rights advocacy through his unwavering antibusing policies that safeguarded America’s racial and social hierarchy. Ford cloaked his antibusing stance behind the veil of individualism, excusing his braking of the drive toward school desegregation and racial inclusion with the contention that African Americans of singular achievement were in position to partake fully in the rights enjoyed by other Americans. By clamping down on the enforcement of the laws he championed to overturn formal segregation, Ford helped to preserve the discriminatory racial traditions that were based on practice, not policy. In this regard, Ford and others like him defied racial convention to offer to African Americans a taste of racial equality even as they appeased whites resistant to abolishing the old, racial order. The dissertation retells this history and chronicles how northern racial practices became guiding for the rest of the country in the aftermath of legal and legislative remedies to Jim Crow.

**Civil Rights Memory and the Need for Ward**

For most Americans, the memory of Jim Crow conjures up the image of a southerner, white and ill-mannered, born in Birmingham or Selma sometime at the end of Reconstruction. He bristles at the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, thumbs his nose at the enforcement acts. He delights in shouting “nigger” when he bumps
into a person with black skin. He quickly imposes a white supremacist order, hanging signs that remind Negroes that they are despised and not worthy to dine with him, to live in his neighborhood, to ride on the same coach he does, to work at his job, or to vote in his elections. He refuses to drink from the same water fountain as Negroes and is uncompromising when it comes to permitting his or his neighbors’ daughters to marry outside the race. He seduces others around him to embrace his way of thinking and occasionally visits the Border States to remind them that the colored man is a threat.

When a Negro steps out of line or attempts to defy racial custom, this southerner dresses up in a white sheet, calls up a gang of his friends, mounts his horse, and goes on a lynching spree. He is occasionally taken to court by those who seek to challenge him. But he wins his cases even when his racial reasoning is exposed as illogical. He walks out of the court room, grinning and puffing his chest out knowing that he has been conferred the legal underpinning to carry out racial injustice with vicious intensity.

As Jim Crow nears his octogenarian years, a movement targeting him develops. In 1954, he is told that “separate but equal” is no longer lawful and that his grandchildren must attend the same schools as black children. In 1955, he bludgeons a 14-year-old boy from Chicago for flirting with a white woman, gouging out the young man’s eyes, shooting him in the head, and disposing of his body in the Tallahatchie River. He is shocked, however, when there is local, national, and even international outrage over his brazen act. Later that year, a black woman sits down next to him at the front of a bus in Montgomery, sparking a boycott that lasted 381 days. By the next December, the U.S. Supreme Court affirms a lower court’s ruling that bus segregation is unconstitutional.
under the Fourteenth Amendment. In 1957, he is forced to watch nine defiant black students, escorted by the US Army’s 101st Airborne Division, walk through the doors of Little Rock Central High School. In Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1960, he groans as sit-ins are held at the lunch counter in a Woolworth store, eventually compelling the department store chain to reverse its policy of racial segregation. He is angered by the Freedom Rides in 1961, riots after a black kid is marshaled onto the University of Mississippi’s campus in 1962, and is offended the following year when a preacher writes a scathing letter questioning the morality of white clergymen then proceeds to march into the nation’s capitol for jobs and freedom. Jim Crow is resilient and bombs four little girls at the 16th Street Baptist Church seventeen days later. But the movement is also unwavering and continues its campaign. In 1964, he is outraged as Congress passes the Civil Rights Act. He retaliates the next year on a bloody Sunday in March, clubbing and spraying tear gas at civil rights marchers on the Edmund Pettis Bridge. Two days later, an indefatigable King leads more protesters to the overpass, chanting vociferously, “We Shall Overcome!” A Voting Rights Act is signed, a Loving couple seals their affection, a hero is martyred, a housing act is approved, and Jim Crow passes away.

This memory of Jim Crow and the civil rights movement is not incorrect. It is, however, incomplete. It presumes Jim Crow to be a southern phenomenon, it narrows the timeline of the civil rights movement, it commemorates a slain leader, it overlooks Black Power and the contributions by minor actors, and it completely neglects the North in shaping a vision of American race relations. In the past twenty years, scholars have challenged this prevailing narrative of civil rights in an attempt to embed a broader, more
complex freedom struggle into the American imagination. Scholars have given particular attention to analyzing racial dramas performed outside the American South, primarily as an ongoing effort to grapple with what Jacquelyn Dowd Hall has termed the “long history of civil rights.” The “long history of civil rights” thesis has posited four interconnected frameworks for historicizing the civil rights movement, which has fundamentally reshaped race relations scholarship. First, historians have challenged the locality of the civil rights movement, arguing that it was a series of local struggles rather than a national campaign movement. Second, historians have disputed the periodization of the civil rights movement, contending that it transcends the historical timeline of 1955-1968 of which it is typically attached. There has also been an effort by scholars to draw continuity between the Civil Rights and Black Power periods, arguing that against their supposed distinction and asserting that they belong to a larger tradition of black freedom struggles. Finally, historians have downplayed the differences between de jure segregation in the South and de facto segregation in the North; in doing so, they have attempted to take the South out of its role as the meta-narrative of racial oppression.6 “By placing the world-shaking events of the classical phase into the context of a longer story,” according to Hall, historians have sought “to buttress the representational project and reinforce the moral authority of those who fought for change in those years.”7

In the wake of the “long history” framework, scholarship addressing civil rights and race relations in the outside the American South has emerged. Martha Biondi, Matthew Countryman, Patrick Jones, and Robert Self, amongst others, have written important case studies on civil rights and Jim Crow in the urban North and West.
Biondi’s *To Stand and Fight* deftly examines issues in New York around education, employment, housing, and police brutality, among other things, and demonstrates that the battle for racial justice went further than a campaign for integration and involved group rights. Countryman’s *Up South* treats some of the same themes discussed in Biondi’s work but also documents the efforts of Philadelphia’s Black Power activists to meld Black Nationalism’s trenchant analysis of racism inside American culture and longing for self-empowerment with a grassroots movement of community organizing to build an effective coalition in the push for racial equality. The centrality of black working-class and black women activists in Countryman’s study necessarily reshapes the top-down, black middle-class leadership model that has been indispensable to the prevailing civil rights discourse. Jones’s *The Selma of the North*, like Countryman’s *Up South*, emphasizes the role performed by local leaders in the protest against employment and school discrimination, and in the advance for open housing. Self’s study of black power politics, tax revolts, and white suburbanization in East Bay, California, enlarges the awareness of a longer struggle for economic rights beyond its atavistic appearances in the South where the Poor People’s Campaign is often characterized as the next stage of the civil rights movement rather than an ongoing aspect of it.8

These studies, however, chronicle incidents in New York, Philadelphia, Milwaukee, and Oakland largely during the postwar period and, thus, become ancillary to, if not indistinguishable racial episodes from, the events taking place in the South during the same era. Biondi, for instance, considers World War II to be the “watershed of the civil rights movement.” In this regard, the earlier struggles confronted by African
Americans in the North prior to World War II are barely given a cursory glance while the conventional civil rights timeline is only slightly altered ahead of its commencement with Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Jones’ metaphorical use of “Selma” as a description of the racial skirmishes in Milwaukee further reveals the South’s ascendancy within the civil rights movement and efforts to understand Jim Crow despite the best attempts by historians to argue against the South’s primacy. Further, many scholars have continued their own fascination with chronicling the South as best seen in Tracy K’ Meyer’s *Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South*, Robert Korstad’s *Civil Rights Unionism* and *To Right These Wrongs*, and, very recently, Tomiko Brown-Nagin’s *Courage to Dissent*. Inevitably, the “long history” framework has broadened the study of the civil rights movement and race relations but it has not successfully disengaged the South from being imagined as the distinct place of racial discrimination.

Part of the problem has been the periodization associated with the “long history” framework. In his book, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, Thomas Sugrue takes an expansive view of the North, and charges that most studies converge heavily around the epic struggles in the South and only shift northward during the mid-to-late 1960s when urban riots erupted and black power movements developed. But while some historians have situated the civil rights movement beyond its conventional timeline, and have elevated the prominence of the 1930s and 1940s, they have done so with a singular focus on black working-class unionism and with little attention to even earlier battles against Jim Crow. In the case of the former, the treatment of black working-class unionism merely becomes a logical extension to Joe Trotter’s *Black Milwaukee* and Kimberley Phillips’ *Alabama North*,...
which arrogated greater agency to working-class African Americans and reshaped the “ghetto synthesis” scholarship that developed around studies conducted by such scholars as David Katzman, Kenneth Kusmer, Gilbert Osofsky, H. Allan Spear, and Richard Thomas. This historiography, even when complicated by Trotter and Phillips, still focuses its attention around education, employment, and housing, and does not give any regard to the institutionalized Jim Crow that African Americans confronted in the North separate from the urban crisis and the configuration of ghetto communities. In the case of the latter, the North’s prewar flirtation with Jim Crow, outside of education, employment, housing, and unionism, has been marginalized and left at the periphery of civil rights and race relations historiography. Despite even Sugrue’s rhetorical critique of civil rights discourse, and his delicate inclusion of pre-1930s activism, his study largely follows along the same continuum of recent scholarship on the North that concentrates on incidents occurring during the 1940s and simultaneous to the conventional civil rights timeline such that northern Jim Crow episodes seem merely an outburst of the intense racial confrontations in the South.

*In the Shadow of Jim Crow: The Benching and Betrayal of Willis Ward* addresses these historiographical concerns that continue to remain subsequent to “long history” revisions. First, this study examines Jim Crow in the North during the interwar era and probes early twentieth century migratory influences on race relations outside the South, permitting an expansion of the civil rights periodization. It also allows the racial injustice that African Americans encountered in the North to become more palpable and less vulnerable to being depicted as mere extensions to the acute racial clashes happening in
the South. Second, this dissertation progresses past the earlier “ghetto synthesis” scholarship, and beyond the more recent “civil rights unionism” research that is fundamental to the “long history” framework. Instead, attention is also placed on other ways in which African Americans were segregated within American life and society away from the areas of education, employment, and housing. In particular, this study observes the entrenched racial restrictions on cultural participation and social engagement that African Americans encountered. By focusing on black exclusion from leisure activities, this study fills a necessary gap of race relations historiography as it demonstrates the limitations of citizenship for African Americans living in the North during the first half of the twentieth century. Lastly, this dissertation operates against the South as the dominant narrative of the civil rights movement to reveal the nationwide struggle for freedom rights and opportunity.

**Jim Crow Lurks in the Shadow of a Forgotten North**

A major problem within “long history” revisions has been trying to explain the North’s role in America’s race relations. Scholars have narrated the separation of African Americans and their white counterparts in the North and have analyzed the racial altercations that erupted between black and white communities over the competition for jobs, housing, and public space. Historians have also identified racial customs that established a hierarchy in the North that was just as stable as the racial pecking order in the South. Yet, the efforts by “long historians” to draw greater continuity between *de facto* segregation in the North and *de jure* segregation in the South have effectively flattened out important regional distinctions that help to differentiate Jim Crow in the
North, South, and West. This is not to contend, as some scholars have, the need to
delineate race relations in the South separate from those occurring in other regions or,
better said, to maintain the South’s ascendancy. The goal is the opposite. Race relations
in the North, South, and West should be placed in conversation with one another. But to
amalgamate the three requires treating the racial clashes in the North and West separate
from those in the South so that the former is not glimpsed as a mere flare-up of the latter.
Thus, while the South is read as having a more vicious form of racial oppression, the
North’s version of Jim Crow bears need for its own classification so as to recognize its
durability and its lasting influence on American race relations.

Remarkably, the North has been more advanced in grappling with the problem of
race than the South, though this story has largely gone untold as long history revisions,
intentionally or unintentionally, have neglected its distinguishing qualities. As slavery
weakened in the North during the antebellum period, the region shifted to the use of race-
specific laws to structure notions of inclusion and exclusion. When Alexis de Tocqueville
made his famous voyage across the United States in 1831 and 1832, he was struck by the
depth of racial bias he encountered in the North. “The prejudice of race,” he wrote,
“appears to be stronger in the states that have abolished slavery than in those where it still
exists; and nowhere is it so intolerant as in those states where servitude has never been
known.” In the post-Civil War and Reconstruction years, the South assumed these laws,
albeit with more aggressive enforcement and the added supplement of “white only”
demarcations. The North, however, shifted to a more inclusionary approach that defied
racial conventions in the South. Laws were passed that granted black northerners civil
rights that black southerners fought to obtain through the late 1960s. Yet, racial practices in the North endured and were accorded more deference than the legal and legislative statutes that made integration lawful. Though African Americans were permitted to attend the same schools as whites, for example, they still faced other exclusionary practices once there. In a sense, black northerners discovered the limitations of integration just as black southerners were fighting to secure it.¹¹

So how were racial practices able to endure? And how did these practices seep into American life over the second half of the twentieth century as *de jure* segregation was ended? It is oversimplification to argue merely that *de facto* racial practices were present longer than the system of segregation itself even as this claim is widely accepted. The broader argument in the history of Willis Ward, in contrast, places those racial practices that have continued to loiter into a northern context. By doing so, it enhances the historical grasp of America’s race relations by acknowledging how white northerners shaped a response to racial integration that has exhibited more staying power than the legal decrees that sanctioned racial prejudice in the South. As those regulations were overturned, white southerners desired new-fangled tactics to maintain racial demarcation or, better said, to get around the law. They glanced at the Midwest and the North for guidance. In these regions, African Americans were tolerated in the early part of the twentieth century, and the degrading laws that characterized northern Black Codes during the nineteenth century were supplanted by legislative and court-ordered directives that mandated integration. Before the Supreme Court’s 1954 ruling in the *Brown v. Board* case, for illustration, Ohio had already desegregated its schools.¹² Yet, as late as 1986,
federal courts were still involved in trying to curtail school segregation in Ohio schools. By comparison, southern schools, by 1970, were less segregated than educational institutions in other region. Thus, by delineating the North’s version of Jim Crow, this study explains how lingering remnants of the old, racial order have persisted, leaving African Americans still in pursuit of a fuller exercise of citizenship and racial equality even as formal segregation is obsolete. Further, this dissertation evinces how racial divisions in the country, especially in the areas of education, employment, and housing are derivatives of a northern adaptation of Jim Crow where African Americans were tolerated but never fully accepted.

This study neither proclaims to be a new history of the civil rights movement nor its truest depiction. On the contrary, In the Shadow of Jim Crow: The Benching and Betrayal of Willis Ward builds on the recent studies by historians to shape a harder civil rights movement. Hall and other scholars have complicated the historiography on America’s race relations and have made “civil rights harder to celebrate as a natural progression of American values, harder to cast as a satisfying morality tale,” and “most of all harder to simplify, appropriate, and contain.” In this latest round of civil rights bloodletting, the objective is to expand a more comprehensive view of America’s race relations. The aim is also to make the case that the ongoing patterns of racial discrimination in the country are not merely the work of contemporary actors but rather a protracted effect of northern racial practices that have lurked in the shadow of a now lifeless and distinctly southern form of Jim Crow. Gerald Ford’s refusal to support busing, and his adoption of the arguments by integration opponents that “religion,
national, or racial intolerance is a matter of individual conscience that cannot be changed by legislative coercion,” has authenticated northern racial practices. Likewise, Willis Ward’s reluctance to challenge extant racial inequities, imploring African Americans to be patient on the question of equality under the guise of respectability, has permitted the de facto racial order of the North to germinate to other areas of the country. In both instances, the legitimacy given to the North’s treatment of the color line has plagued interactions between black and white citizens.15

**Scope of the Dissertation**

This study is animated by the following questions: How did northern institutions maintain separate but unequal practices without the same legal underpinnings that existed in the South? How have de facto racial practices in the North been misconstrued as a lesser Jim Crow? How did the benching of Willis Ward affect his professional life as well as the political career of Gerald Ford? How does analyzing the interchange between race and sport in the context of racial pioneering elucidate a “long history of black conservatism?” How has the North’s version of Jim Crow proven more durable and influential in guiding contemporary race relations in America? What does racial pioneering indicate about the way in which conservative, black middle-class elites shape their politics?

Methodologically, this dissertation relies heavily on primary sources amassed at several archival libraries, most notably the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan and the Walter Reuther Library in Detroit, Michigan. These sources include academic files, administrative and government documents, biographies, congressional
and presidential records, interviews, journals, labor reports, letters, newspaper archives, oral histories, personal papers, namely those belonging to Willis Ward and Gerald Ford, and other archival collections. Throughout parts of the dissertation, African Americans are referred to by the now antiquated terms “Afro American,” “colored,” and “Negro” as well as the still prevalent “black.” This is done to maintain the historicity of some of the eras chronicled in this study and to keep with terms that were common in the first half of the 20th Century. By that choice, neither any disrespect to the subjects of the dissertation nor to present-day readers is intended.

This dissertation is divided into two parts and comprises six chapters. The first four chapters are presented as a microhistory and demonstrate how racial structures were established and fortified in the North. The final two chapters, however, provides a life history that depicts the affects of racial pioneering on Willis Ward and portrays the long history of racial conservatism. Chapter One, *Not far from Birmingham*, provides a historical context for understanding the racial climate in the North. It recounts the Ward family migration to Detroit and examines the economic, political, and social transformations that hastened Jim Crow’s emergence in the region. The chapter provides details of Ward’s upbringing, his developing sense of accomplishment and individualism as a racial pioneer, the early stages of his friendship with Gerald Ford, and his arrival at the University of Michigan in 1931 as the first black varsity football player since George Jewett in the early 1890s. The chapter sheds light on Michigan Athletic Director Fielding Yost’s racial views as well as the efforts put forth by Michigan alumni to have Ward tear down the school’s racial blockade.
The next chapter demonstrates that Ward’s benching was not an isolated event but endemic of the Jim Crow practices that African Americans encountered in the North. Chapter Two, *Jim Crow in the Big House and Elsewhere in the North* chronicles the long history of racial discrimination at the University of Michigan and explores racial confrontations at other northern institutions that affected black athletes. It examines northern efforts to prevent African Americans from fulfilling their athletic quests, exposing how white institutions maintained separate and unequal practices without the buttress of legal sanctions extant in southern states. Northern schools, for example, relied on the use of gentleman’s agreements to restrict African American participation. The chapter also recounts how white athletic officials constructed racial barriers that constrained African American performance and compelled these players to exceed the standard athletic expectations in order to earn spots on Michigan’s teams. According to John Behee, black performers had to be “superspades”—sensational from day one—to integrate white football squads. When African American athletes were deemed superspades, and earned opportunities to participate on all-white teams, they were met by intense racial bigotry in the form of disparaging epithets and intentional injuring at the hands of white players.

Chapter Three, *Bonfires Lit in Protest* analyzes the protests Ward supporters launched to challenge Michigan’s racism. It argues that these resistance campaigns contributed to other local and national mobilization strategies aimed at remedying Jim Crow. It considers the American Student Movement, which coincided with the Ward controversy, and demonstrates how these student-led battles against racial discrimination
During the 1930s were harbingers to the 1960s student protest struggles that captivated the civil rights crusade. The chapter also discusses the shifting nature of campus protest as Communist and socialist-affiliated student groups transformed egalitarian idealism into meaningful action that propelled more aggressive responses to racial injustice. Though the movement to prevent Ward’s benching is unsuccessful, the chapter underscores how early interracial coalitions were built between black and white freedom fighters to threaten the Jim Crow system. Conversely, this chapter also reveals how white institutions, in response to this emergent civil rights movement, shaped new strategies to uphold the existing racial order.

Chapter Four, *Old, Traditional Antagonisms*, probes the efforts by Yost and other athletic officials to delay the full integration of sports for the purpose of safeguarding white notions of racial supremacy. The racial politics within college athletics is examined and the chapter shows how football was viewed as powerful agency that catapulted boys into men, reinforcing Victorian notions of masculinity. At the same time, the sport also exhibited loyalties to the American racial caste, not only excluding black men but also gendering them. The chapter addresses Yost’s scheduling of the contest with Georgia Tech, the fallout of the game, and Ward’s decision to accept the orders from Yost and Michigan Head Coach Harry Kipke that he be sidelined. The chapter also recounts Gerald Ford’s efforts to keep Ward from being excluded though it stops short of labeling the future President a racial advocate. Finally, the chapter explores the criticisms of Ward by the black press for his refusal to defy Michigan’s racial prejudice and to quit the team.
Chapter 5, *Lost Opportunities*, provides a pivotal departure in the Ward story. Whereas the first four chapters are primarily aimed at framing the racism that Ward confronted at Michigan, this chapter delves into the opportunities forsaken by Ward to emerge as a racial advocate. The chapter explains how Ward’s benching affected his athletic career and influenced him not to participate in the 1936 Olympics despite his outstanding track and field resume, which included victories over the incomparable Jesse Owens. The chapter also positions Ward as an adversary to the black workers he supervised as an executive at the Ford Motor Company who was partly responsible for directing the company’s hiring practices. The chapter reveals his betrayal of some of the groups that advocated on his behalf and his unwillingness to utilize his opportunity at the Ford Motor Company to promote racial progress. Ward, along with his co-manager Donald Marshall, is regarded as an underling to Henry Ford and Harry Bennett who maintains the racial status quo, fulfilling the wishes of his superiors. This chapter is also significant because it emphasizes the labor-civil rights union that develops during the late 1930s and early 1940s, and makes clear the role that Ward performed in engendering African Americans and UAW representatives to oppose the racial prejudice at the Ford Motor Company.

The final chapter, *Willis Ward’s America*, analyzes the political views of Ward and Gerald Ford. It illustrates Ford’s policies as a congressman and president that undermined the strides African Americans made to secure full equality even after landmark judicial triumphs and legislative victories. Specifically, Ford’s support of civil rights legislation and his outreach to black leadership and organizations are weighed
against his antibusing stance and his hesitancy to challenge his own political base and constituency to champion measures intended to achieve racial equality. Ford The chapter also analyzes the rising tide of new black conservatism epitomized by individuals like Ward who decelerated the pace of racial progress not only by maintaining the racial status quo but also by arguing in opposition to the enforcement of laws that were achieved during the civil rights movement. The chapter elucidates Ward’s colorblind and meritocratic vision of America in which individualism is prized over collectivity—a forerunner to the conformist black politics emergent in the post-1970s that reasoned the ongoing problems that African Americans endured to be symptomatic of choices and conditions they forced upon themselves rather than as consequences of systemic racism and racial segregation.

In the Shadows of Jim Crow, unavoidably, is part biography and probes the life of Willis Ward from his playing days at Michigan through his tenure as a judge. Yet, this life narrative offers an expansive, multilayered history that depicts the role intercollegiate athletics performed both in continuing the old, racial order and contesting it. This dissertation chronicles both the prolonged struggle by African Americans for inclusion in juxtaposition to the rise of black conservatism. It analyzes the permutations that the freedom fight experienced as local racial episodes became vital to racial progress even as these incidents inadvertently transformed some persons into movement allies and activists and others into adversaries and apathetic actors. This study also emphasizes how black participation in sport became integral to the civil rights campaign and evinces how ordinary citizens, through their endorsement of integration in athletics and their push
back against racial inequality, reshaped the broader freedom struggle of African Americans. This dissertation, equally, reconciles the moderate politics of black athletes like Ward who suffered racist treatment yet rebuffed opportunities to be more vocal in the movement to confront racial discrimination, instead perceiving of their own pioneering and progress as a universal sign that African Americans were better off. On the whole, this study reveals the resiliency of northern *de facto* racial practices, and illuminates its mainstreaming within contemporary American race relations. This dissertation, therefore, fills a significant gap in the historiographical study of Jim Crow and civil rights; it permits the North to gain greater prominence in race relations discourse while moving scholars toward a more comprehensive view of Jim Crow life in America.

Jim Crow is dead. But the ghost of the North’s version of Jim Crow lurks in the shadows.
CHAPTER 1: NOT FAR FROM BIRMINGHAM

Thus, one observer concluded, racial prejudice “haunts its victim wherever he goes,—in the hospitals where humanity suffers,—in the churches where it kneels to God—in the prisons where it expiates its offences,—in the graveyards where it sleeps the last sleep.”¹⁶

One by one, trains carrying sanguine passengers, many of them soon-to-be University of Michigan freshmen comprising the fall class of 1931, screeched into the two-towered station at the Michigan Central Depot in Ann Arbor. Blowing a dense fog of soot into Michigan’s unusually humid autumn sky and, by chance, rearward into the depression-laden experiences these travelers had left behind, these cast iron bullets greeted a glacial stoned oasis purported to be “the finest station on the line between Buffalo and Chicago.” As the departing commuters gathered their luggage and exited steamed coaches, which had journeyed from cities like Detroit and Grand Rapids, and towns dotting even further eastward and westward, their surroundings quickly validated the optimism they fostered along their personal and public voyages.¹⁷

The Michigan Central Depot, positioned at the underside of a concaved road whose northeastern hill was bordered by South State Street, the location of the University of Michigan, radiated with splendor. It revealed the vision and vividness of its chief designer, famed architect Frederick Spier, and the virtuosity of its builders, Detroit’s Gearing and Sons. Ivy crawled up the side of the building whose stoned veneer had been
quarried from Four Mile Lake between Chelsea and Dexter and cut at Foster’s Station on Huron River Drive near Maple Road in northwest Ann Arbor. The interior conveyed old-world elegance with stained glass windows, red oak ceilings and trim, and French tile floors. The exterior seized greater visual majesty. Petunias and carnations carpeted the outdoor entryway while a fountain spurted at the point of a triangular garden just east of the baggage shed. During this era, gardens were considered a crucial aspect of railroad design as the train stations provided visitors with their first impression of the looming town. The grounds at 401 Depot Street fulfilled this objective; the landscape was lush and welcoming, and invited fantasies that the time spent in Ann Arbor boded well for the city’s newcomers.\textsuperscript{18}

Thus, outside the aberrant warmth that remained from a wickedly brutal summer, there was every reason for those persons who had trekked through the Michigan Central Depot to be hopeful about the world that awaited them. None perhaps arrived with greater expectations than Willis Ward, a bronze-complexioned, schoolboy sensation in both football and track from Detroit’s Northwestern High School. Ward had initially planned to enroll at Ivy League Dartmouth College, far away from the clutter, commotion, and crime of Detroit and the whispered intolerance quietly existing at the University of Michigan. Harry Kipke, Michigan’s Head Football Coach, also recruited Ward who was named the state’s High School Athlete of the Year after setting the national prep record in the high jump. Up till now Michigan’s track record with Negro football players did not impress Ward who feared he would be denied the chance to compete on the gridiron just as every other black athlete had been refused the opportunity
to do during the nearly 40 years since Ann Arbor’s own George Jewett became the first colored player in the university’s history to do so. ¹⁹

**Breaking Michigan’s Color Barrier**

Jewett broke Michigan’s pigskin color barrier in 1890, just a year after William Henry Lewis and William Tecumseh Sherman Jackson integrated college football at Amherst. Michigan’s decision to allow Jewett to play influenced other pre-Big-Ten schools to permit Afro-American players on their respective teams. ²⁰ In 1891, Fred D. Patterson, who emerged as America’s first black automobile manufacturer, joined the Ohio State University football team. ²¹ Two years later, Preston Eagleson suited up for Indiana. Yet Michigan’s early efforts to integrate its athletic squads and to sway other

![Figure 1: Willis Ward poses for a picture at Detroit’s Northwestern High School in 1931. Courtesy Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.](image)
nearby, northern institutions to follow accordingly dissipated quickly. When Jewett left Michigan to attend Northwestern University in 1893 after being deprived of the privilege to study medicine while still playing football, the University pivoted toward veiled practices that kept Negro competitors from donning the Maize and Blue uniform. Michigan did not recruit a single colored football player after Jewett’s departure and only one Afro-American athlete appeared on any of Michigan’s other sports teams toward the end of the decade.22

The hiring of Fielding H. Yost hardened the school’s prohibition against black gridiron gladiators. When Michigan’s first athletic director, Charles Baird, appointed Yost as the head football coach in 1901, it ended whatever opening Afro-Americans might have had to play for the team.23 Yost was a native of Fairview, West Virginia, a northern town near the Pennsylvania border and closer to Ohio than to any place in the South. But there was no doubting it—Yost was a Southerner. He was born six years after the end of the Civil War and his father, Parmenus, served as a surgeon under Robert E. Lee. Further, his syrupy pronunciation of the school’s name as “MEE-she-gan” betrayed his distinctive southern patois and informed his stance on keeping the races segregated.24 Yost’s Jim Crow posture was every bit the de rigueur of southern life. In the South, the unequal hand of separate-but-equal injustice, made callused by the 1896 Plessy decision, created an unfavorable racial climate for Afro-Americans. They confronted racial blockades in all segments of life, which ridiculed the very notion of colored athletes integrating the playing field just as it delineated how all Negroes were to be treated. But institutions in the North and West were also discouraged from utilizing black talent to
excel in sport, most notably football, as a consequence of the arrival of white migrants from the South. The rise of southern administrators and coaches at colleges above the Mason-Dixon Line transformed campus race relations and coerced northern universities to fall into the same pattern of discrimination against colored players as their Confederate counterparts. Yost’s coming to Michigan similarly drove the school to follow this pernicious, racial precedent. He saw that he could win without black inclusion.

Alongside his proficiency for developing young men into champions, often pressing his team to play better and faster with his constant “hurry up” roars, Yost transported Southern-style Jim Crow to his new coaching gig in Ann Arbor. For the next twenty-five years, he rebuffed every attempt by colored football athletes to integrate his vaulted squads.

Yost persistently ignored recommendations by Michigan alumni who pleaded for him to bestow certain Afro-American high school football recruits opportunities to vie for spots on various Wolverine rosters. In 1904, a compelling case was made on behalf of Abner Powell, dazzling phenom from Salt Lake City. He was alleged to have been able to run one-hundred yards in ten seconds. The Big Blue alum said of Powell, “This young man is a human whirlwind…the equal of Heston…a thorough gentleman, always knows his place…fine punter.” But such attributes, which would have made Powell an ideal recruit had he been white, were shrugged off by Yost who did not bother even to scout him. Toward the end of his coaching tenure, Yost tolerated having Belford Lawson, a talented black halfback from Roanoke, Virginia, engage in workouts with the reserve team. The reserves squared off in intra-squad practice events against the varsity team, and
were tasked with grooming the latter for real football games against other Big-Ten and northern institutions. A press clipping in September 1923 highlighted Lawson’s prowess on the field during a preseason scrimmage between a “blue” squad and a “red” squad. “Lawson, colored halfback on the red, demonstrated his ability at breaking up passes, knocking them down with great regularity,” the Detroit Free Press article reported. But Yost remained vehemently opposed to sanctioning a colored boy’s participation on the varsity, and Lawson was not granted any racialized immunity. Lawson was skillful enough to knock down passes thrown by the quarterback of a national championship team but not deemed good enough to take the field during regular-season competition. According to John H. O’Brien, “It was pretty well understood that Yost would not have a black on any football team he coached, although he did not object to their participation in other university sports. Football was something else again.” And no Afro-American, as John Behee noted, “Ever played varsity football for [Fielding Harris] Yost.” The father of Michigan’s “Point-A-Minute” teams of the early Twentieth Century had halted effectively the university’s already shaky commitment to integrating college football.

Ward was quite familiar with Yost’s unwritten policy barring Negroes from becoming members of the Michigan lineup. The scuttlebutt on the school’s refusal to play black football players was well-known throughout the state with Afro-American athletes forced to quit football and settle for track and field. Though Yost had retired from coaching after the 1925-1926 season, his role as the university’s athletic director belied every impression that his successors might put an end to the de facto segregationist custom of excluding black football players that he implemented.
Tolan, the “world’s fastest human,” encountered Yost’s affect on the Wolverine coaching staff. Tolan, who tried out for the team in 1927, was initially given permission to play. But on the third day of practice, E.J. Mather, the freshman football coach, notified Tolan of the team’s decision to keep him off the squad, ruining any prospect Tolan had of becoming Michigan’s second black varsity letterman. “Some coaches are disagreeing on your chances,” Mather explained to a crestfallen Tolan. “Some of them think you shouldn’t be allowed to play. I’d be tickled to have you but I’m afraid I’m going to be outvoted.” Mather’s apprehension with respect to aggressively campaigning for Tolan to be on the team exposed his declining influence with the university’s other athletic officials. He battled cancer throughout the 1927 season, and was forced to step down from his head coaching duties on the school’s basketball team. But the unwillingness by Michigan coaches to undermine Yost’s unbendable authority loomed larger in preserving the school’s routine of fielding an all-white football squad. The Michigan athletic personnel grasped the racial narrow-mindedness that infused their boss’s attitudes concerning the use of Afro-Americans. None of them, to a man, wanted to be held culpable for prospering Jim Crow. But Yost was a leviathan in their eyes, well-regarded as one of the country’s finest and most influential coaches. Earning his respect superseded any penchant for fairness, especially since the potential of acquiring his blessings could eventually lead to a major coaching promotion. Thus, Yost’s longstanding racial diktat that black athletes be withheld from playing football was politely obeyed. They demanded that every Negro player be a “Superspade”—exceptionally gifted and good enough to start day one or be kept from competing. In the
interim, the staff made every effort to explain that “Michigan did not discriminate” so as to hide any guilt of racial prejudice. For Tolan, he was simply not good enough just like the other colored players who had tried to make the Michigan roster had been told. The team promptly “took away Tolan’s football uniform and handed him a track suit in exchange,” one of the few sports where Yost raised no objections to fielding black athletes.  

Ward observed the treatment of Tolan and other colored superjocks by Michigan. Four years later, he prepared to attend Dartmouth. Nestled on the Connecticut River in Hanover, Dartmouth gained somewhat of a reputation for offering bona fide tryouts to black competitors. Michigan’s integration of its football team had preceded Dartmouth by twelve years. But after Matthew Washington Bullock joined the “Big Green” roster in 1902, becoming only the second Negro in the Ivy Leagues to do so, Dartmouth devoted its attention to enrolling other colored standouts to end permanently the College’s racial barrier in athletics. The older brother of legendary Fritz Pollard, Leslie, played halfback for the school during a period characterized as the “nadir” of American race relations. This unprecedented display of racial egalitarianism, which ran counter to the prevailing racial trends within the country, amazed Ward whose simple desire was to play for an institution not averse to utilizing black athletes. He reasoned, “If a school has a reputation of not utilizing an athlete because he is black, then you will go to the school that doesn’t.” The consensus view was that Dartmouth offered a welcoming place to Negroes, and Ward discerned he “would be happier [there] as it was somewhat more liberal” than the university located approximately one hour to the southeast from his home in Detroit.
When one Michigan coach and Dartmouth alum, aware both of his alma mater’s willingness to treat Negroes fairly and Michigan’s ban on black football players, pushed for Ward to head east to the rural New Hampshire school, it only strengthened the young man’s resolve to leave the Midwest.34

Figure 2: Willis Ward carries the ball for Northwestern High School. Courtesy of Burton Historical Collections, Detroit Public Library.

Harry Kipke, however, felt strongly about Ward’s skills on the gridiron and urged his matriculation at Michigan. In the spring of 1931, Kipke approached Ward with a plan for getting him on the team. He visited the Ward home to meet with Willis and his father, Henry. He encouraged Ward to consider Michigan and tried to solicit Henry’s help by promising the old man that his son “would never regret it.” Conscious of the rebuttals that

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Henry and Willis might have regarding Michigan’s disconcerting racial customs, Kipke summarily dismissed the concerns. He asserted that Michigan’s racist rule, if there was such a thing, was one in which he did not take part. Kipke’s sensitivity to the Ward family’s unease about Michigan’s tradition of excluding colored football players nearly won over Henry and Willis who both saw him as a genuine, racial ally.\(^{35}\)

But Kipke’s pledge to curtail Yost’s de facto rule in opposition to black football players proved daunting for the young coach from Lansing, Michigan. He witnessed firsthand Yost’s impatience with Elton Wieman who lasted only two seasons as Michigan’s head football coach. Outside of being scapegoated by Yost for the team’s poor showing, Wieman’s complaint that the heavy-handed southerner never furnished him with complete control of the team jeopardized any possibility of him retaining his job.\(^ {36}\) Wieman’s outstanding role in working to help transform Michigan into a juggernaut neither diminished Yost’s restlessness nor averted his decision to fire his former offensive line coach. Being a spectator to Wieman’s demise only escalated Kipke’s pessimism that his ability to convince his mulish boss to acquiesce when it came to the idea of Ward playing for the Wolverines was bleak. He lacked Wieman’s coaching clout, and Yost was undoubtedly not going to be persuaded by his newest minion. Sure, Kipke was a beloved Yost recruit who lettered in three sports and captained Michigan’s undefeated 1923 National Title team. But his athletic resume did not erase his relative coaching inexperience or impart to him the know-how needed to maneuver single-handedly against the intimidating West Virginian. His greenness on the field aside, whatever remaining amounts of leverage he may have possessed were sliced away by the
unrelenting fear of being laid off as the Great Depression shrunk college budgets and forced athletic departments to decrease expenses. Football coaching staffs whose salaries had once been impervious to university-wide spending cuts now found themselves among the unemployed.\(^{37}\) Kipke could ill-afford to test his eminence’s say-so over the matter and risk being fired. Thus, to integrate Michigan’s lineup, Ward required a higher authority than the biddable Kipke who had spent the previous decade both learning closely under Yost’s tutelage and trying to gain his admiration.

Circuit Court Judge Guy Miller possessed the legal muscle needed to overturn Yost. Word of Ward’s decision to register at Dartmouth had already been leaked by the press. Still, Miller’s motivation to help Ward integrate the Michigan football team grew after he was contacted by fretful school officials who notified him that “Michigan and Yost did not want black football players.” Miller, along with fellow 3rd Circuit Court Judge DeWitt H. Merriam, discussed the matter with James Murfin, a Regent of the University and Fred Matthai who served as President of the University of Michigan Club in Detroit. Both men backed Kipke’s recruitment of Ward and had made their own overtures to him to gauge his interest in attending Michigan. Ex-Governor Alex Groesbeck, a graduate of Michigan Law School, also espoused support for Ward’s enrollment. No stranger to controversy himself, Groesbeck had once denounced the Ku Klux Klan over their staunch resistance to his reelection bid and his refusal to outlaw private education. His advocacy on behalf of Ward was, therefore, refreshing. Together, these men convened to pinpoint a strategy to topple Yost. But it was Ward who permeated their dialogues. In their conversations, they wondered, “Well, why doesn’t this
kid go to Michigan?” Despite Yost’s racism, the prevailing conviction by this ad hoc yet powerful assemblage was that Michigan’s bigoted customs could be jettisoned if they had a gifted athlete capable not only of challenging the university’s Jim Crowism but also of striving on the actual playing field. Given his decorated athletic performances in high school, Ward was clearly perceived to be that player. But to assure him that he was the man needed to oust Michigan’s racial embargo, Judge Miller turned to Marshall Pepper for assistance supposing that the black law clerk would appear credible to Ward.  

Miller assigned Pepper the responsibility of conversing with Ward, “one black to another,” about the situation. But Pepper’s racial tête-à-tête with Ward did not immediately convince the hesitant football star. Ward countered Pepper’s appeals with a barrage of questions, none more crucial than the issue he raised germane to the practicality of attending school in Ann Arbor in spite of Big Blue’s practice of denying the use of colored football players. “Why should I go to Michigan if I want to play football? I can’t play,” Ward shouted. Pepper anticipated Ward’s grievances. He and Ward were but two sides of the same coin—black men dealt the unjust hand of racial inequity. In spite of that, Pepper had managed to integrate an otherwise white world as a law clerk and presumed that with the strong backing and well thought-out plans of his superiors Ward could do the same in Ann Arbor. He insisted to a hesitant Ward that there were a group of men, including his own boss Judge Miller, who were ready to abolish Michigan’s deplorable acts of racial exclusion. Pepper then advised Ward to meet with Judge Miller who he claimed was adamant in his rejection of the university’s separatist practices. Ward went to meet with Judge Miller at his chambers in the old circuit court.
building, though he only agreed to do so out of “a feeling of sympathy for the clerk, for whom it was important.”

The conference with Judge Miller was propitious. In response to the school’s egregious color line, Miller grilled Ward on his eagerness to help dismantle Michigan’s discriminatory rules. Miller posed to a reluctant Ward, “Well, if we can get an assurance that you will get a fair chance at Michigan, would you help us break this alleged tradition?” As Ward sat back in his chair, contemplating what he should do, the anxious Judge went on. “We can’t do it without help, and we need somebody who has the talent so they can’t come back to us and say, ‘Look, the kid just couldn’t make it.’ You know.” Sensing that Ward was ready to give in, Miller, every bit the skilled litigator, presented a last-ditched argument to win over the talented lad. “Your marks are high enough to indicate that you should be able to survive scholastically at Michigan. So why don’t you help us help you?” His entreaty worked. Judge Miller’s meticulous reasoning reassured Ward who graciously agreed to break Michigan’s racial barrier. With the endorsement of Murfin, Matthai, and Miller, he enrolled at Michigan to play football for Kipke. Yost was neither contented with the decision that overturned his accepted policy of not having Negroes play football at Michigan nor comfortable with the role Kipke performed in enlisting Ward’s services. He reportedly came to blows with his young protégé.

Ward, however, relished in the court injunction he obtained, which gave him the opening to join the Michigan football team. “I went for it, and don’t regret it,” he ardently professed. To Ward, Judge Miller’s ruling represented a good omen for Afro-Americans and signaled a path toward fulfilling some of their long-standing, progressive yearnings.
It meant that the unpleasant odor of Jim Crow, so redolent in the South with a stench that had chased black migrants to the North, had not accompanied Ward on his trip to Ann Arbor. It had finally been exhaled, supplanted ostensibly by a scent of racial fairness. Thus, when the locomotive carrying Ward eventually reached its destination in Ann Arbor, he stepped off the railcar beaming with pride. His cherubic cheeks unfolded in a smile that evinced his confidence that the university’s icy gridiron race relations had begun to thaw. Ward depicted the picturesque train station as more than a harbinger of a charming college town waiting to be explored. He glimpsed the verdant setting at the Michigan Central Depot as the backcloth to a city where colored people would be given a chance to compete and succeed alongside their white counterparts. 

My Father Packed His Bags and Headed Northward

Ward’s arrival in Ann Arbor epitomized the hope his father, Henry Ward, had when he moved the family away from Birmingham, Alabama. In 1915, Henry fled to Detroit, an exodus Willis remembered as being motivated by his father’s desire to get his five daughters out of the South. Economic considerations also spurred his migration Ward recounted. But Henry had a more significant driving force for relocating the family than Willis, the youngest of seven Ward children, recalled. Born three days after Christmas in 1912, Willis was barely two by the time the elder Ward decided to flee northward. He had no real memory of his father in Alabama. Willis’s reminiscences embodied the sanitized narrative Henry disclosed to his younger kids, a side-effect of his reticence to detail extensively his most injurious racial skirmishes. Willis was not aware, therefore, of the racialized terror that precipitated his father’s departure from the South.
By all accounts, his dad had experienced success as a small businessman who was able to keep his family out of poverty during an era when the dreadful sharecropping system confined many colored families to economically serf-like conditions. Henry, however, had perpetrated the unpardonable offense of confronting a white man on his job. The altercation incited the local Ku Klux Klan who threatened the senior Ward with violent reprisal. One night, not long after the incident, gunshots, echoing through the night’s pitch-black firmament, awakened the Ward household. Just a few decibels beneath the cacophony of staccato gunfire, the hollers of a white man imploring the senior Ward to come out were heard. Henry never appeared and eventually the clan disappeared into the night. Yet by the next morning, Henry had packed up his belongings and headed northward as far as his savings and the Louisville and Nashville Company train he traveled on took him. The first major stop in the North was likely Cincinnati, a place too-near south for him comfortably to dwell. The city where Negro passengers returning southward to visit loved ones were forced to board “Jim Crow cars” was regarded by colored migrants as a midway-point to other northern cities rather than as a terminus. Though Chicago and Cleveland had been attractive destinations for black Alabamans magnetized by employment opportunities, Ward landed in Detroit where he quickly acquired a job working in the foundry at the Chalmers Plant on Jefferson Avenue. In short time, he sent for Lula Rachel, the oldest Ward child, and then the rest of the family, including the infant Willis.

Though the youngest Ward had a vague recollection of his father’s motive for leaving the South, he, nonetheless, recognized his daddy’s disdain for Dixie. To a casual
observer, Henry Ward had a concealed, almost unnoticeable contempt for southern racism. He was not known as a bitter man, and he rarely displayed any grudges or malice toward others regardless of race. He was also a man who seldom discussed how deeply segregation affected him. The restraint Henry displayed in dealing with pervasive racial inequality typified bourgeois values of respectability espoused by middle-class Afro-Americans who long hoped to pass on these principles to their working-class brethren. Elite forms of uplift ideology, alongside the more popular forms that predated emancipation, permeated black bourgeoisie discourse starting around the turn of the century and equated good behavior with racial progress. Yet Henry’s self-control was not gleaned from the uplift ethics emergent with the black elite whose added emphasis on class stratification surely placed him and other blue-collar Negroes at a distance safe enough to impede interaction between the two groups. His sense of composure, instead, reflected the fervor of his spiritual convictions and revealed his trust in a Christian faith that prevailed over any discrimination he encountered. He stressed the salvific notion that the afterlife provided relief for the shortcomings Negroes experienced on Earth at the hands of white men and instilled in his kids no sense of hatred, which he personally felt philosophizing habitually about racial inequality predictably provoked. Henry’s tact had to be pleasing to a Second Baptist Church clergy awash in the waters of uplift even if his diplomacy did not descend from the privilege shores of black elitism. For Afro-Americans at the lowest rungs of society, it was a commitment to righteousness—not respectability—that kept them from flouting the Victorian standards of propriety even where racial discrimination prompted impoliteness.
Even after his migration to Detroit, Henry clung to his unwavering devotion to God, serving as a deacon at Second Baptist Church. No drinking and dancing were allowed in his home.\textsuperscript{49} He also obliged his children to spend most of their free time at this renowned house of worship, which served originally as a “station” on the Underground Railroad and later as a meeting house for several prominent Afro-Americans such as Frederick Douglas and Ralph Bunche who was baptized there.\textsuperscript{50} In this era, black churches became magnets for colored transplants from the same rural boundaries or small districts in the South to reconstitute families and communities in northern urban vicinities.\textsuperscript{51} Second Baptist Church was remarkably responsive to the massive incursion of southern Negroes and its church rolls expanded as rapidly as Detroit’s growing black population. Led by the Reverend Robert Bradby, the church welcomed anxious migrants, many of whom were Baptist. The church also instituted a system of committees to greet incoming trains at the city’s Michigan Central Station with offers of employment and housing assistance.\textsuperscript{52} For Henry, meeting members of Second Baptist Church upon his arrival in Detroit provided him with a sanctified and suitable respite from the trouble he had escaped in Birmingham. The church’s fortuitous generosity enhanced his religious dedication. When Willis later went on to teach Sunday school at the church, pleasing his devout Baptist father, he also satisfied Henry’s efforts to pay back Second Baptist for its timely hospitality. Such benevolence caused Henry to eschew discourses that inevitably goaded him into expressing his antipathy toward intolerance. Yet his reluctance to travel to the South even for a brief jaunt, although tacit, defied his usual approach to addressing racial disquiet.\textsuperscript{53}
To borrow from Langston Hughes, Henry had “picked up [his] life” and had “gone up north” on a one-way ticket. His aversion to the South influenced his dealings with relatives who still resided in Alabama and other places below the Mason-Dixon Line. He wrote letters back to them infrequently. Henry repeatedly warned all of his children that if any of them ever chose to revisit the South on their own, he would neither go back to get them nor send a dime to help subsidize their return northward. He held closely his private opinions on race and Jim Crow. But the reserved and religious Ward clearly had strong feelings about Dixie, a place he considered incorrigible. His membership at Second Baptist Church and his commitment to avoiding racial tough-talk did not soften his stance on southern racial discrimination.\textsuperscript{54}

**The Great Migration ‘Up South’**

Henry Ward was not alone in his views of the South. Many southern Negroes began to believe they could no longer wait for equality to become a part of their legacy. Life in the South had pushed them to flee in search of a fuller exercise of their citizenship. This escape and exploration resulted in the “Great Migration,” the mass movement of Negroes out the South to the North and West starting in 1910. This migration to the North was glimpsed almost as a mystical journey from bondage and destitution to buoyancy and deliverance. For a number of years, black southerners assumed that the North was the land of freedom. Even if these presumptions were inexact, by any objective benchmark, the North had to be more hospitable than the South.\textsuperscript{55}
Afro-Americans migrated to the North anticipating better opportunities and a greater exercise of freedom than they had experienced living under Jim Crow. But black southerners were also captivated by the belief that the North provided a refuge away from the entrenched racial callousness that buttressed the South’s de jure segregation and subjected them to random acts of bigoted cruelty. Thus, between 1910 and 1930, 1.6 million southern Negroes, resembling Henry Ward and his family, departed Dixie. There was a steady flow of black migrants who came from all corners of the South “full of,” as Richard Wright described it in recalling his own experiences of traveling north, “a hazy notion that life could be lived with dignity.” The colored population in Detroit, alone, swelled by 600 percent between 1910 and 1920, outpacing other predominantly black communities above the Mason-Dixon Line. This surge of colored migrants flooding the North, however, worried white northerners who observed the Negro influx as an impending menace that imperiled the de facto racial order.56

Racial tensions intensified in the North. Black migrants agitated racial anxieties and prompted white society to establish practices aimed at safeguarding their sense of economic and political hegemony. Fears mounted as Negroes began to creep into northern cities in droves to fill jobs that had typically been the reserve of white northerners.57 This concern was consolidated by the restrictions on European immigration, the departure of northern soldiers during World War I, and the subsequent use of black southerners as strikebreakers, which collectively dictated the continuous need for colored workers. In response, white northerners acted hastily and stubbornly to assert a position of superiority in the burgeoning racial hierarchy.58 Black migrants were
just as obdurate as their white counterparts. Emboldened both by the patriotic esteem gained from fighting in World War I and a growing desire to create new, fully-liberated lives away from the racially-maligned roles they assumed in the South, Negroes sought to defy the mushrooming white supremacist habits sprouting in the North. This clash of wills between white northerners seeking to reinforce the primacy of their whiteness and the black community raring to eradicate the deep-rooted racial demarcation that caricatured them as unworthy of full citizenship triggered a more scornful and shameful set of racial dynamics in the North. The rising racial divisiveness sparked race riots throughout the North that mirrored the lynchings emblematic of black and white relations in the South. These developing racial hostilities yielded another effect: they shaped life in the North for black inhabitants, like the Ward family, to confront the rigid racial segregation presumed to be exclusive to the South.

Yet the rapacious gnaw of southern Jim Crow imbued early black migrants’ imaginations with a distorted view of the North as a safe haven. In the land where Lincoln lived, where Republicans governed, and where enfranchisement was not denied to black northerners, southern Negroes pictured a world absent of Jim Crow, lynching, and racial disparagement.\(^59\) The preliminary impetus was likely economic. This was thought to be the case for Henry Ward who Willis declared “didn’t have any prospects at the time he left Birmingham.” But as the movement took shape, and as the vision of the North-as-Canaan put into more lucid focus southern white tyranny, the exodus morphed into, in E. Franklin Frazier’s words, “One of the most crucial mass movements in the history of the Negro in the United States.”\(^60\)
Afro-Americans’ encroachment into the North possessed the spiritual resemblance of salvation. To these dispossessed black migrants from the South, the North symbolized economic, political, and social liberation. The images of jobs, equality, and promises of a dignified future in the North snuggled tightly within each migrant’s dreams. This metaphorical imagery of a Promised Land that inculcated the expectations of Negroes relocating to the North with a sort of sacred zeal was best epitomized by the Biblical story of the Israelites’ rescue out of Egypt. One group of migrants from Mississippi embodied this religious fervor when they held a prayer meeting to commemorate the precise moment of emancipation. When their coach reached the halfway point on the Ohio River Bridge, they stopped and knelt before God to offer thanks. When the prayers were over, they performed a triumphant rendition of the jubilant hymn, “I Done Come out of the Land of Egypt with the Good News.”

The nascent stage of the “Great Migration” was, as Angela Dillard has contended, “an important expression of agency and self-determination, as millions of African-Americans struck out in search of better lives for themselves and their children.” The family of Margaret McCall Thomas Ward, Willis’s second wife, grasped migration as the only way to remove the symbolic shackles of white supremacy. “My dad and my mother were publishing a newspaper in Montgomery, and it was at that time the Klan was rising,” Margaret stated. “It was because of that and the fact that he was very, very outspoken in his editorials that made them decide it was time to leave Alabama. They moved to Detroit with his mother, my grandmother.” Lacking the legal recourse to challenge white racism, Negroes exploited migration as a tactic to evade the South’s
indefatigable presence of Jim Crow. Mobility remained their most vital response to
mounting discrimination. From 1890 to 1910, southern states had approved legislation
that effectively disenfranchised the Afro-American community while sanctioning racist
whites’ unchecked power to stifle and suppress local black denizens. Although these
segregationist laws maintaining white supremacy were instigated by Democrats in the
South, these deleterious directives were legitimized by a Republican-led Supreme Court
that pandered to the South’s intransigent racial politics.64

The 1896 Plessy decision left Negroes more vulnerable. The decision nullified
monumental legal protections that had been achieved during Reconstruction and stripped
away Afro-Americans’ belief that they could receive equal treatment under the law,
especially in reaction to belligerent behavior by white racists. As Mark Weiner posits,
“For many blacks, life became in some respects worse than it had been under slavery,” as
white supremacy reinstated itself on new, more unsympathetic terms. With a monopoly
of political power, white southerners rigidly shaped the contours of black life around
legalized segregation. Intimidation and violence proceeded without white perpetrators
having to dread the risk of legal consequence. New laws were also passed that invalidated
black enfranchisement rights while cementing racial segregation as the rule in southern
society. These laws allowed lynchings to become a quotidian aspect of white supremacy
in the South. Lynching, in the mind of white racist southerners, was indispensable to
forcing Negroes to surrender to Jim Crow at the same time as it limited black
socioeconomic mobility. But Jim Crow laws did not place restrictions on interstate travel,
which meant that black families in the South could go either north or west.65
Afro-Americans also countenanced disparities when it came to education and employment. In 1910, eleven former Confederate states exhausted three times more per capita on white students than on black students. Colored schools were entombed to squalor, congested, and often without heat during winter months. Black students found difficulty in getting to schools that were often located in remote areas away from the precincts that encompassed black life. The ratios of students-to-teacher were significantly higher in black schools than in white schools. The separate-but-equal system also narrowed the employment opportunities for Afro-American southerners, particularly when it came to specialized jobs. White prejudice gave strictly white-owned businesses sanction to control the southern economy and to prolong black poverty. These enterprises—from the local dry goods industry to large companies like Coca-Cola—rebuffed the hiring of colored workers as clerks, secretaries, or sale persons, much less managers. With government dominated by men committed to white supremacy, Negroes were also excluded from managerial and clerical positions in state and local bureaucracies as well as elective office. A tiny fraction of black professionals became physicians, dentists, and lawyers but were refused opportunities to work in those respective fields. The circumstances were no better for blue-collar workers. Afro-Americans were excluded from jobs in textiles and oil and gas, which was steadily becoming the South’s most rapidly growing industry. With white and blue-collar jobs, alike, closed to them, a great majority of black southerners continued to work the land—their destiny attached to slavery’s cotton and tobacco economies. As tenancy and share-
cropping continued to expand, impoverishing an already poor agricultural problem, it became clear that life for Negros in the South would not produce any progression.\textsuperscript{67} There was an unambiguous racial ceiling imposed on black advancement. In nearly every segment of their lives in the South, Afro-Americans were restricted and reminded of their alleged inferiority. To be a Negro in the South was, as W. E. B. Du Bois depicted, someone who “must ride Jim Crow in Georgia.”\textsuperscript{68} Black southerners not only rode Jim Crow, but they also were compelled to chew on it, and the intractable racism that accompanied it, daily. Impelling Afro-Americans to think Jim Crow was not done by accident. It was the deliberate intention of white southerners to fashion such a harsh facade of racial degradation so as to signal to Negroes that equality and opportunity were inescapably linked to racial identity. Black success was viewed ominously and infuriated whites who were reluctant to share power. White supremacists relied on a variety of tactics to maintain their system of domination while forcing the black community to endure racial discrimination. White southerners created heavily racialized spaces—what Katherine Lumpkin termed those “deadly serious…signs and separations”—to take the fiction and myth out of the idea of race or any impression that race did not matter.\textsuperscript{69} Along these lines, “white only” and “colored” signs enabled a racial fault line to exist with every black individual constrained and cut off by his or her color. These signs also were put to use to curb the thinking of Afro-Americans who saw themselves as equal in status to whites.\textsuperscript{70} This is what Jim Crow in the South was about—not separation but shame as a means to limit black accessibility and demonstrate the superiority of white racial identification.\textsuperscript{71}
Racial degradation shoved Negroes out of the South. As Jim Crow laws and racial discrimination reached their maturity, black southerners needed little enticements to depart from the white supremacist atmosphere of the Deep South. But there were more practical reasons that Afro-Americans migrated north. Economic imperatives, industrialization, and the abatement of European immigration spurred migration. World War I made the North more attractive to southern Negroes, as the break for economic prosperity seemed possible. Jobs became the pull factor for the Great Migration. Prior to the war, industrialists “adhered to a rigid color line in their hiring practices.” But in the midst of the war, black labor became desirable as jobs were vacated. Employees had no choice but to turn to the home labor market, and the color barrier quickly faded away. For the first time, Negroes benefitted from the industrial employment opportunities in northern cities, inspiring more black southerners to migrate northward.

In the spring of 1915, northern companies, particularly the steel mills and railroads, began sending workforce recruiters down South both to enlist the labor of and offer free transportation to Negroes. Self-help organizations like the Urban League and governmental agencies such as the Department of Labor aided the process by gathering workers for northern war industries. Railroad and industrial labor recruiters often embellished the nonetheless real job opportunities that were created by the bolstering of the defense as well as the manpower shortage following army enlistment. Afro-Americans were often aware of these recruitment shenanigans. Most southern Negroes often depended on the observations of other black workers who had been sent northward to “test the waters.” As one colored migrant confessed, “Of course, everything they say
about the North ain’t true, but there’s so much of it true don’t mind the other.” Still, with the confluence of industry booming and the pipeline of European labor being severed, Negroes streamed into northern cities. Afro-Americans were also drawn to the North by companies that hired them as strikebreakers, though this practice foreshadowed coming racial hostility. Rising prices during the war lessened the value of wages, sending white workers out on strike for more pay. Labor conflict arose as white strikers attacked black strikebreaking laborers. Afro-Americans, nonetheless, continued to make northern inroads. As Robert C. Twombly aptly noted, “The black man moving north, once an exception to the rule, became commonplace.”

Black newspapers also actively participated in persuading Negroes to leave the South. The Chicago Defender published a weekly national edition aimed at black southerners. The editor of the Chicago Defender, Robert Abbott, encouraged Afro-Americans to move to the North in lieu of the jobs that were being made available during World War I despite the fact that he apparently opposed the conflict. Abbott decried the war “as bloody, tragic, and deplorable,” but added that “it is an ill wind that blows no one good…factories, mills, and workshops that have been closed to us, through necessity, are being opened to us. We are to be given a chance…prejudice vanishes when the almighty dollar is on the wrong side of the balance sheet.” Abbott clearly did not conceptualize the “representational ascendancy” that governed racial discrimination; even with black economic progress serving as a counterbalance to the accepted wisdom of white superiority, public gestures and guises, signs and symbols, fortified the meaning of whiteness and the racial deference that was to be given to whites over Negroes. Abb
likely had heard of Henry Ford’s policy stating that approximately ten percent of his workforce would constitute Afro-Americans—an uncommon and unprecedented exception in American industrial praxis. Then there was Ford’s decision to compensate laborers with five dollars a day. The Defender, thus, urged black migration and, in the process, saw a significant boost in circulation as they continued to highlight the jobs that awaited migrants in the North. They even set a departure date of May 15, 1917, to declare a day when black southerners should sally forth on the “Great Northern Drive.” Copies of the paper were proliferated throughout the South. By 1918, the Chicago Defender had been forced underground as white southerners attempted to inhibit its distribution. These efforts aimed at suppression only convinced Afro-Americans that the information disseminated in the Defender was reliable; thus, newspapers were folded into bundles of merchandise or passed around on the sly. When it was all said and done, the messages spread by Abbott and the Chicago Defender, amongst other publications, led black southerners to march out of Egypt.

But in coming out of their figurative Egypt, Negroes migrating from the South came into another setting where Jim Crow also took up residence. Colored migration nationalized a “southern problem.” It appeared as Afro-Americans moved northward, Jim Crow laws relocated as well. In the North, black migrants experienced marginal success in their efforts to breakdown segregation. What once had seemed like a promised land was little more than a mirage. Many facets of northern life entailed a considerable degree of intolerance aimed at Afro-Americans that was just as debilitating and often as brutal as anything these black migrants had witnessed in the South. Colored migrants
were exposed to the harsh reality that labor opportunities in the North would not bring the economic progression they sought after leaving the South. When they were hired for industrial jobs most of the positions were among the least skilled and lowest paying. Afro-Americans living in Detroit were restricted to bottom level positions, if employed in the auto plants or in the general workforce. In 1926, more than half of the thirty thousand black workers living in Detroit were employed in factories or foundries—the latter of which provided employment for Henry Ward. Another three-thousand Negroes were employed as public service workers. Detroit was a mere microcosm of the North where the majority of black migrants were engaged as common laborers or found work in the same domestic fields they had left in the South.85

The widespread practice was to employ Afro-Americans in the tedious and unpleasant trades, such as those in the foundry, where brawn was more crucial than brainpower. Historian Randal Jelks emphasizes precisely this point, stating that “African-American newcomers had to take the grimmest jobs in industrial workforce, such as those in the plaster mines. These were the most physically taxing jobs and the most susceptible to layoffs.” To worsen matters, most northern labor unions excluded Negroes. As Jelks surmised, “There was little recourse for these [black] workers.” The Reverend Henry Beets offered a more gloomy analysis: “Labor unions do not care to absorb these people.” It should be of little surprise that black workers, so easily hired, were typically the first individuals fired.86

There were other employment dilemmas for black migrants. Afro-Americans who were hired as strikebreakers suffered severe racial counterattack for their decisions to
accept jobs that belonged to white striking workers. The outcome was a dreadful outbreak of mob violence. When workers went on strike at a Philadelphia sugar refinery, black replacements were hired. These colored scabs were impugned by white striking workers who saw them as the immediate cause of continuing labor strife. It did not take long for these white picketers to strike at a separate target—black hands who had filled the factory positions they relinquished during their job demonstration. A bloody race riot ensued, one of many that occurred in the North. Michael Levine recalled the fallout of this riot: “The National Guard stood by, while the city police attacked reporters photographing the white mobs and destroyed their film. Although whites committed the vast majority of the violence, eleven blacks got long prison sentences for killing four whites, while only eight whites were given lengthy terms for the deaths of thirty-nine blacks.” As Levine evinces, Afro-Americans were often the target of both anti-white sentiment and judicial injustice. In truth, these white strikers were more worried with the competition over jobs that Negroes stirred. This concern by white workers often generated greater labor discord as was the case in Detroit when twenty-five thousand white workers quit the Packard plant because three colored employees had been given promotions to work on machines based upon seniority rules.87

Racist distortion also fed white suspicions regarding the immense flow of black migrants into northern cities. Awareness amongst whites of the harmful consequences of Negro migration was circulated largely by the most popular radio broadcast of the 1920s, Amos ‘n’ Andy. Amos ‘n’ Andy was known for its racist archetypes and minstrel tradition where the program’s two white creators dressed in black face and mocked Afro-
Americans with derision. One of the most famous songs in the country was “All Coons Look Alike to Me,” which carried the antebellum image of blacks as “coons” and “niggers” into Twentieth Century parlance. On the theater stage, “The Coon and the Chink,” “The Coon at the Door,” and “The Coon Musketeers” were the most celebrated plays, receiving mass public consumption throughout the country. The increasingly racist inclinations of whites were revealed, to a greater extent, in the D. W. Griffith film Birth of a Nation. Birth of a Nation was based on the 1905 best seller, The Clansman, by Thomas Dixon, Jr., and offered a rearranged version of Reconstruction—one in which terrorist nightriders like the Ku Klux Klan were portrayed as saintly heroes while the freedman was “represented either as an ignorant fool, a vicious rapist, a venal or unscrupulous politician, or a faithful but doddering idiot.” The movie stoked racial fires in the North as whites became more distrustful of black migrants. Historian Jane Dailey charged Griffith with using “disputes between whites and blacks over sidewalk space as a synecdoche for the decline of black deference toward whites and the corresponding loss of a white power and prestige.” Still, the film, which denigrates Reconstruction, glorifies Ku Klux Klan violence, and employs stereotypes of black Sambos was well-received. Beginning with a record run of forty-two weeks, it was the most-watched movie of its time. Chief Justice Edward White, who had ridden with the Klan, believed it justified fully the “uprising of outraged manhood.” The most damning support of the movie came from then-President Woodrow Wilson, who said of the film, “It is like writing history with lightening. And my only regret is that it is all so terribly true.” With the President of the United States signing off on the racist charade of Birth of a Nation, Afro-Americans
were seemingly unable to migrate to any setting in the country where Jim Crow did not put down segregationist roots. Even more, the racist parody of blacks, and the advocacy it received from prominent leaders in Washington, only swung open the door for whites to perform violence on black migrants to the North in hopes of quelling black optimism and objectives of achieving racial equality.\textsuperscript{88}

The migration of southern whites contributed to the racial hysteria of the time. The vast majority of whites living in states like Ohio had come from the South, where they had eschewed social contact with Negroes. Southern-born whites embraced the racial practices of the region they came from and quickly moved to develop awareness in the North of the dilemmas triggered by black migration. The \textit{Painesville Telegraph} stated, “If the black race continues to increase among us as it has done for the past few years, there will hardly be room for us.”\textsuperscript{89} As white southerners deepened their presence in the North, the Ku Klux Klan started their reign in several northern cities. The Klan had long remained a localized organization. In 1919, however, they began to attract considerable nationwide attention, and, subsequently, claimed 100,000 members. By the end of the year, the KKK had established a club in Grand Rapids South High School, punctuating the northern shift to a discernible rendering of Jim Crow.

The emergence of a northern version of Jim Crow provoked scattered outbreaks of anti-black violence and produced one of the most brutal periods in American history. In 1919, white mobs attacked black people in twenty-six cities. These assaults led to twenty-five race riots, most of which occurred during the summer of 1919.\textsuperscript{90} James Weldon Johnson christened the summer of 1919 the “Red Summer” because of the
African-American blood that was shed in these anti-black riots.\textsuperscript{91} The Red Summer marked a year of hostility that saw the race riot become to the North what lynching was to the South.\textsuperscript{92} There were race riots across the North—in cities like St. Louis, Chicago, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Kansas City, Scranton, and Seattle—as whites attempted to curtail the ability of Negroes to improve their social status. Chicago had one of the worst riots of all.\textsuperscript{93} The beaches along Lake Michigan were unofficially segregated. On Sunday, July 27, an Afro-American accidentally swam into an area reserved for whites. White beachgoers began hurling stones at the black swimmer, causing him to drown. When police rebuffed the call for the arrests of the white parties involved, some black Chicagoans began assaulting whites. The news spread quickly throughout Chicago and whites retaliated.\textsuperscript{94} Negroes had come to the North singing and praising God like the group from Mississippi who were in such good spirits when they crossed that Ohio River Bridge headed for Chicago in 1917. Two years later that city, like many others, exploded in a horrific race riot. David Levering Lewis gives a succinct summation of the Red Summer of 1919: “The Red Summer had shown that most white Americans, North and South, were in no mood for generosity, and that outright conflict was a course pointing to almost certain doom.” The \textit{Chicago Defender}, which had relentlessly campaigned for black migration north, for the first time began advising colored southerners to stay home. These widespread eruptions of anti-black violence were an unsympathetic gesture by white communities across the country that blacks—new or not—were going to be kept in their places.\textsuperscript{95}
The stealthier maneuver by white Northerners to keep Negroes in their places was to reconstruct living conditions that were not substantially more favorable than that of most Negroes in the South. Black northerners found themselves struggling to find educational and housing opportunities. In 1925, the NAACP noted “a distinct movement towards segregation in public schools in Northern states.” The migration of Afro-Americans into white communities in northern cities during the first half the Twentieth Century caused a tremendous rise in northern school segregation. As Davison Douglas contends, “Northern school segregation was more extensive than it had been at any time since Reconstruction.” Black kids were assigned by educational administrators to colored schools or allocated to separate classrooms within the same institutions. Colleges and universities also participated in the practice of segregating black and white students. Schools such as Oberlin and Harvard isolated black students in dormitories. The problems were even more vexatious when it came to housing segregation. White northerners countered a swelling black population by running away. They also mobilized in ways that limited Afro-Americans to specific neighborhoods. In their absence, sizable ghettos amplified, complete with rent gouging, slumlords, congestion, filth, disease, and a host of other problems. If there was a ghetto in the North, the black migrant was sure to be there. As George Groh asserted, “The ghetto is not just a slum, but a slum set aside as a place of black habitation.” In 1910, Detroit’s black population lived amidst Jews and other immigrants. But the 35,000 newcomers who migrated to the city during the next decade were concentrated into Detroit’s oldest and most disreputable precinct, “Black Bottom.”
Racially-restrictive covenants fenced white neighborhoods off from black intrusion. Whites created residential agreements that forcibly kept black migrants out of these predominantly-white neighborhoods. In some cases, government officials were complicit in residential segregation. In 1923, the mayor of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, ordered all black southern migrants to leave his town. In other parts of the North, vigilante violence accompanied black attempts to relocate into predominantly white neighborhoods or followed the refusal by some uppity Negroes to vacate these lily-white communities. One such incident triggered murder charges against Ossian Sweet, a black doctor in Detroit who resisted a white mob seeking to drive him from his home. Sweet was charged with murder for allegedly killing a white member of a gang that had gathered outside his home endeavoring to drive him out of this all-white neighborhood.

Underscoring the frequently accepted double standard of the day, [Clarence] Darrow, who represented Sweet, exclaimed “If white men had shot and killed a black while protecting their homes, no one would dream of having them indicted.” The jury returned a verdict of not guilty after deliberating for several hours. But the fact that Sweet was charged with blame pointed to the changing times in the North toward Jim Crow. The Sweet case was a part of a sobering narrative. White northerners made it clear that they could accept black neighbors in small numbers, but not en masse. During the 1920s, they enlarged their demands for segregation in public accommodations, housing, and education. By removing Afro-Americans from the realm of citizenship via racial segregation, whites thwarted black power and influence.
Black migration, in essence, radically accelerated the racial disjointing that had already commenced during the early Twentieth Century. In 1927, Detroit minister Reinhold Niebuhr described the shift in the racial paradigm in the North where blacks went from being ostensibly unobserved to being seen as a threat: “It is a gentle conceit of northern people that race prejudice is peculiar to the South. The tremendous migration of southern Negroes into the industrial centers of the north is rapidly dispelling this illusion.” Niebuhr’s meticulous observation reflected the racial anxiety in the North that could be found in the words of a Cleveland city manager. W. R. Hopkins proclaimed in 1925 that he did not “know of any problem confronting the city that contains more potential menace than the fact that 40,000 southern Negroes had been dumped into Cleveland within the last few years.”101 Announcements similar to the one delivered by Hopkins became the backdrop to the Jim Crow fires that were smoldering in the North. On June 26, 1923, a short commentary from the Associated Press wire service appeared in the Grand Rapids Press. Titled in bold letters, “SOUTHERN NEGROES FLOCK TO MICHIGAN,” the editorial promoted the belief that the black problem needed to be preemptively solved. Commissioner of Agriculture L. Whitney Watkins and Labor Commissioner Carl Young delivered a report to the state administrative board insisting that the flood of colored southerners into Michigan had created a difficult situation. They complained that hundreds of black migrants had been sent into the state’s industrial centers mainly due to southern lynching laws, activities of the Ku Klux Klan, and the unrest prevalent amongst Afro-Americans since the World War. To harness this southern invasion, Watkins and Young recommended that the administrative board “authorize a
committee to proceed with a survey and the preparations to take care of the Negro population…that Negro farm colonies be established in certain parts of the state, that immigration of the Negroes be discouraged, [and] that some state body be authorized to keep in close touch with the welfare of Negroes.” The article also cited the affect migration had on the southern labor economy, most notably in the belt states like Mississippi, Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama and Louisiana where black emigration had been most prominent. The two state commissioners remarked, “Some southern states are becoming alarmed at the departure and the consequent effect it may have upon the southern labor situation.”

But it was the northern economy and the concern over the potential political hegemony that Afro-Americans were procuring that became the catalyst for the reemergence of Jim Crow in the North.

There was no necessity to being a closeted Confederate given the spread of segregationist customs to every sector of the country. Henry Ward and his family had left Birmingham, but white southerners had also left and headed northward. They boarded the same trains and clung to the same optimism that living in the North would improve their lot. But they also carried with them southern virtues flowered beneath the Mason-Dixon Line and steeped in racial bigotry not only to nourish white fears concerning the threat of Afro-Americans but also to teach their northern brethren how to control it. When migration to Detroit during the period of 1915 to 1930 supplied the colored population with the substantial numbers needed to enter political office in Detroit, it gave white southerners the ammunition needed to convince northerners to rein in black mobility and success together. Even Negroes who had achieved a low-level of
prestige were perceived as posing a danger to the legitimacy of whiteness and bumped into restrictions that resembled the racial separation thought to be an artifact of their southern past.  

“In virtually every phase of existence,” just as Leon Litwack portrayed of the antebellum north, “Negroes [once more] found themselves systematically segregated from whites.” In time, white northerners exploited white southern racial practices and crafted their own de facto version of Jim Crow. Despite the illegality of segregation, the culture of racial exclusion triumphed in the North. They sketched clear lines of demarcation between themselves and Afro-Americans, often marking black isolation with racist appellations that were utilized to describe the boundaries that kept Afro-Americans completely separated from white communities. Boston had her “Nigger Hill” and her “New Guinea,” Cincinnati her “Little Africa,” and New York and Philadelphia their comparable ghettoes—for which Richmond, Charleston, New Orleans, and St. Louis had no counterparts. In Detroit, it was Black Bottom that reminded many colored optimists that they had not traveled far enough away from Birmingham and the other southern cities they deserted to escape Jim Crow.

**Mobility has its Limitations**

Henry Ward and his family were fortunate not to be amongst the colored migrants who inhabited Black Bottom. Though the community fostered its own culture and attractions, discrimination and poverty militated against the labor by its denizens to develop a respectable neighborhood. The cabarets on Adams and Hastings, popular Black Bottom gathering spots on what later became the Paradise Valley strip, was not alluring to the holier-than-thou Ward who chose not to frequent the rundown district. On
any given night, the pulsating hum of off-beat ragtime rhythms entranced black revelers into fox-trots and jigs that lasted into the wee hours of the morning. But Second Baptist Church, located just west of Black Bottom in downtown Detroit, was the closest the Ward family ever got to the heart of this vibrant-yet-ramshackle vicinity.\textsuperscript{110}

By 1918, the Wards had settled on Euclid and Brush, just a crawl east of Woodward Avenue, which separated the North End neighborhood from the West Side where upwardly mobile Negroes resided. The West Side was an attractive enclave for well-to-do black professionals to escape during the 1910s and into the 1920s as the number of southern-born, colored migrants in Black Bottom and the budding Paradise Valley escalated. Few of the city’s old guard, outside Reverend Bradby at Second Baptist Church, sympathized with the Negro newcomers from the South. In fact, most members of the West Side’s black upper-class even accustomed themselves to segregating from colored plebs precisely at 11 o’clock on Sundays just as white Christians were long in the practice of doing. St. Matthew’s Episcopal, located at the intersection of St. Antoine and Elizabeth, became black elites’ most popular site of worship. Many privileged Afro-Americans preferred the quiet refinement that supplemented their subdued reverence there over the boisterous performances witnessed both at Baptist and some African Methodist Episcopal churches. But the ornate cathedral offered the colored aristocracy something else far more desired. Widely recognized as housing the “blue book of colored society in Detroit,” St. Matthew’s endowed the doctors, lawyers, and moneyed black congregants sitting in its pews with lessons in Deuteronomy and in distinction. To further distinguish themselves from other black Detroit precincts, these West Siders founded
their own community organization, the Entre Nous Club to “keep their homes on a high level.” Though the group’s efforts spotlighted the black self-help tradition in Detroit, specifically the organizing activities of Detroit club women, their primary impetus was to sponsor home improvement and neighborhood beautification initiatives. Through their hard work and resolve, the motto, “The West Side is the Best Side,” flourished and summed up their personal progress as well as their collective peculiarity from other colored Detroiter.

It also encapsulated the strides Henry Ward had made since he first pulled into Detroit. While he never moved into the tony district to the west nor graced St. Matthew’s, he could find solace in living in an area nearby and just north of Grand Boulevard where the blight and banality of the community immediately adjacent to Black Bottom ran out. Henry’s status as a foreman at the Chalmers plant, along with the assistance of the National Urban League and Second Baptist Church, afforded him better housing options and ceded opportunities for Willis to attend Breitmeyer Elementary during the first four years of his schooling as opposed to the more derelict institutions sited further southward. Given the restrictions placed on black choice and mobility, this partial sense of autonomy, even if limited in time by the residential walls of segregation, positioned Henry to move closer to the full exercise of citizenship so many colored migrants coveted. Eventually, he accomplished something he may have once deemed unattainable for a black man, at least one from the South. Having left the Chalmers plant to go work for the Ford Motor Company in the early twenties, he was able to save up enough money to purchase a home. After transferring from the Highland Park plant to the Rouge plant,
Ford’s primary industrial complex, he moved the family into a single-story abode on Twenty-Fourth Street in Southwest Detroit. Originally an area of ethnic diversity, the neighborhood, like others in Detroit, experienced a racial demographic shift and by the 1940s had blossomed into an incipient Mexicantown. But for Henry Ward, it was an unfathomable achievement for a southern Negro even if the old-world borough was undergoing change conditioned by white ethnic immigrant flight. While he had earned money in the South, he could not buy a home of his own. Having the chance to seize a piece of personal property surely must have endowed Henry with the feeling of real citizenship. It also mattered that the Baker street line of the Detroit Citizens’ Street Railway Company passed directly in front of his residence, permitting easy access back and forth to work. Most black northerners, destitute or well-off, did not have that benefit.\textsuperscript{112}

But the Wards’ migration to the North teemed with early trials and tribulations that provoked annoyances indicative of the grueling road they, like other Afro-Americans, had traveled to flee the troubles of the South. Though some of their experiences were unique, they were, nonetheless, characteristic of the travails many black southerners faced in their new environs in spite of some of the progresses they made. Willis’s mother Nettie Ward (née Sanders) died about three years after the family arrived. The harsh winters were unbearable for her feeble body, weakened severely by a number of cumbersome pregnancies. The six years she was present in Willis’s life did not create
for him a remembrance of her. His father’s remarriage around 1920 canceled out whatever lasting memory he had of his mother as his stepmother preoccupied his awareness. His uncomfortable relationship with his stepmother also drove a wedge between his father and him—one that remained until Henry’s death in 1938.113

The decision to avoid the overcrowded Black Bottom also produced difficulties. Henry relocated his family to other sections of the city several times, narrowing the sense

Figure 3: A Ward family photograph taken during the mid-1920s. Courtesy of Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.
of community the Ward children cultivated early on during the pivotal years following their migration. Willis went to the Columbian School for fifth grade—already his third school by the time he was ten. This unsettling pattern continued with Willis spending three years at the McGraw School prior to his enrollment at the predominantly-white Northwestern High School. Henry’s endless pursuit of a “good” environment welcoming to respectable and reliable Negroes like himself may have been a better option than even some prominent Afro-Americans were bestowed, especially as white communities began to be defined by racial homogeneity during the 1920s. But for nearly their first decade away from Birmingham, the Ward children did not live in any one locale long enough to learn the names of the other neighborhood kids, much less feel like the North had fulfilled their father’s dream. Henry Ward had gotten the chance to see all of his children grow up, something he might not have been able to do had he remained in the South. He, however, died a run-of-the-mill factory worker of Henry Ford in 1938 and “didn’t come back money-wise to what he had been in the South” despite his ability to “get a home on land contract… [and] pay for it.”

A Blond, Tousled-Hair Chap Named Jerry Ford

Excepting his father’s death, Willis Ward likely reflected on the first eighteen years of his life and on the up and down experiences that his father and other Afro-Americans had in the North as he made his way up South State Street to Michigan’s campus. His stroll was not paced with anxiety. It was a leisurely walk, as relaxed as a black man could possibly be in a predominantly-white town during the early 1930s. It symbolized not only the distance Willis had traveled from Detroit but also how far
Negroes had journeyed from the travails of the South in their search for dignity. The difference in Ward’s mind was that his voyage represented the closing stages of the quest. From his kindergarten days at the Carson School through his adolescent years selling newspapers, and even during his time at Northwestern High School where he emerged a world-record holder in track and field, Willis had always pondered Jim Crow. Now, a timely court injunction presented him with a moment to mull over the fairly innocuous concerns typical for a kid on his way to college: the worries of not being late for class; the doubts about being successful; and the uncertainties of living independently from his family, notably Lula who helped raise him and pushed him to be the first Ward to attend college. It also gave him the chance to contemplate playing football for the University of Michigan—something no Afro-American had been able to do in nearly forty years.115

When Willis finally reached the steps of Michigan, he proceeded to join the other freshmen taking part in orientation week. He went to Waterman and Barbour Gymnasium located on North University Avenue to register his courses for the semester. If Willis had a smidgen of skepticism that times had changed, then his first day at Michigan altered his small trace of disbelief. A blond, tousled-haired chap approached him, and said, “You are Willis Ward. I am Jerry Ford from Grand Rapids.” Running into a fellow Michigan athlete helped Ward feel comfortable during the all-important registration process. That Ford introduced himself, on the other hand, made Willis feel welcomed. He described Jerry as affable and quickly saw in him a man with “no hard prejudices because of color.” Ward recalled Ford as judging each person according to “character and general
behavior”—qualities Henry Ward had worked hard to instill in his children. Ward and Ford became “fast friends” as Willis portrayed it, “and that was the way it was.” Before long, they also became roommates for away games that took the Michigan team on weekend road trips against other Big-Ten opponents.\textsuperscript{116}

Ward sensed in Ford a comrade. He recognized the racial complicatedness of their relationship in an era given to Jim Crowism. Over fifty years later, Ward explained his appreciation for Ford’s friendship: “If I could just in some way capture the travails that we went through then they could really appreciate a person like Jerry Ford who could step outside the normal conduct and make the overture he made and be the fast friend that he’s been…quite easy to be the friend of black person [today]. I’ll say easier than it was back there then.” For Ward, Ford’s willingness to associate with him provided an indication of the kid from Grand Rapids’ own character and general behavior. “You were subject to being ostracized if you became too involved with blacks. That was a testament to Jerry despite that…he was a man though he was only seventeen years old.”\textsuperscript{117}

But the 17-year-old had experienced his own struggles that matured him. Like Willis, Jerry’s story was also one of migration occasioned by terror. Whereas Willis’s father Henry had left Birmingham in 1915 attempting to elude the dreadful viciousness of the Ku Klux Klan, Jerry’s mother Dorothy fled Omaha the same year to escape the domestic violence of Leslie Lynch King—Ford’s biological father. Dorothy took her son, then Leslie L. King Jr., to Grand Rapids where her parents lived. After her divorce from Leslie was final, she met and fell in love with Gerald Rudolph Ford, a paint salesman for the Grand Rapids Wood Finishing Company. Years later, Dorothy’s second husband took
out formal adoption papers for her son and renamed him Gerald R. Ford Jr. Like Ward, Ford’s family also moved around prior to settling, first to a rented two-family house on Madison Avenue before heading to a residence his parents purchased on Rosewood Avenue in the prosperous area of East Grand Rapids. The elder Ford, like Henry Ward, saw his fortunes improve when he changed jobs, enabling him to buy his own home. Financial troubles afflicted Gerald Ford Sr. in 1921 causing the bank to foreclose on the Ford’s Rosewood Avenue mortgage and forcing the family to move to a rented home on Union Avenue.¹¹⁸

Figure 4: Gerald Ford poses with his courses Gardner and Adele James and half-brother Tom Ford in 1924. Courtesy of Gerald R. Ford Library.
This fiscal strain exacerbated later by the Depression also burdened the Ford household and nearly prevented Jerry from being able to attend Michigan. Arthur Krause, the principal of South High School where Ford starred in football, learned of the family’s strapped financial circumstances and offered to help. He arranged for Jerry to receive a one-hundred dollar South High “bookstore” scholarship, the equivalent of a full year’s tuition. Krause also invited Michigan Coach Harry Kipke to Grand Rapids to scout Ford who won the young coach over with his on-the-field performance. Football scholarships did not exist during this era to cover Ford’s tuition at Michigan. But Kipke helped Ford obtain a job waiting tables at the university hospital restaurant and cleaning up at the nurses’ cafeteria. Kipke, likewise, had enabled Willis Ward to get a job washing dishes at the Michigan Union—the first black kid to ever do so. Even if reluctance muzzled their talk of the horrors each other had tackled along the way to becoming Michigan men, Willis and Jerry could swap stories about their work experiences at the university. They also could recount their teenage years growing up in South Michigan as well as share tales of the strict discipline their fathers supplied. Ford said of his stepfather, “he was…a man of impeccable integrity” who drilled into him and his three half-brothers “the importance of honesty.” Like Henry, Gerald Sr. did not drink or keep liquor in the house.\footnote{119}

Despite their racial differences, Ward and Ford related to each other. Ward even permitted Ford to call him “Willie,” becoming the first white person allowed to do so in spite of his father’s stanch disapproval of it. Henry, Ward admitted, “would really chew me out if the kids came by and said, ‘Mr. Ward, can Willie come out to play?” Ward was
constantly reminded to tell them his name was “Willis.” But Ward felt strongly that “there was something about Jerry that to call me Willie was not offensive.” This connection, for Willis, substantiated the hopefulness he had when he departed the train at the Michigan Central Depot. Indeed, life in Ann Arbor appeared to bode well for him just as his initial thoughts had suggested it would when he first peeked out the window of the coach at the train station’s magnificence and the verdure of the city.120

The year was 1931, a crucial moment in civil rights yore. It was the same year that the Scottsboro Boys were falsely accused of raping Ruby Bates and Victoria Price. That the incident happened in Ward’s home state of Alabama was a sign of how vastly dissimilar the world in Ann Arbor seemed from life in the South and also in Detroit. As eight of the nine young men originally charged with rape were preparing for their retrials with appeals to be heard in 1932, Willis Ward was diligently studying, swiftly becoming a household name in track and field as only a freshman, and gearing up for spring football practice to be held at the end of the school year when he would finally get the formal opportunity to overcome Michigan’s racial hurdle. And rather than have whites carry out a miscarriage of justice against him, those that Ward met seemed sympathetic to his cause. Bob Miller, the son of Judge Guy Miller, offered Ward reassurance. “My father told me you were coming, and if you have any problems, let me know.” Ivan Williamson, captain of the 1932 Michigan football team, greeted Ward with a similar message: “If you have any problems with anybody, let me know because we’re prepared to take care of them.” But no promises likely held as much sway with Ward as those from Harry Kipke who he claimed “loved me as a boy” and “was determined to fight anyone who
might try to hurt me because of race.” Ward had neither any reason to distrust Kipke and the others nor any inclination that these assurances would come under challenge. And given what to him looked like racial evenhandedness, he had no grounds to embrace his father’s cynicism that the supposedly benevolent white people at Michigan “are going to turn on you.” For Ward, the proof was yet to come.¹²¹
No Northern state university prohibits the enrollment of Negroes, although a few practice minor forms of discrimination once they are enrolled. This is often a matter of individual prejudice rather than of official policy.\textsuperscript{122}

A pall of uncertainty settled over 1932 America. In the gloom of the Great Depression, the nation’s plunge into torrents of economic upheaval persisted. Unemployment hovered at 25 percent, and menial and mundane work once considered below the dignity of white men grew desirable. Black joblessness stood higher, doubling the national average as white competition jeopardized the reserve of “Negro jobs.” Less than two years after a group of Atlanta whites had adopted the slogan, “No Jobs for Niggers until Every White Man Has a Job,” bellhops, domestic servants, elevator operators, garbage collectors, street cleaners, and waiters had white faces. In truth, the slump privileged no man, black or white. There was no racial immunity from hunger and joblessness, nor were there any cures for a distressed market that turned the middle-class meager. To borrow from John Steinbeck, everyone was an “Okie,” not just those from Oklahoma but each person who the Depression had dispossessed and transformed into scum. The pulsating shock from lingering economic tremors heaved destitute Americans into Hoovervilles that iconicized the President’s blame for his handling of the crisis. Away from these tarpaper-and-cardboard shantytowns, the indignant and morose stares from pride-struck husbands and wives waiting hours in bread-and-soup lines narrated the
country’s story with harrowing despair. The bitterness descended onto their children, transforming innocent brood into resentful, quasi-labor protestors. The humdrum spectacle of youth carrying signs, “Rarig’s kid doesn’t starve, why should we?” and “Why can’t you give my daddy a job?” accentuated the unshakable feelings of insecurity consuming the nation.\textsuperscript{123}

The economic cataclysm that cracked the faith and foundations of American life opened lesser fissures in Ann Arbor. The city was not unharmed by the Depression. Local industries lost orders and construction tailed off from $7.2 million in 1929 to a little over a half million in 1932. Retail sales dropped by 50 percent and bank clearings that stood at $54 million only three years earlier sank to just $30 million. But most Ann Arborites stayed hopeful. They expressed their optimism for economic recovery by predominantly supporting Herbert Hoover’s reelection bid at the polls, becoming one of only a few areas in the state to maintain its traditional Republican loyalty. Their sense of buoyancy was not arbitrarily formulated. The University of Michigan’s presence buffered to some extent the immediate effects of the financial decline and insulated the city against hard times. Students matriculated, teachers instructed, landlords rented rooms, and shopkeepers generated sales, however diminished, not only to local residents but also to the throngs of out-of-town guests who visited the city’s hospitals, concert halls, and, most importantly, its playing fields. Thus, from the vantage point of other municipalities throughout the state and truly the rest of the country, “Ann Arbor appeared,” in the words of one observer, “an oasis in a desert of broken companies and bankrupt farms.”\textsuperscript{124}

\textbf{The Shaping and Sidelining of a Superspade}
The economic uneasiness was surpassed only by the nail-biting over the Michigan Wolverines’ 1932 championship prospects. Big Blue’s football program remained top-notch through the Depression and provided the university’s followers with a reason both to be cheerful and to flood the city with currency on Saturday afternoons that cushioned the murk triggered by lost jobs and savings. But the team had lost its only two All-Americans from the eight-win 1931 squad, center Maynard Morrison and end Bill Hewitt, and Coach Kipke was burdened with rebuilding his entire offensive line from the left tackle to the right. A “suicide schedule” only amplified concerns that the coming football season might be disastrous with one reporter later remarking that Kipke had “sufficient reason to weep on every shoulder” at the “stupendous task” before him. So when the team went out for spring practice on an unpredictably, rain-drenched May 25 day, they, not unlike the farmers throughout a drought-stricken southeastern Michigan, likely saw the tempest as a strangely good sign.\textsuperscript{125}

There were other reasons to be encouraged. Among the young men vying for opportunities to prove they were ready to help lead Michigan back to athletic glory were rising sophomores, Willis Ward and Gerald Ford. Freshmen were ineligible to play on the varsity so both men had to wait their chance to earn a spot on the team. But having to sit on the sideline for a season was advantageous for the anxious lads who were able to sharpen their skills. The varsity trained against the freshmen in preparation for their next opponent. The practices were grueling, the competition stiffer than what either Ward or Ford had each remembered during their prep days at Northwestern and South, respectively. Yet, both men delighted in the snap-to-whistle intensity that transformed a
customary exhibition into a spirited, gridiron affair. They also treated the situation with
the maturity expected of upperclassmen. Ward acknowledged the benefit of restricting
freshmen from playing prematurely at the varsity-level. “There is a vast difference
between college—that one year difference in a young man’s age, at 18, 17, give or take a
year,” Ward cautioned. “It can make so much difference in his physical growth…And
you get out there as a freshman, you learn the system.” Their eagerness to have Michigan
scouts teach them how to compete against other Big Ten teams, and the nonstop lessons
from Coach Kipke as well as their freshman coaches on how to play with physicality,
readied them for the arduous battles sure to come against unyielding conference foes.126

That the two freshmen might become key contributors for a team that only a year
earlier neither appeared capable of joining provoked tremendous irony. Financial
hardship nearly erased Ford’s dream of attending Michigan. The Great Depression struck
his family who was unable to afford the tuition to send him to the school. Ward also did
not have enough money to meet the expenses of college. But their exceptional talents on
the field helped them secure the aid needed to become Wolverines.127 Whereas Ford
glimpsed “football [as] my ticket to college,” the fleet-footed Ward characterized
athletics as a chance to get a first-rate education. “You go there for an education, and
that’s what the school is for. Athletics—although Michigan has been very successful in
the athletic field, it’s more renowned for its scholarship.”128
Though they were fond of Michigan’s intellectual tradition, Ford and Ward were also delighted to build on the institution’s athletic achievements. After a year on the freshman football team, they were raring to go. Ward wet his feet on the track and field team. But there was nothing that compared to his putting on the maize-and-blue football uniform for the first time. Being a member of the Michigan Wolverines was special, something of an allure for young men throughout the state whose dream it had been to
play in the Big House. They were spectators to stars like Benny Friedman and Bennie Oosterbaan. Fielding “Hurry Up” Yost, the country’s most famed college football coach, was glimpsed by his peers as a living legend. And Michigan Stadium, fashioned after the majestic Yale Bowl, was unrivaled in its construction and magnificence. It featured the earliest innovation of the electronic scoreboard and sturdy columns and footings to enable the seating to be expanded beyond 100,000. Such was Michigan’s magnetism that Arthur Krause, Ford’s principal at South High, became an ardent supporter of “Big Blue” despite being an alumnus of the University of Indiana. “The Wolverines,” Krause was convinced, “were one of the finest teams in the land.” Jerry Ford had professed his own adulation for Michigan in a letter he wrote to Coach Kipke, expressing his gratitude for being able to attend college at the school. “I’ve always wanted to be a student at the University since I was able to read about the prowess of their athletic teams.”

Ward’s aspirations traveled beyond athletics and were forged in racial symbolism. Chiseled in Michigan’s storied football past were the memories of both national titles won and celebrated turf wars against rival Ohio State, most ending in lopsided victory for the team fondly referred to as the “Victors.” On any given Saturday, a crowd of 85,000 fans, consisting of students, faculty, loyal alumni, and other devoted followers packed Michigan Stadium to watch their team dominate some hapless opponent. But carved into—or more appropriately, out of—these illustrious images were the tales of black gridiron gladiators who had woven their own achievements into the yarn of Michigan’s pigskin glory. Outside of George Jewett, no colored athlete lettered in football during the
school’s 53-year involvement in the sport. Michigan’s racial past had been fraught with inequity. While the University never held an official policy excluding Negroes from enrolling at Michigan, black students endured other de facto forms of segregation once they arrived on campus that revealed the limitations that mere acceptance had for achieving racial fairness. Integration provided a vital step toward equality; but for colored collegians at northern institutions such as Michigan, it was not equality itself—a painful lesson in gradualism black southerners were forced later to learn in the aftermath of major legal and legislative battles won to curtail Jim Crow.
For the moment, Ward stood in stark contrast to Michigan’s sordid racial history. He was given the judicial-go-ahead to join the football squad. For all his early accomplishments in track and field as a freshman, the notable accolades attained in years past by other colored standouts, namely Olympians DeHart Hubbard and Eddie Tolan, detracted from his own successes. In football, however, there was no robust black tradition of athletic dominance at Michigan to lessen the racialized significance of the occasion, sans Jewett’s dazzling displays during the long-forgotten early 1890s. As Ward stepped onto Ferry Field for spring practice, he wanted to demonstrate that he belonged. He ignored the anxieties expressed by Michigan track fans who worried he might get injured and blow his chance to be “the greatest track man to ever compete for the Maize and Blue.” To Ward, his play on the football field, in spite of Yost’s reluctance to embrace the use of black athletes, was essential to validating the strong push made by Governor Groesbeck, Judge Miller, and others to get him on the team. His performance could also dispel racial myths concerning Negroes’ alleged inability to pick up the game. Ward knew all too familiarly the denigrating labels that were trademarked for colored competitors. “And they used to say, the black kids are too dumb, you know, in basketball…And in football.” Though most of these racist stereotypes about black intelligence were concocted to conceal white aversion to social contact between Afro-American and Anglo-Saxon participants, Ward’s feats on the field supplied evidence contrary to the notion that colored athletes were ham-fisted and unhurried learners who were qualified only to run track. As one press report summing up his decision to play

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football and risk injury read, “Ward would rather an ‘M’ on the gridiron than to be an Olympic champion.”

Willis’s debut with the team was splendid. The United Press provided details of the scrimmage. “Three young freshmen at the University of Michigan—Jerry Ford, of

Figure 7: Gerald Ford poses with the Meyer Morton Trophy awarded to the most improved returning freshman. Courtesy of Brian Kruger, Stunt3 Multimedia.
Grand Rapids; Russell Oliver, of Pontiac, and Willis Ward, Detroit Negro—displayed such brilliance during spring football practice that they are expected to become important cogs next fall in the Wolverine varsity eleven.” If it had not been for the exceptional play of Ford, Ward would have been honored as Big Blue’s most valuable returning freshman player. Ford won the Meyer Morton Trophy, awarded to the first-year man who demonstrated the “most improvement, best attitude, and greatest promise for the varsity.” But it was Ward who electrified media correspondents present at the game. One report filed later in July described him as “the outstanding athlete becoming eligible for play.”

The tough task standing before Coach Kipke seemed to vanish with the superb performance put on by his top freshman recruits. Ward’s impressive unveiling was particularly reassuring for his young head coach. Ford and Oliver, despite their notable
first appearances, were destined to be backups. Ford, in fact, waited two full seasons before he was able to become the team’s starting center, languishing behind All-American Chuck Bernard. Ward, on the other hand, was expected to become an immediate contributor. Kipke tested Ward’s readiness through a vicious act of racial cruelty, summoning his team to pounce on the “giant negro.” Kipke was quoted as saying that he “ordered his veterans to pound a black candidate ‘without mercy’ during practice, so that if, at the end of the week he doesn’t turn in his uniform, then I know I’ve got a
great player.” When Ward kept his jersey and pants and showcased his talents in thrilling fashion, Kipke discerned that he had located a “Superspade”—a gifted Negro athlete who not only could be instantly special on the field but who also was able to justify the racial friction that was predicted to emerge over his involvement on the team.¹³²

This kind of racial ruthlessness, coming out of Kipke’s mouth, tasted southern. It was customary of men like Yost to promulgate such pitiless and prejudiced attitudes. Racial viciousness saturated the southern racial diet. Yet, Kipke’s bounty on Ward hinted at the northern appetite for Jim Crow. Kipke unmasked the North’s segregationist facade where African Americans were tolerated but still bumped into racial malice and mocking. Black northerners were not acquainted with the “white only” signs that delineated private and public space as their colored counterparts were subjected to in the South. They were, nonetheless, familiar with racial boundaries that were just as sinister and possibly more stable. Because de facto practices were impenetrable to legal or legislative overturn, African Americans in the North discovered a fleeting sense of equality. Thus, Ward’s participation on the varsity was hardly a sign that white Americans accepted him just as his father presumed would not be the case.

As a Superspade, Ward was compelled to outperform whites and outrun racial violence. The sturdy gestures from Kipke and some of his teammates that allayed his fears of being exposed to racial torment softened. Ward’s eyes, even if ajar, now concentrated more steadily on the veiled discriminatory acts that African Americans tackled in the North. Yet, he was reluctant to abandon his opportunity to play for Michigan. He shrugged at the rough treatment that was ordered against him, portrayed
Kipke as evenhanded, and spotlighted benevolent acts that the coach and other white university officials performed on his behalf. “Kipke,” he declared, “was one of the fairest men I knew—ever.”\textsuperscript{133}

Yost, in spite of his prejudiced views, also flattered. When an African American was granted athletic opportunities, it was the custom of his college to give him a pittance and to locate some reputable black person to lodge him on the road. “Now this was accepted around the Middle West anyway,” Ward stated, “and therefore the kid wasn’t with the team overnight.”\textsuperscript{134} Black athletes who traveled with an all-white squad, thus, were arbitrarily debased and treated as a second-class citizen when it came to housing.

DeHart Hubbard, the first black athlete at Michigan to make a traveling squad in the twentieth century, recalled the embarrassment of not being allowed to eat with his team in a private dining room at a Chicago hotel in 1924. A discomfited Hubbard construed, “I suppose that was part of the racially accepted pattern of the time.”\textsuperscript{135}

Eddie Tolan and Booker Brooks, disturbingly, might only wish they were as lucky as Hubbard. They were required to stay at the black YMCA. If the degradation of having to find lodging in a YMCA away from their teammates was not enough, Tolan and Brooks encountered more shame upon rejoining their teammates at the hotel. They were chided by the hotel clerk for using the front entrance and cruelly advised not to do so again. It mattered neither to the hotel clerk nor to Michigan officials that Tolan had won two Olympic victories or that the Governor of Michigan named a day in his favor as a symbol of America’s pride in this young man’s athletic accomplishments. Behee summed up the indifference shown toward Tolan and Brooks, concluding that “to the hotel clerk
in Chicago, whose attitude reflected the national persuasion, any black wanting accommodations was just another ‘nigger.’” What Behee did not grasp in his analysis was the University of Michigan’s complicity in treating Tolan and Brooks with racial contempt. No representative from Michigan objected to the hotel clerk’s racial disparagement of Tolan and Brooks or suggested that the attendant’s actions were outside the purview of the racial opinions held by the preponderance of the school’s athletic officials, namely Yost.136

Henry Graham also found traveling to be arduous, revealing a more tangible illustration of Michigan’s culpability in helping to permeate Jim Crow practices throughout the North. Graham, the number two man on Michigan’s 1927 tennis team, acknowledged that “Negroes were barred from the better hotels and, of course, that’s where the Michigan teams stayed.” One of the most disconcerting incidents for Graham came during a trip to Minneapolis for a tennis match against the University of Minnesota. One of his teammates was informed that Negroes were not allowed to stay at the hotel and told that Graham needed to leave. The night clerk claimed that if the black tennis star stayed, “all the guests would walk out.” He recalled, “The captain came to me and said, ‘Graham, we’ve got a problem. I’m from Iowa and I don’t know too much about colored people. I’ve had very little contact and I really don’t know them. I’ve lived on a farm and there were none near. There were none in the schools I attended. But I have no prejudices. I think you’re a fine person and I’m behind you, but I’m not going to fight the color question.’”137 His teammate’s apathy augmented Graham’s humiliation. While this comrade alleged that he had not held any prejudices, he was still unwilling to challenge
the racial intolerance that became the footing for the experiences that black athletes endured on the road. In a broader context, whites’ avoidance of dealing with the “color question,” what W. E. B. Du Bois called the “major problem of the twentieth century,” fueled the explosion of Jim Crowism in the North. Whites who asserted opposition to racial prejudice were hesitant to put white privilege at risk by defying racism. In these moments, black athletes, like African Americans throughout the country, were reminded of the saliency of white supremacy.\textsuperscript{138}

By early 1932, Michigan coaches began to confront the problems of lodging black athletes away from the rest of the team. “Kipke and Michigan busted that rule,” Ward proudly stated. He continued, “Kipke said that this kid was a member of my team, and I want him to feel a part of the program and not have his feelings hurt.” Kipke was adamant that Ward board with the team and pushed Yost to alert hotels that a black man was on varsity and that the team did not want any embarrassment at registration time. Ward believed that the bigoted Yost stepped out of racial character to defend him during a team trip to Chicago. Though Big Blue relied on the Palmer House Hotel for lodging through the years, the hotel’s management was unreceptive to the requests made by Kipke that Ward stay there. When they declined to alter their policy, “Yost flip-flopped from being a segregationist.” Ward remembered Yost saying, “Well, we have been staying at this hotel since 1900. We will pull every team that we have and not stay…And I am going to see if I can’t get other Big Ten schools to also not stay at your hotel.” Officials at the Palmer House Hotel relented. The Depression had already “rocked them well” and “shook them in the pocketbook,” Ward verified.\textsuperscript{139}
Yost’s stand gratified Ward. “He [Yost] was a strong supporter of me.” Willis overlooked the likelihood that Yost’s posturing was an indication of the athletic director’s own mortification with being openly rebuffed. Yost detested having Ward on the team and cooperated with Kipke only because of a court mandate. Not to be slighted, Yost demonstrated his influence and power by forcing the Palmer House Hotel to honor his demands. Notwithstanding, Ward helped integrate the hotel. “Aside from Marian Anderson, I was the second black to stay in the hotel as a guest in 1932.” The same thing occurred in Columbus, Ohio, when the Wolverines traveled there to play the Buckeyes during Ward’s junior year. He integrated National Hotel where William Henry Harrison, a Presidential candidate, had spoken in June 1890. “And the help, many of them black, telephone operators, waiters and all, you would see them coming and looking to see: There he is,” Ward giddily reminisced.  

Ward immersed himself in the pleasure gained from being a racial pioneer, but he also absorbed the implications attached to his racial ground-breaking, at least initially. His creation of opportunities for other African Americans was redeeming. As a senior during Jesse Owens’ sophomore year, Ward appeared ready to establish a racial legacy. He helped his Buckeye rival integrate the Indianapolis Club when both went to partake in the Butler Relays. Originally, Ward was turned away. The desk porter explained to the track team manager that Ward was not permitted to stay. When the manager conveyed the hotel’s position to Charlie Horton, Michigan’s track coach, he threatened to leave.
Horton shouted, “Well dammit, we will turn this team around and go back to Detroit.”

Minutes later, the manager, “beaming like a devil,” according to Ward, came to the
Michigan track champion and said, “Willie, here is your key.”

Ward then pushed Owens, who had also been refused lodging, to brave the hotel’s Jim
Crow policy. “So I told him, I said, ‘Jesse, you had better get your coach, Larry Snyder,
because I am here.’ So Jesse gets mad, and he calls his coach…and he beeps on him. The next thing I know, here comes Jesse with his key. Whee! We are in!”

In reality, Ward was not in. These moments signaled racial progress but they were not a precursor to African Americans gaining civil rights. Michigan’s white administrators and coaches were barely on the verge of fully accepting Ward’s presence on the football team, and certainly not ready to extinguish the smoldering flames of racial injustice. He conquered the track and field, and was dubbed Michigan’s one-man track team. On the gridiron, he led Michigan to consecutive national titles, earning honorable mention All-American honors his junior season. In December 1933, he finished as the runner-up to Duane Purvis of Purdue for the Associated Press Big Ten Athlete of the Year. According to an AP wire, Purvis edged Ward “by the slender margin of two votes.” Ward’s talents were apparent to the conference coaches and sportswriters who voted. “Ward, in addition to his feats in track, was one of the bright stars of Michigan’s championship football team this fall. Fast and rangy, he was classed as one of the finest wingmen in football.” Yet, the man who drew constant praise and collected many accolades for his ability to evade defenders on the playing field was unable to elude Jim Crow. By the summer of 1934, only months before the start of his senior year, team officials notified Ward that he was going to be sidelined in the Georgia Tech game.

Ward was miffed. Others in the Ann Arbor community were also riled as word leaked out that Michigan planned to withhold him from the competition. A letter to the editor of Michigan Daily summed up the thoughts of Michigan’s alumni, faculty, and students who suspected that Ward’s benching would not only be regrettable but also
would set a bad precedent for the school and other northern institutions if they continued to take a similar approach to tackling racial discrimination. “It will be unfortunate if the Michigan coaching staff, as well as the coaching staffs of other northern universities, concludes that the manner to avoid confrontations of this type in the future is to refrain from coaching and playing promising Negro athletic material…but the easier and more decent way, both for the students who comprise the University and the people of the State who support that University, is not to schedule games with institutions below the Mason and Dixon [sic] line.”

The precedent, however, was already established by other northern schools. Michigan was merely following the pattern of racial exclusion. This was the era of gentlemen’s agreements. These often unwritten arrangements, commonly referred to as “Jim Crow clauses,” assured southern institutions that black athletes would sit out intersectional games. The “Jim Crow clause” was so popular that, in a few cases, schools began writing this clause of benching black players into contracts, which were often signed years in advance. “Such benchings” according to Michael Oriard, “became increasingly common in the 1930s as more major football schools in the North integrated their teams, and as universities from all regions scheduled intersectional contests in quest of national prominence.” While most of these benchings occurred in games played on southern soil, an unsettling trend emerged as more northern schools began to yield to southern demands even on the home fields of northern institutions.

Yost was quite aware of this developing tendency to bar African Americans from competitions against southern schools and there is no question he sought to exploit this
racist custom to disgrace Ward. A year prior to Ward’s benching, Yost phoned an associate in Virginia or some other southern state requesting him to arrange a game for Michigan with a Jim Crow school. The Yellow Jackets accepted that overture with a counteroffer. Kendall Wood, son of Professor Arthur Wood, reported the details of Georgia Tech’s proposal at a rally held on behalf of Ward. “In December a telegram was received by the Athletic Department from Georgia Tech stating that if Michigan proposed to play Ward in the game that it would have to be called off because if Georgia Tech did permit him to play the publicity that Georgia Tech would receive in her local state papers would be so severe that it just could not be allowed.”

The news from Atlanta was music to the ears of Yost who wanted to be sure that Tech officials were unconditionally against any prospect of Ward playing in the game. A friend of Georgia Tech’s football coach W.A. Alexander, Yost presumed that a southern school would take the stance of objecting to their teams playing against Negro players. Yost also received word from his brother-in-law Dan McGugin, football coach at Vanderbilt and a former Michigan football player, that the North’s routine of sitting black players against southern schools was time-honored and would not come under scrutiny. McGugin initially sent correspondences to Yost explaining to him that he could not “afford to use colored players as it has never been done in the case of games with teams from this section.” To further reassure Yost that benching Ward was part of an acceptable practice, McGugin cited the recent example of his Vanderbilt team. “Ohio (State) wrote me two years ago about the same thing and I talked with the Board about it and the Board was horrified and was absolutely unwilling to play the game under that
condition…Ohio did not play the man. Ohio told when they scheduled games with the Navy that the Navy asked that a colored man not play at Annapolis but that they did not ask for that agreement at Columbus.149

The black player referenced by McGugin was William Bell, a star tackle on Ohio State’s football team. Bell was withheld in a 1930 game against Navy, a decision that President George W. Rightmire championed.150 When Walter White, Secretary of the NAACP, dispatched a telegram to Rightmire protesting the racial prejudice against Bell, the president immediately sent a rejoinder to White suggesting he had never heard of the NAACP and questioning the organization’s motives before concluding that “the University is endeavoring to protect him [Bell] from unpleasant experience of probable race discrimination manifested in a southern city.” Rightmire alleged that Bell agreed that it was “best that he does not make the trip to Baltimore because of the conditions which he understands he would probably meet there.” There was no such difficulty in benching Bell against Vanderbilt. L.W. St. John, the Ohio State director of athletics, provided Yost with all the particulars. “Nothing was said in advance of the Vanderbilt game…Some time ahead of our game, I had personally talked with Dan McGugin and told Dan not to be disturbed, that we would not play Bell against him. We handled it in such a manner here that the fact that Bell was not put in the game was more or less a surprise to everyone.”151

Yost yearned to do the same with Ward—to go slyly about benching the star without anyone noticing. William Fisch, Chairman of the United Front Committee on Ward, confirm this at a rally held on Ward’s behalf. “Yost thought he could keep Ward
out of this particular game and no one would notice.” Unfortunately for Yost, even the North’s furtive version of Jim Crow was readily identified. A petition from the Ward United Front Committee against Negro Discrimination read, “Because he is a Negro, Willis Ward is not to be permitted to compete in the Georgia Tech football game. Such a flagrant example of racial discrimination is inexcusable in a university with our cosmopolitan traditions.”152 Omitted from Fisch’s argument that evidently sought to give attention to Big Blue’s supposed egalitarian practices was a recognition of another Maize and Blue tradition—Michigan’s egregious history of racial exclusion, particularly during the Yost coaching era. Even when African Americans were authorized to play on Michigan teams, they were met with racist caricature, castigation, and contempt.153

Any lingering distress over Kipke’s prearranged assault was now a distant memory, supplanted by the unpleasant reality that the road traveled to move far away from the Jim Crowism of the Birmingham and of the South was meandering. Ward knew that there were only delicate differences to be parsed between the northern and southern racial variety. He emphasized this view in an interview he conducted years later with John Behee. “Much of the racism Michigan men experienced, during the first half of the century, as they worked, studied, socialized and competed for their school,” he stressed, “was typical of the Midwest and much of the nation outside the ‘solid South.’”154 Further, the racial prejudice encountered by Michigan’s black lettermen was entwined into the nation’s fabric: restaurants and hotels refused service to African Americans; landlords denied housing to black renters; and employers rebuffed Negroes when it came to jobs and opportunities upon graduation. As Behee poignantly stated, “They [black
Americans] were IN America but not OF it.” Similarly, African Americans at the University of Michigan reached the same conclusion about life in Ann Arbor that Behee had drawn about life in America. “If you want to know what it is was like then I’d have to say black students were AT the University but not OF it.”

At the University but Not of the University

The benching of Willis Ward was neither a singular moment in Michigan’s history nor a culmination of its exclusionary practices. The racial discrimination that besieged Ward was fomented through years of denying African-American athletes the right to belong. George H. Jewett, Sr., the first black player to make Michigan’s varsity team, experienced northern racial intolerance during the fin de siècle period when very few African Americans suited up for white institutions. It did not take long for Jewett, a graduate of Ann Arbor High School and a star athlete who excelled in both football and track, to emerge as Michigan’s most dangerous halfback as only a freshman. But he also wasted little time becoming apprised of white Northerners’ employment of both the brand of racial epithets and brutal savagery that marked Jim Crow life in the South.

Jewett’s outstanding play against Albion—Michigan defeated Albion 56-10—resulted in a riot as opponents and fans tried to “kill the nigger.” In another game against the Purdue Boilermakers, Jewett was forced to endure chants by the crowd of “Kill the Coon! Kill the Coon!” These bigoted bellows were only drowned out by the sound of rage being inflicted upon Jewett’s body. On one play, as officials emptied out a number of players from on top of the pile, Jewett was found underneath, flat on his face and unconscious. As his flaccid body was carted off the field, the Purdue fans stood and
applauded the efforts of their team to have brought Jewett to his seeming demise. \(^{157}\)

“Teams deliberately sought to cripple key opposing players,” according to Behee, “and the officiating, like the rules, was rather loose in discipline.” \(^{158}\) Behee’s point is accurate but fails to bestow deference to the racial implications that made the occasional bending of the rules for unfair play between all-white squads a habitual incident when it came to black players who were intentionally injured by white players. White players went out of their way to hit a black teammate or attempt to injure him. Coaches, if they did not openly encourage it as Kipke had done with Ward, frequently turned a blind eye to such actions. Predictably, African Americans suffered injury on the field as members of predominantly-white football teams. Some even succumbed to death.

White players obliged the crowd’s screaming pleas to “tackle the nigger.” They targeted and wounded black players, often piling on top of them. The ritual of piling on Negroes was so appallingly common that some African-American athletes adopted techniques to avoid injury. Fritz Pollard rolled over on his back, flailing his legs bicycle-style to avert piling on after being tackled. \(^{159}\) Death on the field was not uncommon for black athletes competing against all-white squads, albeit northern or southern teams. Jack Trice, who played at Iowa State, died on October 8, 1923, of internal bleeding and hemorrhaged lungs suffered in a game against Minnesota. \(^{160}\) Trice was deliberately injured in that scrimmage, the first game of his career. Three other teams refused to play Iowa State with a ‘colored boy’ on the team. Trice, therefore, set out to play the game of his life. The night before the game, he wrote a note and placed it in his pocket. “The honor of my race, family, and self is at stake. Everyone is expecting me to do big things. I
will! My whole body and soul are to be thrown recklessly about on the field tomorrow. Every time the ball is snapped, I will be trying to do more than my part. Of all defensive plays, I must break through the opponents’ line and stop the play in their territory.”

And he did. Trice put on an outstanding performance in a game that, by all accounts, was played violently. Despite breaking his collarbone in the first half, Trice allegedly insisted he was well and continued to play much to his detriment and eventual demise. In an off-tackle play, he was knocked to the ground and trampled on by a Minnesota squad that intentionally hurt him. Before the game was over, he was carried out on a stretcher against his will to the ambiguously rueful chants of “we’re sorry,” by Minnesota fans. It is unclear if fans were truly expressing sympathy for Trice. He was rushed to a hospital a half block away from Northrup Field but was barely provided any treatment. He was told that his injuries were not serious and declared fit to travel back to Ames, Iowa, by train with his teammates. Stretched out on a makeshift straw mattress in a railroad car, Trice made the nearly 250-mile trip back to Iowa in severe pain. He arrived in Ames the next morning and was immediately rushed to the Iowa State hospital. Two days later, Trice died of internal bleeding and a broken collarbone suffered in the game against Minnesota. The death threats that had been made to George Jewett of the University of Michigan—“kill that nigger”—had become depressing truth in the life of Jack Trice. Sixty-one years later, Iowa State would seek to make restitution to its first African-American player by naming its new football facility “Jack Trice Stadium.” Still, his death and the heartrending reflections enclosed in his private note highlighted the unusual pressures and perils that black athletes endured at white institutions.
The harsh truth here for Jewett and other colored athletes, thus, was no different than the reality faced by African Americans who ran up against the cruelty of Jim Crow—a black person could be badly injured if not killed by whites not only to convince blacks of their inferiority but also to make the case that the races be kept separate in order to insure tranquility. Paternalistic whites in the South, for instance, supported slavery and then segregation as a way of averting the violence that African Americans otherwise experienced at the hands of radical racists. “Conservatives,” Joel Williamson asserts, “sought segregation in public accommodations to protect black people and their dignity. For conservatives, segregation meant giving the black person a very special place in which he would be protected.”¹⁶⁷ The logic behind this rationale that argued for isolation as a conduit for racial concord was not only flawed but it was also tactically racist. Rather than rebuked radical racists for their bigoted barbarity, black Americans were chastised through a process of exclusion that was intended to signify their inferiority and to keep them alienated not only from whites but also from the rights inbuilt in the American ideas of citizenship and democracy. Jewett and other black athletes, likewise, ran into similar patterns of discrimination as they were presented the option either to acknowledge their racial inadequacy by choosing not to play alongside white Americans or to integrate all-white football squads and, thus, be drawn against any spite or violent behavior from whites who were only seeking to maintain their supposed racial superiority.¹⁶⁸

African Americans who chose to do the latter were expected to keep quiet about the racial aggression that confronted them. A *Michigan Daily* article buttressed this view, saying of Jewett, “He is a brilliant player who stands punishment with indifference.”
Jewett’s apathy was particularly noted in a game against Northwestern. After being tackled, players on Northwestern piled on as part of the age-old ritual of inflicting pain on any Negro who sought to equate himself with white Americans merely by his participation on an all-white football squad. When the pile was finally cleared, Jewett came up from the ground with a badly bruised face. “The crowd was indignant,” reported the Daily, “and requested Jewett to name the man who had maltreated him, but this he refused to do. The audience “heartily cheered” when Jewett later returned to the game, a sign that Jewett’s reticence was appreciated. It meant that Jewett knew “his place” in a white world. A black man did not possess any right to bring accusations against any white man.  

The bitter irony was that as Jewett learned to play the game in a fashion similar to white players on both his and opposing teams, choosing to inflict as much pain as he tolerated, he discovered that the rules condoning illegal play did not apply to him. On one specific occasion, Jewett, having been dealt a fair share of after-the-whistle blows from a University of Chicago Maroon defender William Rapp, jumped up from the dirt and delivered a sensational blow to Rapp’s nose. Jewett was immediately ushered off the field by the referee. There was very little recourse or respect accorded for African Americans to seek retribution in response to racially-violent behavior. “America,” as Roy Wilkins asserted, “[was] so accustomed to settling the Negro outside any moral or ethical considerations.” The racism Jewett encountered while at the University of Michigan was not left to the football field. Prior to his senior year, Jewett was informed that he
could not participate in athletics and study medicine concurrently.\textsuperscript{171} Jewett transferred to Northwestern where he lettered in football and earn a degree in homeopathy.\textsuperscript{172}

It took another forty years before another African American played football at the University of Michigan. As Behee elucidates, “At Michigan, the hiring of Fielding Yost as a football coach in 1901 ended whatever chance black athletes might have had in football.” The dedicated southerner prohibited every Negro from joining the varsity. DeHart Hubbard and Eddie Tolan, two standouts in track, were deprived of the chance to battle on the gridiron. Yost did not have any trouble permitting the two men to compete on the track teams at Michigan, though this was not a normal practice. Yost’s decision to authorize Hubbard and Tolan to run track for Michigan was a calculated response to other universities that were using African Americans to score huge wins in track and field. Not to be outdone, Yost was willing to sanction certain black runners—the Superspades—to participate on Michigan’s track teams if it meant enhancing the athletic glory of the University. When it came to football, Yost was unalteringly against the idea of having black players on the team.\textsuperscript{173} He did not see the need for them. Football was white America’s game, and Yost was one of its many satraps looking to govern the policy on participation while protecting the sport from an invasion by the Negro just as American efforts were placed solidly against African Americans who were neither convinced of their inferiority nor willing to cede to subordinate roles.\textsuperscript{174} Black Americans, in this regard, fervently believed that Yost had an aversion to using colored athletes. Edwin B. Henderson, with Yost clearly in mind, later wrote in his 1939 edition of \textit{The Negro in Sports}, “It is known that one of the coaches [Yost], although of national stature in his
capacity, had been little inclined to use or be tolerantly fair to colored football candidates."

Hubbard and Tolan were not the only individuals who were denied the opportunity to play football under Yost. But while Hubbard and Tolan were able to, at least, participate on the track teams, others were not as fortunate. In some cases, outstanding players were not even recruited by Yost. This would be the fate of Sam Ransom, a multisport star and teammate of Walter Eckersall at Hyde Park High School.

To grasp the depth of Ransom’s powerlessness in falling short of getting recruited by Yost, it is vital to be cognizant of the latter’s philosophy on his archetypical football players. He was the architect of creating what he termed the “four-sided” man. Allison Danzig remarked that Yost’s four-sided men possessed “brains, heart, courage, and character” that not only helped make them “the best athletes” but also “in mature years, the most useful citizens.” Ransom’s play on the field and his demeanor off it demonstrated an encompassing of these qualities. Gerald Gems states that “by 1902, Chicago newspapers regularly praised Sam Ransom.” In a national championship game against a Brooklyn team, Ransom scored seven touchdowns despite having to share the field with future All-Americans like Eckersall. The Chicago Tribune spoke glowingly of Ransom’s performance. “Ransom was the particular star of the game. It was Sammy who was always in evidence, running now around one end and now the other, gaining twenty, thirty, forty yards with ease, always on hand when a fumble was made ready to fall on the ball. Ransom it was who made touchdown after touchdown, Ransom the irresistible.”
Ransom was alluring in the eyes of the writers at the *Chicago Tribune*, but he certainly was not enticing to legendary coaches like Yost and Alonzo Stagg of Chicago. Neither Yost nor Stagg tried to recruit Ransom who ended up at tiny Beloit College. The irony is that both gentlemen, however, recruited and subsequently fought over Walter Eckersall. Eckersall’s recruitment by Yost is strange considering the unprincipled behavior on the part of Eckersall that surely did not give Yost any reason to believe that Eckersall epitomized the four-sided man. Eckersall’s paucity of character was revealed when he was suspended by the AAU amidst charges of professionalism while still in high school for playing with the Spalding team of the Interstate League. Eckersall was not deeply erudite or sophisticated. He was admitted to the Chicago even though he did not meet the school’s rigorous academic criterion. Once Eckersall matriculated, his academic and moral ineptitude continued. Gems points out that Eckersall “often missed classes, failed exams, did not pay his bills and borrowed money to buy expensive clothes. Stagg interceded with faculty members, and even the president, to keep him eligible for competition.” To be sure, Yost might have handled Eckersall’s prodigal and profligate nature better than Stagg. But Eckersall displayed clear signs of being uncouth and unintelligent long before he enrolled at Chicago. As one friend of Eckersall admitted during a defense of the athlete, “[There have been] many deplorable and unfortunate actions…knowledge of his loose morals…and absolute lack of a sense of responsibility…he has been a grafter as well as a monumental liar.” Yost, even so, wanted Eckersall on his team while Sam Ransom was not at all recruited. To Ransom,
Yost’s four-sided man apparently required a fifth side—whiteness—that automatically canceled out any of the deficits a young man might have in other areas.  

Racial prejudice also factored into the decision to decline Clifford Wilson the chance to play football for Big Blue in 1928. Herbert W. Wilson, an Indianapolis lawyer and Michigan alumnus, decided to support Clifford’s bid to play football for the Wolverines. He sent a correspondence to Coach Tad Wieman inquiring as to whether or not a “colored man” could play on the team. When Herbert was a student at the school, “Coach Yost would not permit it.” Wieman’s response to Wilson revealed the racially-tortured logic that informed the actions of Michigan officials who regularly snubbed African Americans who desired to be a part of various athletic teams at the school. Wieman replied, “I had quite a talk with [Clifford] Wilson two or three weeks ago relative to the problem you suggest…there were certain complications that would be difficult for all with a colored man on the squad: that because of this I did not think it advisable for a colored man to be on the squad unless he was good enough to play a good part of the time.” Wieman continued, “In other words, unless he were a regular or near regular, the handicaps to the squad would be greater than the advantages to say nothing of the difficulties that encounter the individual himself. I assured him, however, that any man who could demonstrate that he was the best man for any position would have the right to play in that position.” For a colored man to play football for Michigan, based on Wieman’s judgment, he needed to be a “Superspade.” Black athletes, in other words, had to be great from day one in order to be granted a chance to be a part of the team while white players were given the opportunity to develop their abilities over time. Wieman
suggested that “[Clifford] Wilson took all of this in fine spirit and agreed that that was the best way to handle the situation,” as Wieman alleged that the young Negro hopeful made clear that he “would not care to be on the Varsity squad unless he were good enough to play.” Clifford Wilson, like other black athletes competing in a white world at the time, did not have any choice but to acquiesce to Wieman’s decree. It represented the only viable option, even if futile, for him to gain a roster spot on the team.  

Wieman, as expected, cut Wilson. Clifford went out for spring practice and, to Coach Wieman, fairly looked the part. Wieman described him as big, strong, and fast. But the coach remained opposed to utilizing a Negro who might pose unwanted challenges for the team. Wieman adopted Yost’s unwritten policy of disallowing African Americans from joining Michigan’s storied football team. He explained this position to an obviously disenchanted Herbert Wilson. “During the time that I have been at Michigan we have never had a colored candidate for the team who was good enough to play at all regularly. At one time we did have a backfield man who, had he been white, would probably have been on the squad as a second or third substitute.” Since Belford Lawson, the play to whom Wieman alluded, was not white, Michigan determined that having him on the team was unnecessary and limited him to competing only on the practice squad. “In a case like that we decided that it was not worth the friction that would result to have him on the squad,” Wieman said. “I do not know of any other case where a man’s color has in any way affected his standing in athletics at Michigan.”  

Clifford was not beyond exceptional. Put differently, he lacked the right skin complexion needed to don the Maize and Blue as Wieman intimated by citing the
example of Lawson. Belford’s blackness expunged his value to the team, and his knack for big plays did not wipe away the agitations stirred by his presence. If anything, his participation on the team would have awakened racial anxiety from some white northerners resistant to the idea of racial intermingling. Long before Georgia Tech came to play in an intersectional contest against the Wolverines, Michigan was maintaining exclusionary practices. While there may not have been any signs and symbols to make public the existence of segregation in the North, there were ample rebuffs and rejections of colored athletes that illuminated Jim Crow’s presence in the Big House.

Yet, the assertion by Wieman that a black player’s participation on the team would trigger unwelcomed complications bears scrutiny. His premise was largely based on the racial fears that were stoked in whites who were concerned that the opportunities given to black athletes hastened integration. The Great Migration of black southerners had already put white northerners’ notions of liberalism and racial equity on trial. White northerners were resolute in their efforts to restrain African-American migrants from assuming a position of equality, and certainly not authority, with them. The only way to safeguard white racial superiority was to disavow any prospect for Negroes to secure racial parity. Thus, each time a colored athlete’s opportunity to vie for a position with a northern school was thwarted, he was firmly put into his place and made palpably aware of his racial and, as a consequence, economic, political, and social dissimilitude with white Americans. To have acted otherwise, in the mind of Yost and Wieman, among others, was to provoke racial indignation or forced the university to defend the principles of democracy and equal opportunity and institutions like Michigan were undoubtedly not
inclined to take such a stance. Wieman’s trepidation, therefore, was due to his apprehension regarding the potential of having to explain his decision to have a Negro on the team in the first place. His mentioning of the looming difficulties the school and team would have to deal with, furthermore, stood merely as a racial ploy to divert attention away from the real problem at hand—the undeniable belief in the ethics of Jim Crow.  

Still, there were definite issues that arose from having African Americans participate on all-white teams, namely lodging. Finding local housing for black athletes was one of the prevalent problems that white teams confronted. Travel heightened the severity of the predicament, though the enormity of this issue was not always given regard by outsiders who felt that the black players, in the words of Behee, “had it made.” Behee describes the scale of this inattention, contending that “what most failed to realize was the tremendous anxiety and tension that accompanied travel for most black athletes and the apprehension that at any time or place they might be publicly humiliated because of their race.”

To be sure, this was a de facto version of Jim Crow compared to the South’s de jure form. But these northern racial practices affected black athletes in the microcosm of sports just as they shaped life for African Americans in the larger community. The pernicious effects of northern Jim Crow can best be glimpsed in Michigan’s treatment of black athletes in the post-Ward era. After the Ward incident, it took another seven years before another colored man was extended an opportunity to play football for the Wolverines. Julius Franks became the first of only four black men to make Michigan’s teams in the 1940s; Gene Derricotte, Lenny Ford, and Robert Mann were the others.
While these four players doubled the number of black lettermen Michigan previously had on the football team in its history, there were still a number of other viable black candidates who were effectively deprived of the chance to join the Maize and Blue.

Behee cites Horace “Hap” Coleman and Joseph Hayden, Jr., as two players who were turned away. Coleman went on to star in the backfield and on the track team at Western Michigan University after sitting idle on Michigan’s bench despite his outstanding skills and speed on the gridiron. Coleman enrolled at Michigan to play football while completing a master’s degree but ran into the school’s firm quota system. He “tried to convince Coach H. O. ‘Fritz’ Crisler that he could help the 1945 football team, but they already had one black.” Coleman quit the team, explaining that he needed to focus on his studies though the real reason he quit was because he was not able to fulfill his yearning to play football. For Hayden, the news was worse. He was not given a tryout by the team and was told by Michigan’s line coach, Jake Blott, that the team was already set and that he would likely just stand around. Crisler denied Hayden’s story in an interview with Behee and labeled Coleman and Hayden as “malcontents.” Crisler argued that Michigan athletics were completely free of racial prejudice and that any charges to the contrary were false. But Lovell Farris explained, “Blacks had plenty of reason to doubt the coaches.”

Farris experienced firsthand the deceptive practices of Michigan coaches. He went to Michigan to play basketball but later tried his hand at football. He quickly became convinced that the coaches were determined not to let him play. Farris was moved from split end to tight end where he was called on to do more blocking, a
surprising move considering that he had no background in football. Farris drew compliments, however, for his play at split end but was moved to allow two white players to get more playing time as split ends despite not performing nearly as well as him. Farris ended up injuring both of his ankles only weeks into making the transition to tight end as he struggled blocking the larger defensive tackles. He was eventually forced to quit the team and to try his hand again at basketball.\textsuperscript{188}

Yost’s segregationist policy, couched in southern Jim Crow customs, had been adapted into its northern brand. Michigan was deficient of laws to regulate African-American life but bolstered its racial practices with time-honored rules that proved to be just as deleterious and durable. “Unwritten quotas,” as Behee acknowledges, “were maintained keeping the number down to one or two superb athletes.”\textsuperscript{189} But nowhere were unwritten regulations more strictly adhered to than in the sport of basketball where, in 1952, John Codwell and Donald Eaddy became the first African Americans to play on the Michigan basketball team.\textsuperscript{190} Prior to this, Negroes were kept out of basketball due to “gentlemen’s agreements” Dan Kean, one of only two black tennis players in Michigan’s history, not only believed gentlemen’s agreements were responsible for keeping African Americans off the basketball team but also speculated that the purpose of the agreements were to keep them from rubbing up against whites. “They said this could be prevented in football by the uniform worn. Tennis and track were non-contact sports. But in basketball there was too much contact between white skin and black skin”\textsuperscript{191}

Franklin Lett failed in his attempt to make the 1934 team. Frank Cappon, Michigan’s basketball coach, had no desire to help integrate black athletes into Big Ten
basketball and warned Lett to stay away from the team. Leon Wheeler of the Detroit Athletic Association, a colored organization, intervened. He petitioned Cappon to grant Lett a chance to play on the basketball team while suggesting that the gentleman’s agreement be voided. “A large group of interested Michigan people and friends have been deeply interested in knowing whether you would be big enough hand break the much-talked-of gentlemen’s agreement and be gentleman enough to let Frank Lett play on your basketball team,” Wheeler pleaded. “The Gentlemen’s Agreement’ is out.” A similar request was made by Roy Wilkins of the NAACP. His appeal was answered by Frank Robbins, secretary to President Ruthven of the University. Robbins replied to the delight of Wilkins who was informed that Lett could go out for the freshman team. But this was not to be the case. As Ward exclaimed, “Robbins’ letter was a lie! Coach Cappon came to me and said, ‘Willis, tell Lett to stay away from the team. He cannot play!’” When asked about the gentlemen’s agreement, Crisler alleged that no such agreement existed in the Big Ten during the nearly fifty years he was associated with the conference. Crisler further claimed that he had never heard any coach or athletic director express not wanting black basketball players. Yet, African Americans were kept off Michigan’s basketball teams and out of Big Ten basketball. 

Talented men like Lenny Ford, Tim Harvey, and Elton Price were refused a tryout even though they possessed more talent than the white players on the team. This racial discrimination changed during the 1950s when six African Americans lettered in basketball. In 1964, three black athletes were named to the team. “At first,” as Behee explains, “it was shocking and repulsive to many whites. Then, as championships began
reviving Michigan basketball from its long obscurity, these three men won the hearts of alumni and fans alike.” But even this unprecedented move could not erase the history of gentlemen’s agreements that shaped the racial etiquette in the Big Ten and throughout the rest of the North.195

Michigan was a Jim Crow school.196 Certainly, more African Americans attended the university than at all than all the schools in the South combined. And though they were relatively few black athletes on Michigan’s teams, they were not completely excluded. Still, as Behee asserts, “Everyone seemed to agree that Fielding Yost would have preferred there be no blacks on any of Michigan’s teams.” Though Yost did not fully accomplish that goal, he did influence Michigan’s racial practice. Michigan’s history reflects this racist passion by Yost as qualified African Americans were segregated from participation on what otherwise were all-white sport teams, especially in football and basketball. In other sports like swimming, gymnastics, and wrestling, they were unable to start joining those teams until the late fifties and early sixties when a newer wave of Michigan coaches began to discard the unwritten quota system for black athletes. In baseball, though Michigan’s door was swung wide open by Moses “Fleetwood” Walker in 1882, only seven black men lettered in the sport while no black athlete was permitted to play golf.197

But the racism was not left to sports at the University. It also stretched into campus and classroom life. Black students had trouble getting financial aid to attend school. Charles Fonville observed, “The greatest source of bias was the financial aid system in athletics at Michigan. Many Caucasians with far less ability than some of the
black athletes received this aid before their black counterparts.” Housing was also an issue as African Americans were humiliated by landlords who denied them the chance to rent a place. “We’d go to rent a place and they’d say, ‘No, it has just been rented,’” recalled Lovell Farris. The virtual absence of Negro women on campus stirred racial animus as black men were vehemently discouraged from interracial dating. The state repealed its miscegenation statute in 1883, forty-five years after it was first instituted. But racial practice overshadowed extant laws and white men in the Midwest and North, wishing to protect primacy and property against the perils of racial intermixture, still maintained their aversion to interracial rendezvous. On campus, Michigan coaches were said to be the least tolerant of interracial trysts, and African Americans were dismissed from the team if they insisted upon dating white women. David J. Hill, a halfback on the 1954 and 1955 teams, was dismissed from the squad and barred from traveling to the Rose Bowl because of interracial dating. Even Lowell Perry, who was reluctant to criticize Michigan, admitted that interracial dating was likely to bring a colored athlete rapidly into disfavor with his coach.

In addition, while black athletes in the first half of the century performed very well academically—Ward, for instance, was an A student in political science—earning postgraduate degrees along the way, many encountered racism from their professors and none could ever make the claim they had a black professor during their tenure at Michigan. Perry recalled a Civil War historian of national prominence who concluded his discourse about the Emancipation Proclamation saying, “Negroes thought it meant freedom from work, a false impression many still have today. They believe all they need
is a pork chop and a sunny beach.” “That really hurt,” Perry remembered. The hurt was also felt by Julian Witherspoon, a track man who recollected a professor who used the phrase “nigger in a woodpile” to illustrate a point during a lecture. Others could remember hearing stereotypes about black intelligence in spite of their own success in the classroom.202

Michigan was steep in Jim Crow. Inclusion greeted African Americans at the entrance but exclusionary practices accompanied them beyond the doorway. They were afforded no special treatment and were banned from engaging in certain activities and sports. In all these instances, black athletes were persistently reminded of their skin color and its role in prompting the university to construct segregationist barriers. Yet, these racial practices were not exclusive to Ann Arbor. Michigan was very much in step with its northern neighbors and the nation, opening the door for Willis Ward and others to experience Jim Crow in the Big House.

A Northern Racial Color Line

Segregation first appeared in college football in a seemingly minor incident in 1903, which ironically took place between two northern schools—Wabash College of Indiana and DePauw University, a Methodist school also in Indiana. DePauw’s players and coaches arrived to play the game against Wabash but refused to enter the field after learning that Wabash had a black player, Samuel Simon Gordon.203 The New York Times reported that DePauw’s team was preparing to exit for the hotel when “several prominent Methodists…appeared [and] besought the young men not to disgrace a Christian college by drawing the color line, and protested against what they denounced as
cowardice and barbarism.” The DePauw players eventually agreed to play and were defeated ten to zero. Although DePauw agreed to play the game, their strong flirtation with Jim Crow portended a negative sign of things to come for other northern institutions.

Jim Crow encroached up college football on a large scale in 1916. Paul Robeson emerged as a star football player at Rutgers. As John Sayle Watterson writes, “In the World War I era, Fritz Pollard and Paul Robeson became All-Americans at Brown and Rutgers simply because they possessed a talent so boundless that football and, more precisely, their institutions needed them to win.” Robeson discovered quickly that his indispensability to Rutgers was tenuous. As the team waited in the locker room before its October 14 game, in celebration of the University’s sesquicentennial anniversary, Coach George Foster Sanford gathered the team together and told them that their opponent, Washington and Lee of Virginia, refused to play the game against a black player. Sanford left the decision up to the team. Washington and Lee waited to the last minute to issue their demands, and by this point the stadium was packed with fans expecting to see a game. No doubt influenced by the significance of the occasion, and given that fans paid to see a game played, none of the administrators, coaches, or players rushed to Robeson’s defense. Amid a deafening silence and a drawn out stillness in the locker, Robeson eventually spoke up and volunteered to sit the contest out. The game was of symbolic import and would have been difficult to cancel. But Rutgers set a dangerous precedent by acquiescing to southern demands, especially since the competition was taking place at a northern venue. Washington and Lee got to play the game their way, Jim Crow style.
Years after the Robeson incident, Washington and Lee attempted to compel another northern school to accept the Jim Crow practices of the South. As Washington and Lee prepared for a game against Washington and Jefferson College in 1923, they discovered that their Pennsylvania foe was planning to play a ‘colored boy,’ Charles West. Recalling the episode, Alan Levy remarked, “Back in Virginia, Washington and Lee learned of this and immediately balked. They phoned their coach ordering him to issue an ultimatum—there would be no game unless Washington and Jefferson benched West. Washington and Jefferson refused to sit West down. Washington and Lee would not take the field. There was no game and since then the two schools have not played one another.”

Washington and Jefferson’s gesture, though admirable, was a rarity during the interwar era. The incident also reflected the developing relations between institutions in the North and South, whereby northern universities dithered from integration to intolerance. Southern schools, on the one hand, were strident in their clamor for northern colleges to comply with segregationist customs and were averse to modifying their requests that Negroes be withheld from intersectional competitions. Washington and Jefferson’s decision to cancel the game, on the other hand, demonstrated the capacity northern universities possessed to gainsay racial discrimination. When Washington and Jefferson President S. S. Baker declined to sit the school’s star halfback, he exhibited an unambiguous stance against Jim Crowism that many of his northern colleagues like Yost and NYU’s “Chick” Meehan avoided. He stated, “I respect the tradition which
Washington and Lee followed in refusing to play the game, but Washington and Jefferson is a northern school with traditions too.\textsuperscript{210}

New York University was more flagrant in its compliance with southern racial customs than any other northern college.\textsuperscript{211} On several separate occasions, NYU acquiesced to the Jim Crow rules of the South and accepted the gentlemen’s agreement to bench standout players in football, basketball, and track. Chick Meehan was the coach of NYU during the first incident and, in a posture similar to Yost, determined that it was better to play the game and reap the huge profits that these games earned these institutions than to challenge the racism of southern schools that were not interested in playing against Negroes.\textsuperscript{212} Meehan acceded to the demands of the University of Georgia by withholding Dave Myers, a star halfback, from a football game between the two institutions.\textsuperscript{213} Meehan was viciously candid about Myers’ choices. He declared that Myers could “sit on the bench, or in the stands, or not come to the game at all if he did not want to,” displaying the racial smugness that came to define northern athletic officials’ treatment of black sportsmen.\textsuperscript{214} The incident resulted in much debate and protest, including long-drawn-out negotiations between the NAACP and NYU administrators. While friends of Myers urged him to “turn in his football togs rather than sit on the bench because of a color prejudice,” others such as Bob Gibson, a sports columnist for the \textit{Baltimore Afro-American}, challenged NYU to oppose the Jim Crowism of the South. Gibson wrote, “If a New York City university allows the Mason-Dixon Line to be erected in the center of its playing field, then that New York City university should disband its football team for all time.”\textsuperscript{215}
The NAACP prodded NYU to take a firm stand in resistance to the Jim Crowing of Myers, informing the school that the organization was prepared to file a lawsuit against both NYU and Georgia if Myers did not play. The University countered by first suggesting that the gentlemen’s agreement was compulsory. They also stressed the dangers of allowing Myers to play in a hostile southern environment. Finally, in a dastardly and deceitful move that spoke to the cowardice of Meehan and NYU, the school reported that Myers was injured and unable to play against Georgia. They claimed that a corps of eminent surgeons examined Myers and that the “acromio-clavicular ligaments of his left shoulder had been injured in the previous game and that if he played this coming week he would be in danger of permanent injury.” There was never any confirmation of the injury. Yet, Myers was absent when the Violets squared off against the Bulldogs, thus honoring the gentlemen’s agreement. The Violets lost the game, failing to score a single point in the fourteen to zero shutout. But the school gained approval in the eyes of southerners who were thrilled to see another northern institution observe the discriminatory practices of the South despite the spirited protest that ensued.

Outside the Ward, no incident aroused more vigorous protest than the benching of Leonard Bates, a fullback at NYU. Approximately twelve years after the Meyers episode, Bates became the victim of gentlemen’s agreements arranged by NYU Head Coach Mal Stevens and officials from the University of Missouri. Missouri demanded that Bates not make the trip, and the president of NYU, Harold Chase, along with school’s coaches, agreed to respect Missouri’s Jim Crow clause. Activist faculty and students
complained. Reminiscent of the Ward controversy with placards that read “Ward Must Play,” “Bates Must Play” became the rallying cry for NYU protesters. Students and sympathizers, alike, picketed in front of NYU administrative building, and carried signs that disclosed their demands: “Bates Must Play”; “Don’t Ban Bates”; “Ban Gentlemen’s Agreement”; “End Jim Crow in Sports”; “End Jim Crowism at NYU”; “No Nazi Games”; and “No Missouri Compromise.” Paul Robeson, who had his own run-in with the Jim Crow clause, called on all American athletes to deplore the gentlemen’s agreement. Other critics did not understand why NYU would schedule a game with a known “Jim Crow school.” “Jim Crowism,” as Donald Spivey remarked, “was the norm in the state of Missouri.” Just as protesters at Michigan pondered why a game would be scheduled with Georgia Tech, Bates supporters wondered in bewilderment about NYU’s decision to place Missouri on the calendar.

Speculation aside, NYU had a protracted history of complying with gentlemen’s agreements. In 1941, the school observed the gentlemen’s agreement with Catholic University by withholding its three black athletes from a track meet in Washington, D.C. George Hagans, David Lawyer, and Fabian Francis were left home. In another instance, the Council for Student Equality, a broad-based student organization at NYU, learned that in early December of 1940, Jim Coward, a star player on the basketball team, was deemed ineligible for the Georgetown and North Carolina games because of his race. Demonstrations were held with pickets carrying posters decrying the University’s decision and chanting “Coward Must Play” and “Don’t Jim Crow Jim Coward.” Despite the protest, NYU coaches held Coward out of the game. The fate of Leonard Bates, thus,
was already sealed. The athletic department, led by Philip O. Badger, was observed as non-progressive while Coach Stevens was described as “an elitist who tolerated blacks in limited capacity.” NYU kept to the gentlemen’s agreement and left Bates in New York when it traveled southward to play Missouri. Despite the remonstrations, and in a total lack of deference to the exceptional performances Bates contributed to the team, NYU determined that protest and proven ability needed to take a backseat to the Jim Crow tradition. Bates’ absence might explain the thirty-three to zero defeat NYU suffered though the loss did not placate students who held a sit-in to voice disapproval of the Jim Crowism at the school. NYU administrators decided to suspend them in spite of petitions that the students be left alone. It took another sixty years before NYU admitted that these suspensions were wrong and honored the protesters. NYU, in the interim, contended that “the gentlemen’s agreement was acceptable to the administration because the South was then inhospitable to Blacks.”

As unpersuasive and weak-willed a response this was by NYU, it was a viewpoint that had cachet with other northern schools that esteemed the Jim Crow clauses of the South. Harvard withheld its outstanding lacrosse player, Lucien Alexis, in a match against the Naval Academy because of that school’s refusal to compete against colored men. Wilmeth Sidat-Singh of Syracuse also encountered racism when he was benched in a 1937 game against Maryland. Lou Montgomery of Boston College was repeatedly benched. On three separate occasions, in games against the University of Florida, Auburn University, and Clemson University, Montgomery was required to sit.
Sitting, strangely enough, was a better option than the racial injustice other colored athlete endured. White fans hurled racial insults and threats at black players whose inclusion was not desired. Kenneth Shropshire acknowledged the racial ignominy and terrorization his grandfather, Leroy G. Moore, experienced while he attended Southwestern College in Kansas shortly before World War I. “The racial hatred that flowed in his direction from other teams was never lost on him.” Further, Shropshire recalled the taunts by opposing teams of “tackle that nigger,” which were shouted even when Moore did not have the ball.

African Americans also were deprived of postseason awards and leadership opportunities. Kenny Washington of UCLA was left off the All-American team. An editorial in the Crisis expressed outraged over the exclusion of Washington and chided Grantland Rice for his decision not to include Washington in his All-American selections. “By every test Kenny Washington earned one of these births. There was only one thing that was wrong with him—he was several shades too dark.” Iowa’s Ozzie Simmons was not given the chance to assume a leadership role with his team. He performed very well in his first two years with the Hawkeyes and was lauded for his achievements on the field. Simmons’s performances were so great that “Iowa’s games in 1935” were considered to be “pilgrimages for black America.” Racial animus from teammates grew with each accolade Simmons garnered. Resentment of Simmons was so intense that at the end of the 1935 season, Iowa made the unprecedented move of not electing a captain, “aimed obviously at Ozzie Simmons, the only real candidate for the job.” As Gerald Gems contends, “Exclusion from the ranks of leadership and the football
field had been painful for many non-WASPS. If sport taught character and leadership, non participants would be relegated to inferior status.” Simmons’s performance waned during the next season. The *Chicago Tribune* noted that “his teammates failed to block or to interfere or to produce the holes through which he might have sped.”

Given the racism of the period, it is difficult to conceive of these Jim Crow practices being abolished other than in the post-segregation era. Such a belief, however, is inaccurate and diminishes the function of white northerners who shaped their own version of Jim Crow beyond the American South. Northern institutions were in position to defy the gentlemen’s agreements laid out before them by southern institutions devoted to Jim Crow laws. But the chance to press for racial tolerance did not appeal to northern institutions, which, as an alternative, chose to “slouch toward a new expediency.”

Sadly, there is evidence that indicates the South might have been open to playing against black player had the North stood its ground. With the increasing profitability in the game and the introduction of the ranking system by the Associated Press in 1931, schools, both North and South, longed for greater opportunities for gain national recognition. To play a team whose star performer was forced to the bench because of gentlemen’s agreements could cause a lower ranking at season’s end for a southern squad demanding that a Jim Crow clause be honored. Southern teams, as expected, were increasingly willing to play against African Americans and were eager to temporarily suspend the gentlemen’s agreements and compete against Negroes. The University of North Carolina “willingly played New York University’s team on which was [Ed] Williams.” Williams was a star running back and was considered one of the best players
on the East Coast despite playing for a mediocre NYU squad. Frank Porter Graham, President of the University of North Carolina, approached the NYU administration to offer a rare concession—Williams was authorized to play in the game. Williams was injured in the final period of the game and had to be carted off by stretcher. Still, the black newspapers at the time indulged the moment as a step forward for the race. Roy Wilkins proudly declared, “There were no boos and in my section of the stand I heard none of the familiar cries of ‘Kill the Negro!’” The Pittsburgh Courier boldly declared on its front page, “N.Y.U. Star Plays Against North Carolina.” Given that NYU was able to play its black player, Williams, against a southern squad, it is troubling to observe NYU’s decision to surrender to Jim Crow policies only four years later.229

Jim Crow existed in the Big House and elsewhere above the Mason-Dixon Line. Northern teams, inevitably, were nefariously complicit in constructing racial blockades in athletics that militated against African Americans’ pursuit of equity. They were permitted to attend northern institutions. But the North was decidedly Jim Crow and black athletes collided with deleterious racial practices that rivaled the strict color line in the South. As Charles Martin stated, “Despite the arrival of African-Americans on campus, many ‘big-time’ athletic programs continued to exclude them…regrettably, the basketball court and the football field remained symbols of white supremacy even after other areas of college life were integrated.” 230
CHAPTER 3: “BONFIRES LIT” IN PROTEST

However, the night before the game, bonfires lit all over the campus echoed with screams of student anger, and “Kill Georgia Tech” was heard throughout Ann Arbor, and the next day in the stadium we did.\(^{231}\)

Reports of Willis Ward’s imminent benching swirled in the weeks leading up to the game between Michigan and Georgia Tech. These rumors ignited an unprecedented firestorm of protests throughout the campus and country. Alumni, faculty and students, and fretful parties rallied around Ward and slammed Yost for his decision to withhold the team’s only black player from the competition. Fifteen-hundred supporters signed petitions demanding that Ward play. Complaint letters were also sent to university administrators stipulating that the Wolverines sanction Willis’s participation in the game or cancel it. Yost did not anticipate this fierce objection to the racial discrimination against a ‘Negro.’ His strategy to sideline Ward was prevalent in the racial climate of the period, both North and South. Southerners maintained rigid lines of racial demarcation. But northerners conformed to the racial customs of its southern neighbors through practice and subtle, unwritten rules that demoralized and segregated African Americans. Thus, as protesters nudged Michigan officials to oppose southern prejudices, furiously wondering why the Yellow Jackets had been placed on the calendar, Yost redoubled his efforts to assure the contest went on without incident—Jim Crow style.\(^{232}\)
Michigan officials were decisively tight-lipped regarding the Ward situation. Even as rumors swirled, Yost, Kipke, and members of the Board in Control of Intercollegiate Athletics declined to confirm or deny the gossip. The latter was a part of what one journalist labeled Yost’s “do nothing” policy.\(^{233}\) Ward, nonetheless, was notified during the summer before the start of the school year that he would not get the chance to compete against Georgia Tech. Ward, dejected, could not grasp the ferocious intensity of racial prejudice that circumscribed him to such a miserable fate. Practice evolved into a chore. Ward later declared, “I was sad for myself. I didn’t have the dedication…because of this horrible thing that I thought they perpetrated on me.” Ward was also angry that the university’s athletic department failed to support him. “I was sad that Michigan would not squawk at a game with a southern team.”\(^{234}\)

But there was tremendous public outrage. Some wondered “how such action could be justified in the light of the honor his athletic achievements had already brought to Michigan.”\(^{235}\) To others, the question converged more on the immutable racial injustice that Ward’s benching signified.\(^{236}\) As Don Deskins, a former Michigan man, probed, “How could Michigan, such a fine and racially-tolerant institution, allow a Southern school with a different racial standard to dictate its own racial code in the Big House?” Glenn Peterson, another alumnus, reasoned that “racial prejudice not shown in other games is not necessary in this game” and implored Coach Kipke to “keep the democratic principles of the U. of M. as an example to others.” Peterson’s plea for Michigan to impede such a flagrant example of racial discrimination resonated with H.A. Smith who wrote a letter to the editor of the *Michigan Daily* begging for Michigan to
esteem its own cosmopolitan traditions. “In viewing our opinions, we say that we believe in equality of the races. Now arises a challenge…do we or do we not have the courage of our convictions?”

Just as Michigan was being chided for having scheduled an intersectional match with a Jim Crow school, the university also attracted its fair share of defenders who offered a range of opinions arguing for the game to be played. A few of the explanations rested on the idea that beating Georgia Tech represented potentially a symbolic defeat of the South’s segregationist order. Others, however, craved more than the joys of a figurative triumph over Jim Crow. Many outspoken Michigan advocates presented a sundry of bigoted motives detailing why Ward did not belong on the football field. The rationales they mapped out, in some instances, appeared noble. Yet, these justifications, no matter how reasonable, compassed a disturbing reality: Ward’s skin color continued to be at odds with his right to exercise the full privileges of citizenship and liberty, which he and other African Americans assumed the North provided. This denial kindled a local battle that helped to broaden the ongoing crusade for “freedom rights.”

Let Ward Play or Cancel the Game

If Ward was to play in the game against Georgia Tech, he was going to require the backing of individuals who could influence the University of Michigan not to cower in the face of racial discrimination. Even as Jim Crow scraped the North, there remained a consensus of sympathetic white northerners who opposed racial segregation. At Michigan, this benevolent white constituency yearned to uphold the democratic principles that were thought to be at the very least the fundament of the institution if not
customary throughout the region. A group of Michigan alumni recapitulated this vision of
an egalitarian university amicable to equal opportunity in their message to Paul J. Elliott,
editor of the *Michigan Daily*. They described the school as a “democratic” college whose
“history, its tradition, its honor is founded on a bed rock of education for all those who
are capable of getting it, regardless of race, or color, or social and financial position.”
Those persons who shared these former students’ viewpoint scurried to Ward’s defense
and objected to Yost and others willing to betray these long-established ideals.²³⁹

Letters from alumni and other anxious parties began to pour into Fielding Yost’s
office. The initial correspondences sent to Yost and other Michigan officials merely
sought to ascertain whether or not Ward would be removed from the lineup against
Georgia Tech. A telegraph dispatched to Fielding Yost from the sports editor of the
*Pittsburgh Courier* read simply: “RUMOR THAT WILLIS WARD WILL BE BARRED
FROM GEORGIA TECH GAME PLEASE CONFIRM OR DENY IMMEDIATELY BY
COLLECT WIRE VIA POSTAL.” A flyer posted around the campus simply asked,
“WILL WILLIS WARD PLAY?”²⁴⁰

As the campus chitchat expanded, so, too, did the nature of the inquiries
concerning Ward’s status for the Georgia Tech game. Joseph Feldman telephoned Yost
not only to interrogate the athletic director on the Ward story but also to ascertain any
involvement by Michigan in sparking the racial firestorm. Feldman was designated by a
campus student group to act as its representative in the Ward matter. Though he was
unable to speak with Yost directly, he left questions for the southerner. “Did the Athletic
Administration make any agreement with Georgia Tech not to have Ward play? Will
Coach Kipke be permitted to play Willis Ward in the Georgia Tech game? Has Yost any statement to make on the entire affair generally?” Feldman’s queries to Yost reflected a growing sense that the University of Michigan had not been forthcoming about its own complicity in stirring the Ward incident. This belief that the university behaved improperly emerged out of Yost’s own reticence to respond to Ward-related inquisitions. When Yost bothered to reply, his answers teemed with ambiguity and he moved swiftly to blame university critics for inciting controversy. Yost charged that Ward supporters “were shooting off without knowing what they were talking about.” Feldman reacted to Yost’s denigrating assessment by demanding that he be forthright so that “there would be no misunderstanding.” Yost said nothing at all, refusing to negate any collusion on his part.241

Additional inquiries pivoted on Ward’s valuable athletic achievements while continuing to spotlight the institution’s egalitarianism. Norm H. Butler, a professed “rooter of the University of Michigan because of the fair play it has given the Negro in the line of sports and education,” subtly asked Kipke not to grant the Yellow Jackets free rein to dictate its segregationist policies in Ann Arbor. “The eyes of the football world throughout the country will be set on your and the Michigan football team because a team is coming up from the South to play your famous team…will you allowd [Sic] Willis Ward to play in this game or will Michigan let a team from the South come up to Ann Arbor and refuse to play against the Colored lad.” Butler spoke to Kipke’s appreciation of Ward as a “great end” who factored prominently not only in the Wolverines’ succeeding title run but also in school’s outstanding black athletic tradition.
He also appealed to the coach’s soft spot for fairness. “This is quite a task for you and hope would stand by the Colored lad who has given his best for Michigan U, the same as De Hart Hubbard, Eddie Tolan have done. I know Willis Ward will not be turn down as I don’t think you would stand for it.” Butler was not overly antagonistic with respect to the university’s ostensible show of racial intolerance. He concentrated primarily on the success Ward and other standout African Americans contributed to the Maize and Blue. Butler’s timidity in unequivocally accusing Michigan of racism was a byproduct of an era in which the universal belief in white supremacy often diminished the uproar over even the most brazen acts of racial prejudice. Yet, the grim undertone of Butler’s missive was unmistakable: “a university founded on the ideals of equality, irregardless of race, creed, or color, cannot support such a flagrant example of Jim Crowism.”

Black organizations were less bound by any necessity to placate university officials’ feelings with regard to the racial implications of benching a black athlete. The NAACP immediately transmitted messages to Kipke and Yost for clarity on the Ward matter. In these pointed letters, NAACP members at the local and national level were insistent that Ward not be excluded from the contest based upon his skin color. Roy Wilkins, Assistant Secretary of the NAACP, seized on the public outcry for justice for Ward and other African Americans who were fervent in their own beliefs that racial discrimination had no place in a northern institution. He informed Kipke, “Word has reached this Association that Georgia Tech, whose football team is to play the University of Michigan on October 20, has made a request that Willis Ward, star end of the Michigan team, be left on the bench for that game…If it is true, do you as a the coach of
the University of Michigan team intend to accede to the request that one of the main cogs of Michigan’s offense and defense be withdrawn simply because he is colored? The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People wishes to urge upon you that no such unsportsmanlike request be heeded, if it is to be or has been made…We believe that if Georgia Tech has made this request, it is seeking, behind a cloak of race prejudice, to take an unfair advantage of the Michigan team.\(^{243}\) Five days later, Kipke received another memo from a NAACP affiliate, this time President Robert M. Evans of the local Detroit chapter. He reiterated Wilkins’ message but also expressed the sentiment that Georgia Tech was aware of Ward’s membership on the Michigan varsity. “Georgia Tech knew that Ward was a member of the Michigan varsity, and a survey of his work last season must have made clear to every one that he was a star, necessary for the full development of the ful [\textit{Sic}] power of the Michigan team.”\(^{244}\)

The NAACP’s did not articulate its motive for becoming involved in the Ward affair. The association, however, regularly sought to utilize local racial incidents across the country to develop test cases for their national campaign to remedy racial inequality. Though litigation was expensive and typically a last option, the ultimate goal was to identify potential lawsuits to pursue. Even in the years prior to establishing the Legal Defense Fund, the NAACP functioned as the most influential black alliance for coordinating legal action and for getting cases before the courts that resulted in landmark decisions that produced substantial changes in an American legal system awash in racial inequity. Though the NAACP’s primary efforts converged around “job justice” during
the 1930s, the organization boldly targeted Jim Crow in other areas where African Americans’ civil and political liberties lay under siege.245

Thus, the potential of a successful battle to block Ward’s benching likely enticed NAACP President J.E. Spingarn and the rest of the association who glimpsed an opportunity to assail discrimination at other northern institutions. The association’s involvement instantly enlarged the attention that Michigan garnered for its inexcusable treatment of Ward. The NAACP, to be certain, had experienced some missteps in its endeavors to put an end to racial injustice and its credibility was ripped apart by segregationists who routinely referred to the group’s movement against Jim Crow as a “communist plot.” Still, the NAACP wielded enough influence that the letters dispatched to the University of Michigan were significant even if they did not render an appropriate response from the school’s administrative and athletic staff.246

Other organizations were equally up to the task of challenging Michigan’s “gentlemen’s agreement” with Georgia Tech. The Detroit Civic Right Committee (CRC), led by Snow F. Grigsby, also interrogated the university regarding the story that Ward was to be sidelined. The CRC was established to fight employment discrimination in Detroit. Grigsby keyed the CRC’s aggressive and frequently confrontational tactics to dispute discriminatory hiring practices in the public sector. The committee, however, eventually extended its struggle to oppose racial inequality to other spheres outside of job discrimination where insolence and intolerance were also rampant. Between 1933 and 1945, the CRC developed into an effective organization far surpassing the local NAACP in raising the social awareness of black Detroit. Grigsby single-handedly masterminded
the group’s strategies and gained a reputation for using research to uncover the extent to which racism affected African Americans in Detroit. Given his relentless pursuit for racial justice and his audacity to rebel against the behemoths of racial prejudice, Grigsby’s eagerness to make inroads into the Ward controversy was unquestionably welcomed.247

He called on Yost to convey any wrongdoing on his part in the Ward case. “We note from the newspapers that Mr. Willis Ward will not be allowed to participate in the game between Georgia Tech and U. of M., at the request of Georgia Tech. Knowing what fine and impartial attitude you have always shown in regards to Mr. Ward and his value, in that he has brought so much honor to the University, we desire to know from you, have you rendered such decision, or is this newspaper agitation? Grigsby’s memo, while diplomatic, strived to make Yost culpable for whatever happened to Ward. It is not known to what degree, if any, Grigsby knew of Yost’s indifference to racial fairness, nor does it matter. By classifying Yost as evenhanded, Grigsby backed the Michigan athletic director into a corner where any action taken to exclude Ward would sully his character.248

Grigsby’s clever line of attack was implemented by other critics of Michigan who categorized the school’s racism against Ward as an attempt to curry favor with Georgia Tech and the Jim Crow South. Various campus organizations, some ultra-leftwing and radical in nature, probed Kipke and Yost for answers, insisting that the reports of Ward’s benching be confirmed or refuted. But they took their efforts further, chastising Michigan for its racial connivance in the Ward affair. The Cosmopolitan Club, National Student
League, Cooperative House, John Reed Club, The Michigan League against War and Militarism, Socialist House, and the Vanguard Club, individually and collectively, chastised Michigan for its connivance. Sonia Smith, writing on behalf of the Cosmopolitan Club, launched a salvo against athletic officers for scheduling the game with an institution that overtly maintained racial segregation. “We, as members of the Cosmopolitan club, believe in racial equality, and therefore, disapprove any action taken by the Board in Control of Athletics in scheduling any event with an institution whose policy involves Racial Discrimination.”

The John Reed Club, a Communist Party affiliate, dubbed the potential act of benching Ward as anti-American. “We protest the plan of leaving Willis Ward out of the Georgia Tech game. Such racial prejudice is un-American and uncalled for and not in keeping with the standards of the U. of M.” The language of “un-Americanism” was deliberate. Its opposite, “Americanism,” enjoyed widespread currency during the 1930s, especially in labor and radical circles. While the term was thought to convey conservative impulses and even a Fordist vision of full participation in the marketplace of American capitalism, and was exploited against communist dissidents, the rhetoric of Americanism also imbued the imaginations of nonconformists who gleaned from it inspiration for political revolt. The John Reed Club embraced the democratic dimension of Americanism, connecting their activism and their protest of Ward’s benching to the American ideals of “democracy,” “freedom,” “independence,” “liberty,” and “rights.” In turn, by branding the racial prejudice Ward was about to experience as “un-American,”
the John Reed Club intended to position Michigan as being out of step with—if not in contravention to—the American creed of democracy.251

Whereas Smith and the Cosmopolitan Club grilled Michigan’s Board in Control of Intercollegiate Athletics for placing the Yellow Jackets on the 1934 calendar, the National Student League (NSL), another Communist-led organization, urged Kipke and Yost to be candid about their intentions. The NSL was accustomed to organizing protests at northern campus communities whenever racist incidents arose. The league jumped at the opportunity to stand up for Ward. “A number of unverified rumors have been circulating around campus to the effect that Willis Ward will be barred from the Georgia Tech game because of the fact that he is a negro. The National Student League, determined to fight all forms racial discrimination, is naturally concerned…Therefore, we respectfully ask you either to verify or deny these rumors within the next two or three days. If such statement is not forthcoming then we shall feel entirely justified in assuming that you have thereby given an automatic verification to the rumors.”252 The open letter sent to Yost and Kipke by the NSL’s Committee on Discrimination represented only the first ultimatum in a series of coordinated letters written, petitions drawn, and protest demonstrations held by the group. The NSL soon adopted a slogan that became the rallying cry of the Ward movement: “LET WILLIS WARD PLAY OR CANCEL THE GAME.”253

From a Motto to a Movement

The “LET WILLIS WARD PLAY OR CANCEL THE GAME” dictum was conceived as the watchword of a movement to compel Yost and the University of
Michigan to rescind its agreement with Georgia Tech if the visitors persisted in demanding that Ward not participate. The NSL posted petitions on university grounds and throughout Ann Arbor lobbying Ward supporters to add their signatures to the appeal so that Michigan’s major decision-makers would choose either to play Ward or cancel the contest. The statement from the NSL read, “We, the undersigned, declare ourselves unalterably opposed to the racial discrimination evidenced in the proposed exclusion of Willis Ward from the Georgia Tech game. We support the slogan: Either Ward plays or the game must be canceled.” The NSL’s condemnation of racism was seminal and highlighted a digression from the previous era when the prospects of speaking unflinchingly on the immorality of racial prejudice were frequently circumvented by even the most liberal dissenters of racial separation.254 The league urged student bodies nationwide to play a decisive part in the movement against racial oppression. Nationally, its officers proclaimed, “We must uproot it [discrimination] on campus by fighting against Jim Crow clubs and schools.”255

The local branch of the NSL promptly gained backing from faculty members, various campus clubs both in Ann Arbor and at universities throughout the North, fraternities and sororities, and other alumni who espoused similar beliefs about the need for Michigan to abort any planned compliance with the Jim Crowism that governed Georgia Tech and the rest of the South. These parties were inspired by the clarion call they heard from one of the NSL’s members H.A. Smith. Smith composed a passionate yet scathing letter to the editor of the Michigan Daily enlisting faculty and students not to let Ward suffer at the hands of Jim Crow. Smith stated, “This is a very cosmopolitan
campus where racial discrimination is supposedly abolished. But is it? On Oct. 20 our football team is scheduled to play Georgia Tech. This team refuses to play a team with a Negro on its squad. They insist upon Willis Ward being kept out of the entire game not because he is one of the best Michigan players but because of their prejudice for his race. Are we as a University of supposedly intelligent, broad-minded students, going to permit a team who is evidently not sufficiently liberal-thinking to dictate to us. In viewing our opinions, we say that we believe in equality of races…In conclusion, I ask you, and you might well ask yourself, do you intend to permit this very vital situation to slip by as necessary evil? Will we allow Willis Ward to be kept out of the game?"

The NSL’s stance that “such a flagrant example of racism” was “inexcusable in a university with our cosmopolitan traditions” magnetized liberal-minded people sympathetic to Ward’s predicament. Within weeks, petitions were signed by one thousand Michigan students. The robust support generated for Ward and the NSL in their stand against Jim Crowism created the opening for a new organization to emerge as the official representative for Willis Ward—the Ward United Front Committee Against Negro Discrimination. The group, if anything, was merely an adjunct of the NSL. Yet, the Ward United Front Committee Against Negro Discrimination attracted outstanding Michigan faculty to its cause. Professors Norman E. Nelson, John F. Shepard, C. L. Meader, John H. Muyskens, Preston W. Slosson, Roy H. Holmes, Carl D. LaRue, DeWitt Parker, Arthur E. Wood, and Philip L. Schenk as well as Instructors Hirsch Hootkins, Hide Shohara, Charles A. Orr, and Paul Wiers signed on to the Ward resolution. Together, these scholars legitimized the committee’s “call upon the athletic authorities to
put Ward in the game or cancel it,” made the Ward movement more compelling, and roused officials both in the athletic and presidential offices at the university.258

Advocates for Ward and the NSL also emerged from afar. Lester E. F. Wahrenburg, Secretary and Treasurer of the University of Michigan Club of Pittsburgh, informed Yost of the association’s harsh disapproval of the racial prejudice shown to Ward and also of their approval of the NSL’s entreaty to have Ward play or call off the game. “Kindly permit me to express… that we are unalterably opposed to the racial discrimination evidenced in the proposed exclusion of Willis Ward from the impending game with Georgia Tech. We support the slogan: ‘Either Ward plays or the game must be canceled.’”259 The NSL was also able to leverage backing from its other branches, specifically those located at other Big Ten universities. The National Student League at the University of Illinois warned Michigan’s Athletic Department that benching Ward constituted a breach of sportsmanship. “We hereby demand that Willis Ward be permitted to play against Georgia Tech on October 20. We consider that the refusal to allow him to play, because Georgia Tech will not play against a Negro, would be nothing short of ‘Jim-Crowism’. A code of fair play dominates the sports of every college in the Big Ten. We feel that if Willis Ward is not allowed to play, this discrimination against him would be a violation of that code.” The Illinois NSL also reminded school officials, for the first time, of their responsibility as members of a public institution. “The University of Michigan is a state university, provided by and for the people of the state on the basis that every citizen has a right to enroll. Not allowing Willis Ward to play would be contrary to the spirit in which this university was founded.” They concluded
their edict with the movement’s catchphrase: “LET WILLIS WARD PLAY OR CANCEL THE TEAM!”

The dedication to gamesmanship and integrity motivated students at institutions like Howard University and New York University to rush to Ward’s defense. Howard students’ denunciations of Michigan for its unsympathetic treatment of Ward may have seemed predictable. As members of a historically-black university, Howard undergraduates were expected to take up the mantra of criticism put forward by the black press, the NAACP, and other budding civil rights organizations. Yet, Howard’s students were also inspired by the NSL’s countrywide campaign to stamp out racial prejudice that coincided with Ward’s struggle against racial injustice at Michigan. Prior to the cross-racial coalitions built on CIO-controlled shop floors during the late 1930s and early 1940s, interracial unions in the burgeoning crusade for civil rights were erected by America’s college students. Unavoidably, this student-led faction fomented by years of tension over American racism, crisscrossed Howard’s college grounds.

Just a year before Ward’s benching, the NSL hosted its annual convention on Howard’s Washington D.C. campus and flouted racial customs in the capitol by having black and white students dine together in traditionally “whites only” restaurants on Connecticut Avenue. The NSL also exposed the Phi Beta Kappa national organization’s unwillingness to charter a local chapter at Howard. The NSL, additionally, worked to enhance interests in the Scottsboro case, which they considered to be emblematic of an oppressive Jim Crow system. The league promoted a National Scottsboro Week on campuses and encouraged its chapters to arrange forums on the case. During the
Scottsboro trial, the NSL sent several of its student reporters to Alabama, two of whom were arrested. Undeterred, the group sustained its indictment of American racism.\footnote{261}

Howard students were also impressed by the NSL’s interracial assembly held in April 1933 to promote racial equality. The Conference on Negro Student Problems centered mainly on the racial dramas that African Americans encountered in New York City. Still, student delegates as well as preeminent black social critics from all regions of the country were invited to the event. Sociologist E. Franklin Frazier made an appearance and decried the “Jim Crow system and the damage that racial discrimination did to education in both the South and in the North.” By the end of the conference, one Howard student sang the praises of the NSL as he found the tone of the meeting different from any multi-racial gathering he had previously experienced. “It was not the old interracial get-together at which hands were shaken ‘for Jesus’ sake,’ and after a few sessions of intellectual back-slapping, Negroes and whites returned to their isolated way of living…The sugary spirit was absent; instead there was a common resolve to go back to the South and, for that matter, many areas of the North, and tackle shoulder to shoulder the problems of discrimination.”\footnote{262}

Howard students were eager to join with their NSL brothers and sisters who not only preached racial equality but also practiced it in their national meetings. Sylvia Steckler of the Liberal Club of Howard University sent a letter directly to President Ruthven accusing him and other Michigan officials of championing Jim Crow. “The Liberal Club of Howard University voices the opinion of the entire student body in protesting the open and flagrant discrimination against the Negro athlete, Willis
Ward…We can interpret his absence from the field on that date only as an instance of a great ‘liberal’ university’s encouragement and support of the whole system of economic, social and political discrimination against the Negro. We demand in the future, the University of Michigan refuse to sanction the prejudices of other universities; that, in any similar circumstance, the University of Michigan instruct its team to insist upon having the Negro athlete play on the field, or refuse to play at all.” Steckler’s abrasive language signaled a new stanza in the poetics of racial dissent that reflected younger America’s growing discord with American racism. Campus radicalism spurred an increase in college-age Americans willing to be vocal about discrimination and to push harder for racial and social equality. Black students were, no less, prodded by this developing activism. To them, the code of fair play embodied the need for African Americans to partake equally in the rights enjoyed by white America. Howard’s students, thus, were ready to be at the forefront of a movement that was larger than Ward.263

New York University’s advocacy both for Ward and the NSL was remarkable considering its own history with having to confront Jim Crowism. Two separate correspondences were dispatched from NYU protesting the racial discrimination against Ward. Albert Ammo, functioning on behalf of the Evening Social Problems Club, New York University’s Chapter of the NSL, and Washington Square College, mailed a memo to Michigan’s Department of Athletics disparaging Big Blue for its actions and admonishing the school to restore Ward’s right to play. “We protest,” explained Ammo, “the discrimination against the colored race, in your laying a negro member off your team for the game taking place with Georgia Tech this Saturday, October 20. We demand that
you either reinstate this member or cancel the entire engagement.” A second missive was forwarded to the Department of Athletics by Irving Pohin who acted as spokesperson for the New York University’s Football Squad along with Washington College and the Evening Division. It reiterated the NSL’s disapproval of Michigan racism. “You are barring a negro member of your team…We protest this discrimination against the negro member, and demand that you either have him play in the game, or cancel the engagement.”

The irony of NYU’s support for Ward is that the institution was fewer than five years removed from its own run-in with southern racist customs and less than seven years away from experiencing another insidious and invidious display of racial intolerance. Chick Meehan benched Dave Myers against Georgia in 1929 after the southern school recoiled at the suggestion its team play opposite a Negro. Despite playing for a so-called cosmopolitan institution, Myers was taken out of the lineup. “We had no intention of playing Myers against Georgia when we scheduled the game and we do not intend to play him now.” An editorial cartoon in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* depicted the racial humiliation Myers suffered. The cartoonist, Ed Hughes, drew a picture of Myers standing in front of a bold black boundary with white letters that read “The Color Line.” The caption at the top of the cartoon simply read, “The New Mason and Dixon Line,” indicating just how far northward Jim Crow had traveled.

Though the incident did not elicit any significant attention beyond the editorial and a few complaints here and there, NYU students braced themselves to challenge Jim Crow the next time it encroached on a northern campus, even one several hundred miles
away in Ann Arbor. Whereas NYU permitted Jim Crow free rein to roam New York
City, students at the school beckoned Michigan to send Jim Crow back to the South. It is
possible that the NYU students were disenchanted that not enough protest had been
wielded against the school for its decision to sit Myers out of the game with Georgia.
With Ward facing a similar fate as Myers, NYU students, many of them NSL members,
were unbending in assailing Michigan for its part in stirring the racial discrimination that
overwhelmed Ward. NYU students were not able to predict, however, that their own
university would be met with another racial episode in 1941 involving Leonard Bates—
one that eclipsed the Myers’ controversy and resembled the Ward incident. Still, their
interest in the Ward case and willingness to ally with the NSL and Ward United Front
Committee Against Negro Discrimination was vital for those persons hoping to overturn
Michigan’s decision to leave Ward out of the intersectional contest.

Given their ability to galvanize widespread support for Ward, and with the need to
bolster the assault against Michigan for its violation of racial egalitarianism, the NSL and
the Ward United Front Against Negro Discrimination searched for ways to expand their
protest efforts. Both alliances began to send pleas to Michigan alumni requesting their aid
in trying to coerce Yost to reverse track from his apparent determination to segregate
Ward. F.A. Rowe, a Michigan graduate and a member of the Board of Education of
Cleveland, Ohio, was a recipient of one the NSL’s leaflets. It read, “There has been much
dissension on the Michigan campus concerning the coming Georgia Tech game. The
cause for all this has been the attempt of the Tech team to keep Willis Ward out of the
game because he is a Negro. Disregarding the fact that Ward is a major star on the team it

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is our belief that racial discrimination has no place on the Michigan campus, and should not be tolerated. We call upon the alumni of this University to give us their views on this matter and to please do that before October 20, as that is the date of the game.267

Members of the NSL put out an announcement indicating that its New York chapter planned to contact Bennie Friedman, the gridiron legend who became the first Jewish football at Michigan, ironically under Yost. After a brief but impressive stint in the National Football League, Friedman took a job as the head football coach at the City College of New York. The hope by NSL associates was for Friedman, himself no stranger to racial bias, to release a statement on the Ward question, stating emphatically his opposition to the benching of a Negro by his alma mater in deference to a Jim Crow school. He did not respond immediately to the NSL’s appeal, perhaps feeling loyal to Yost for giving him a chance. Allegiances aside, Friedman knew the sting of American racism. He had been called names like “Jew boy” and “descendant of Palestine” by the media. Thus, he did not blow the chance to voice opposition to his former coach concerning Ward’s benching.268

On the day preceding the game, Friedman sent a poignant letter to Yost in which he communicated the embarrassment alumni were feeling from Michigan’s insensitive treatment of Ward. “On behalf of myself and many other University of Michigan graduates, I am herewith protesting the refusal to play Ward in the game with Georgia Tech tomorrow. I heard the rumors some time ago that Ward would not be played, but until this week could not believe that this could happen at the University of Michigan. This unusual and discriminatory treatment of a fine young man who has done so much
for Michigan athletics has aroused more resentment at our University among its alumni as well as the laity than anything else I have heard of since my graduation.” Like others, Friedman reasoned that Yost and university officials should have called the contest off if competing in the game meant sitting Ward on the sideline. “If it came to a question of either playing Ward or cancelling the game with Georgia Tech, there should have not been the slightest hesitancy in the cancellation of the game. The decision to play the game with Georgia Tech without Ward, is not only contrary to the spirit of fairness and decency towards one of Michigan’s greatest athletes, but is in direction violation of the statutes of the State of Michigan. The University of Michigan should stand first in the observance of the spirit as well as the letter of our laws and in the spreading of the principles of tolerance and true Americanism. The treatment of Ward is causing our alumni to hang their hands in shame.”

Friedman’s firm stance against Yost, though later than the NSL may have wished, had to be disconcerting for Michigan officials. So, too, were the notices from other alumni who derided university administrators for their capitulation to southern racism. Herbert F. Wilson, secretary of the University of Michigan Club of Indianapolis and prosecuting attorney of Marion County, Indiana, stated that “it is poor sportsmanship [on the part of Georgia Tech] to ask the Michigan coaches to not play Ward.” Wilson’s letter further indicated that “Ward is a splendid athlete, a good student, and a good sportsman in every sense of the world. These characteristics…and not his color should be the basis for Georgia Tech’s determining whether or not they should play against him.” Margaret H. Kruke, former secretary of the Dearborn Michigan Alumnae Association, addressed a
memorandum to the Ward United Front Committee Against Racial Discrimination. She expressed, “I am unalterably opposed to any form of racial discrimination. Personally, I think the University of Michigan should cancel the Georgia Tech game if that institution is so un-American in its policies.” The secretary of the Charlotte chapter of the Michigan Alumni Association, C. B. Fisk Bangs, explained that it had “long been the policy of the State of Michigan and the University that there would be no racial discrimination.” He added, “If Georgia Tech refuses to play with him on the team, I see no reason why they should not forfeit the game to Michigan.” Glenn R. Peterson protested the “thought of leaving Willis Ward out of the Georgia Tech game” and acknowledged, “racial prejudice not shown in other games is not necessary in this. Its either you give in, or Georgia Tech…lets keep the democratic principles of the U. OF M. as an example to others.”

A Campus and a Crusade in Crisis

The sense of dishonor articulated in numerous protest letters by alumni both disturbed and discomfited by treatment of Ward did not compel Yost to cancel the game. He continued to be silent on the Ward matter, even refusing to attend a rally jointly organized by the NSL and the Ward United Front Committee Against Negro Discrimination. He did bother, however, to send a dispatch Michigamua members to the meeting held the night before the game to foil any plots by the Ward movements to plan a sit-in during the game.

“Michigamua,” in its original identity, derived from the fictional Anishnaabe tribe and was censured for its racist practice of imitating Native Americans in public rituals where members dressed in imitation tribal garb. Many Michigamua members had also
participated regularly in the black minstrel shows held at Michigan during the early part of the century. The group was founded by Edward “Bob” Parker in 1904 and included amongst its honorary members, Yost, Kipke, and many other top-level Michigan officials, both in the administration and in the Board of Regents. Because Yost was a very “active” honorary member, Michigamua representatives did their best to obstruct the NSL and the Ward United Front Committee Against Negro Discrimination. The \textit{Michigan Daily} provided coverage for the October 19th rally. Yost had to have delighted in the \textit{Daily’s} next morning headlines:

\textbf{HECKLERS TURN MEETING INTO TUMULTUOUS VERBAL CONTROVERSY}

\textbf{Prof. McFarlan is unable to speak}

Smoldering feelings on the question of Willis Ward’s participation the Georgia Tech game burst into flame last night at what was probably the wildest and strangest Friday night rally in Michigan’s history…the meeting …developed into a bitter verbal battle between student factions espousing each side of the question.

Speaker followed speaker in rapid succession as leaders of each side braved the heckling of their opponents to talk on issues varying from interpretations of true Christianity to the degree of hospitality due to guests.

The heckling began when Abner Morton, Grad., chairman of the meeting attempted to speak. He was met with boos, clapping and wisecracks and it took him fifteen minutes to introduce the first speaker Prof. Harold McFarlan of the Engineering College, Socialist congressional candidate from the district. Apparently unabashed by the professorial rank, the hecklers kept up their banter and booing with unrelenting vigor. Occasional coins were tossed at the speaker…Morton then challenged the group sitting on the right side of the auditorium, where the hecklers were centralized, to send one of their numbers to the platform. After taunts of “yellow” from the left side of the audience, one of the “right” faction came forward to speak. He declared that the sponsors of the Ward movement say “it would be un-Christian to discriminate against Ward” but don’t realize that it would be just that to permit him to play because in all likelihood he would be injured in the game. He further argued that the coaches
who had improved Ward’s playing ability should have the right to say whether or not he should risk that ability.  

The scene was so full of commotion and rancor that one anonymous student, only willing to describe himself as “Also a Frat Man,” sent a letter to the editor of the *Michigan Daily* announcing his dismay at what he witnessed. “Much to my disillusionment, a hostile audience, interested in but one side of the question and led by an arrogant, aristocratic fraternal group, refused to confine their opposition to the established mediums of logical refutation. Insisting on preventing opposing speakers from stating their convictions, this gang adopted Hitleristic tactics of shouting down any speaker who differed with their dogmatic pre-conceived notions. Not content to even listen like gentlemen, they shouted irrelevant and frequently abusive comments at even the sincere professors who rose to protest. The narrowness of this bourgeoisie clique indicated most conclusively how firmly this supposedly ‘free’ campus is controlled by a rigid caste system.”

To Yost, however, Michigamua had achieved just what he had desired. The group caused enough turmoil that many of the individuals attending the rally to champion Ward did not bother to show up next day for the game. Laurence Smith of the tribe of 1935 agreed. When asked for any noteworthy activities of his tribe, he proudly stated, “Broke up a rally in the Natural Sciences auditorium over the fact that Willis Ward was not allowed to play in the Georgia Tech game because of his race. We broke up the protest rally by reading filibuster speeches supporting the coaches’ decision. It got pretty funny before it was over.”

Aside from physically and verbally harassing attendees at the Ward rally, Michigamua members also claimed that Ward was not interested in playing the game in
spite of the NSL’s crusade to convince Michigan’s athletic officials to permit him to play. Harvey Smith, a Michigamua member and former track teammate of Ward, was recorded as “stating that those who were demanding Ward play did not know Ward. On the other hand, Smith said, those who opposed his playing knew him best and were interested in his welfare.”\textsuperscript{275} William Fisch refuted Smith’s story. Contrary to the belief by some individuals that Ward neither wanted to play in the game against Georgia Tech nor desired to stir racial upheaval, he was very adamant about seeing a commotion caused. Fisch spoke to Ward who “expressed gratitude toward their campaign; that Ward was boiling with anger over the fact that he is being barred from tomorrow’s game; that Ward had told him that if it were not for certain obligations and personal affairs, that he would quit the team.” The fact that Ward was neglected by the Yost and the University of Michigan caused his reluctance to speak publicly on the matter even as he privately lamented being Jim Crowed.\textsuperscript{276}

\begin{figure}
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\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{1906_michigan_union_minstrel_show_parade.png}
\caption{A photograph of the 1906 Michigan Union Minstrel Show Parade in which members of Michigamua participated. Courtesy of Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.}
\end{figure}

Sadly, while Smith said that he and Ward had roomed together when the track
team traveled for away trips the prior spring, it appears that he barely knew Ward or totally overlooked if not avoided the problem of race that his comrade was forced to live with each day. The same was true for Gerald Ford. Ford had reportedly spearheaded efforts to prevent Ward from being benched. Yet, he did not hesitate to become a Michigamua member despite the organization’s appalling treatment of Ward’s staunchest allies. Even more perplexing, Ford joined Michigamua only a month after Ward was humiliated and banned from Michigan Stadium by Yost. Unlike most members of the 1935 tribe, Ford was not initiated in the Spring of that year. The Minutes from
Michigamua meetings show that he was voted in November 25, 1934, approximately five weeks after Ward’s benching, and initiated on December 2. To make matters worse, all votes for membership had to be unanimous. One “black ball” and it is implausible that Ford would have been elected to membership. If Ford’s efforts to advocate for Ward were as dynamic as he indicated, his reputation would have been tarnished before the existing Michigamua members who were clearly hostile to Ward’s participation in the game with Georgia Tech that the faction’s most cherished member scheduled.277

The halfhearted support Ward received from his teammates was equalized, to some extent, by the NSL’s vigorous war the league waged on his behalf. While Yost kept quiet on the topic of Ward even in the wake of the NSL’s protest sortie, other Michigan administrators were unsettled and who grew frantic over the barrage of criticisms the institution received. University officials were at their wit’s end trying to deal with the stress of justifying why Michigan scheduled a game with a notorious Jim Crow school. Ralph Stone, one of the Regents of the University of Michigan, copied a letter to President Ruthven after he received a resolution signed by thirteen former alumni who demanded that the Regents “either cancel the Georgia-Tech game or see to it that Willis Ward plays.” A seemingly doleful Stone informed President Ruthven, “I do not know what else to do with the resolution than to send it to you.”278

It is not difficult to grasp Stone’s glumness. The decree, which was drafted by such successful alums as Francis M. Dent, Theo Jones, Andrew H. Sneed, Fred B. Jones, Birney H. Smith, and C. E. Askew, demoralized an already uneasy administration who wanted the Ward problem to disappear. In it, these former students reprimanded President
Ruthven and Michigan’s Board of Regents for not doing enough to bring an end to the racial debacle instigated both by Yost’s judgment to schedule Georgia Tech and Kipke’s impression that his only recourse was to bench Ward. The resolution announced,

Whereas the daily newspapers of October 15, 1934 carried an article stating that foot-ball coach Harry Kipke would not allow Willis Ward to play in the game of October 20, 1934 against Georgia Tech; and

Whereas the undersigned believe that the sole reason for this action is that Willis Ward is a Negro; and

Whereas the University of Michigan is the capstone of the public school system of Michigan, supported by public taxation; and the traditions, statutes and court decisions of Michigan are diametrically opposed to such action as outlined above; and

Whereas the Board of Regents through the President of the University constitute the governing body o the institution, rather than the Committee in Control of Physical Education, the Director of Physical Education as the Coach;

Now therefore Be it Resolved that the undersigned go on record as condemning the public statement of the coach as an act contrary to the traditions, statutes, and court decisions of Michigan; and as condemning the uncalled for intolerance shown thereby; and Be It Further Resolved that the undersigned demand that the Board of Regents and President of the University of Michigan either cancel the Georgia Tech game or see to it that Willis Ward plays in the game.279

The declaration discouraged Stone and, to a greater extent, debilitated President Ruthven who later admitted his own blunder in choosing not to address the racial controversy.

Stone, conceivably aware that Ruthven desired not to get drawn into the Ward debate, advised the president that acknowledging the receipt of the letter was unnecessary. Stone, likewise, hinted at his own frustrations with feeling threatened by the school’s influential alumni. In spite of his supposed distress, he did not hide his own racial smugness when referring to the racism Ward confronted. Stone concluded his letter to President Ruthven
tactlessly joking, “I used to play football and have drop-kicked as many as three goals in a game. I wonder if I would be satisfactory in Mr. Ward’s place.”

Stone’s haughtiness mirrored the arrogance Yost and others exhibited as they, by and large, shrugged off the NSL and alumni demands to alter their position on Ward sitting out the intersectional clash with Georgia Tech. While the movement by the NSL proved daring, the league was not able to stir up enough agitation to fluster Yost, Kipke, and the Board in Control of Intercollegiate Athletics. More to the point, the university balanced the NSL’s vilification with the vindication it received from current and former students as well as the majority of the staff at the Michigan Daily who either elected to
side with Yost or ignored the issue altogether. They chafed at the assessment put forth by Ward that his benching amounted to “a case of the most flagrant type of race discrimination” and, therefore, was “an insult to the Michigan student body, which numbers almost every race.”

While some individuals were apathetic and disinclined from taking the issue seriously, other university devotees argued that Ward did not deserve to be on the field in
the game with Georgia Tech. One reason for benching Ward, some persons claimed, was
due to concerns he might be injured. According to Jon Zemke, “There was a fear that if
Ward played, he would be injured by malicious blows after the play had ended.”
During the Ward rally, a Michigamua member put across this idea of Ward being
intentionally hurt. This sentiment was shared by others. One alumnus wrote a letter to
the Board in Control of Athletics giving his own synopsis on the risk of Ward being
harmed in the game against Georgia Tech. “I have too much respect for Willis Ward, as
an individual and as an athlete to ask him to submit to any possible abuse which he might
receive. Permitting him to play in the Georgia Tech game I feel would not only endanger
his personal well-being, but the success of our entire football team…As a Michigan
alumnus, I am naturally proud of its achievements, and I glory in its victories, yet when it
comes to the point that any group would rather endanger the health and well-being of any
individual, to achieve victory or to support a principle which should be immaterial so far
as a Michigan football team in 1934 is concerned, and which will undoubtedly still
remain long after our own ministerial friends have gone to their ‘just reward’ I would
much prefer to have our team lose every game in which they play.”

Both the Michigamua member and the alumnus were spot on in their estimation
that Ward could be deliberately injured. Other black athletes were battered and
bludgeoned in games against white squads that disapproved of squaring off against
Negroes. And, in truth, Ward was threatened with violent reprisal. Weeks before the
game, some protesters made entreaties to Georgia Tech players, hoping to convince
members of the team to abandon their discriminatory practices. Playwright Arthur Miller,
then a student at Michigan and a writer for the *Michigan Daily*, recounted a story that did not make the editorial because of the gravity of his allegations. He convened with his friends from Arkansas, Harmon Remmel and H. C. Riegler. The young men knew Pee Wee Williams, one of Georgia Tech’s players, from their high school days back in Little Rock, and accompanied Miller on a trip to Atlanta to meet with the football team.

Miller’s goal was not only to protest the racial inequity but also to appeal to the athletes’ sense of fairness. He pleaded with the Yellow Jackets to compete against Ward in a nod to fair play. “Miller was right in the middle of this,” Remmel recalls. The players on the Georgia Tech team rebuffed “the Yankee” Miller “in salty language” and insisted that they were going to kill Ward if he set one foot on the field. Miller went immediately to the office of the *Michigan Daily* and wrote an article about the incident, but it was not published. Remmel said Miller “could not believe that the Georgia Tech team would have tried to *destroy* Willis Ward—but I am sure they would have.” The fear of Ward being hurt, thus, was valid given the Yellow Jackets’ belligerent posture.285

Yet, those persons who worried that Ward might be wronged failed to address the intransigent racism underlying Georgia Tech’s decision not to compete if Ward stepped on the field. If anything, the knowledge that a black player could be injured simply for playing against an all-white football team underscored the justifications offered for segregation’s existence. Segregation was the flawed, paternalist solution to curtailing the violence racist whites carried out against African Americans.286

The rationale that Ward be withheld from the game against Georgia Tech for his own safety, similarly, was akin to the same line of reasoning that segregationists
exploited to validate Jim Crow laws: the idea that it protected African Americans. There were two problems with this argument. First, segregationists implied that sadistic whites possessed the right to assault African Americans randomly without any fear of recourse. Rather than address the racism that fueled white hostility, racial separation was being employed as a tactic for scaling back the violence that the black community endured. Second, and more distressingly, racial segregation did not put an end to white aggression. Worse, this violent behavior could ensue unprovoked at any moment. “What was pervasive,” as George Groh asserts, “was the black knowledge that it could happen on the least provocation. That effect was intended. Whites of sensibility might deplore individual outrages, and they invariably looked down on rednecks who committed such acts, but there was general agreement that force was necessary to keep blacks in line.” Thus, that Willis Ward could be injured or even killed on the field for simply entering the game was a menacing reminder of the racism that kept black northerners from fully escaping the horrors of white supremacy.287

There were other reasons why the NSL and the Ward United Front Committee Against Racial Discrimination were unsuccessful in their efforts to incite a mass movement that capable of thwarting the racial injustice Ward was experiencing at the hands of the Michigan and Georgia Tech. A prevailing thought amongst those parties refusing to support Ward was that it was necessary for university officials to pay deference to their southern visitors even if it meant sanctioning the Jim Crowism of the South. Charles Cole, an alumnus of the University of Michigan Law School, encouraged the Board in Control of Athletics to exclude Ward from the game while also rebuking the
Ann Arbor Ministerial Association for its statement that the racial discrimination shown to Ward would be “contrary to the finer principles of both Religion and Democracy.” He countered, “I fail to see where any religious or democratic principles are involved in the real issue with which you are confronted. To Georgia Tech, it is a racial question, but in making such a request they acted in a very frank and honest manner, in fact, in respect to Ward himself…it appears the ‘finer religious principles’ would be observed best in not asking or permitting Willis Ward to play in the Georgia Tech game…I trust that the unwarranted interference of the Ministerial Association will have no influence or effect upon whatever action your Board or Harry Kipke take in this matter.”

Cole’s assertion that Michigan would esteem the “finer religious principles” by sidelining Ward was characteristic of a liberal retreat from race by many white northerners who resisted opportunities to challenge Jim Crow. Their arguments ran thusly: The South is too racist to support the egalitarian idealism of the North, which accommodates the Negro. Drawing attention to race only serves to drive a wedge in the ongoing development of a relationship between the so-called broadminded whites of the North and segregationists of the South. A progressive agenda on race, further, might rouse too much racial hullaballoo so as to provoke white alienation of other liberal ideas and programs.

Benching Ward, simply put, was an act of racial diplomacy toward the gentlemen of the South. One individual, declining to give his full name, called it a “question of tact.” In a letter written to the editor of the Michigan Daily, he called on the NSL to demonstrate more restraint in respect of their southern neighbors. The writer referred to
himself as a “dyed-in-the-wool Yankee, but one who has nevertheless tasted the dulcet drops of the julep” and felt “compelled to answer the N.S.L. and other radical crusaders.” He accused them of being “a petty, childish figure…with the proverbial chip on their shoulder.” The author went on to expose the fissures in northern liberalism. “Please inject a little tolerance into your stand-pat attitude. The Negro doesn’t appreciate your interference. You really hurt him by rankling the people with whom he must live. You irritate the Southerner needlessly because you strike him in a spot where he is without the moral armour of first principles, yet he has sound justification on the grounds of expediency. You will injure your cause by taking a stand which will not permit mutual understanding and gradual amelioration of conditions. Remember that antipathies thrive on just such an unbending attitude.”

The question of tact was merely a precursor to the Brown decision in which the courts advised states to desegregate schools “with all deliberate speed.” By arguing that the NSL should abandon their efforts both to “insist that Ward play” and to “stand on the firm ground of the great and noble principle of equality,” the writer implicitly suggested that endorsing Georgia Tech’s racist traditions was the appropriate way to improve race relations. The letter ended with what might be considered the basis for Ward’s benching against the Yellow Jackets. “Michigan can well afford to acquiesce to a custom, a prejudice if you wish, of her guest….The custom of not accepting Negroes socially, is so deeply rooted in the average Southerner that it takes almost a religious aspect. It is older than the nation itself. You cannot expect to change Tech’s attitude on Oct. 20 when they meet Michigan any more than you can expect a Catholic to eat meat on Friday, or a
Mohammedan to drink wine, just because he is a guest in a home with different customs from his own…Therefore in the name of hospitality, if not just common decency, Michigan should respect the South’s custom while Tech is here.292

Where was the courtesy for Ward? As the Reverend H. P. Marley emphasized, “The feelings of Georgia Tech are important, but so are the feelings of the Negro students on the campuses of Big Ten universities.”293 Marley also reacted to the insinuation that a failure by Michigan to acquiesce to Georgia Tech’s Jim Crow customs was similar to expecting a Catholic to eat meat on Friday. Marley replied, “Someone has said that this issue is similar to the matter of a Catholic’s abstinence from meat on Friday. One difference is that the meat has no feelings and no psychological problem is involved when two or more people agree to go without. The question of Ward playing football is not just an arrangement between two coaches. It involves the feelings of a young man who has given his best to uphold the honor of his school on the athletic field.” Marley grasped the possibility that Ward might be expected to get over the racism he suffered. He, thus, placed his rejoinder into a larger context to encompass other African Americans who were engulfed by racism. “It is still more significant, Willis Ward could easily overcome his feelings, but can the Negro student in the north, and members of this race in Michigan? The issue is not one of fish on Friday, but the integrity of a people struggling to live down a powerful prejudice. Will the athletic department of Michigan help them?” Marley’s response uncovered the racial contradiction in the contention that Georgia Tech deserved respect as guests while Ward’s feelings of Ward were not ever mentioned, much less given the appropriate regard by the university.294
The racial contradiction in the contention made by the op-editorialist—that common decency dictates treating southern racists with civility for their customs even as the traditions of Michigan, the North, and, most significantly, the Negro, are violated—was shamefully accepted by the university. Ralph Aigler, Chairman of the Board of Control of Physical Education, explained to Joseph H. B. Evans Big Blue’s stance, calling Ward’s participation in sporting competitions a privilege rather than his right and declaring that Michigan owed it to the virtues of hospitality to be cordial to Georgia Tech. Evans, however, was not convinced by Aigler’s claim that Michigan had a duty to act friendly to the Yellow Jackets by being compliant with the Jim Crow school’s segregationist policies. To Evans, excluding Ward was abominable. Recalling the mass meetings he attended while at university, Evans evoked the words of various speakers who challenged and reminded players that “these were times when they must not shirk their ‘DUTY’ to dear old Michigan. In theory, participation,” said Evans, “is a matter of privilege and one who has met every requirement to obtain this privilege has a Right to be accorded the same consideration as his fellow players.” Evans was not done hauling Michigan over the coals. He ended his philippic with a statement that drove home the deficiency in character and sportsmanship on the part of the University of Michigan. “Either Georgia Tech has stated that their team will not be permitted to play against a Negro and the University of Michigan is permitting its guests to dictate its policy, or else the University of Michigan is assuming that Georgia Tech will object to their team playing against a Negro, which assumption is both presumptuous and a reflection upon the fine institution of that school.”
Aigler should have anticipated such a reproachful response from Evans. Just six days earlier, he received a similar message from Francis M. Dent after presenting the same slipshod rationale he later offered Evans. Dent, a prominent lawyer, chewed out Aigler and the University of Michigan in a lengthy correspondence that included a focus on the legal implications of denying Ward the opportunity to play against Georgia Tech because of the flawed notion that sports’ participation is only a dispensation. Dent register, “You stated in your letter that ‘Intercollegiate athletics, however, it must be noted, are extra-curricular and participation therein is a matter not of right or duty but of privilege.’ I cite part of the Section of 146 referred to above which is, in point: ‘All persons within the jurisdiction of this state shall be entitled to full and equal ACCOMODATIONS, ADVANTAGES, FACILITIES and PRIVILEGE of........all public educational, institutions of the state subject only to the conditions and limitations established by law and applicable alike and to all citizens.’” Dent’s letter was unrelenting in its implicit allegation that Michigan was neither maintaining the character of its own egalitarian traditions nor abiding by state laws. He also highlighted other northern institutions that rebuffed southerners’ request to grant Jim Crow inroads into the North. “I was quite glad to read the section of your letter that referred to well-bred host. You might have also referred to well-bred guest. I am quite sure that nobody considers Harvard and Washington and Jefferson Universities and Dartmouth College ill-bred because they had sufficient courage to refuse to allow petty intolerance to interfere with the high traditions and principles of their respective schools.”
Dent added to his rant an indisputable fact about Michigan’s racial traditions: while the school’s origins were couched in equalitarianism, the university had always practiced severe forms of discrimination with many of its top officials persistently bowing to racism. To Dent’s point, just weeks before Ward was benched, a black female student experienced appalling racial prejudice on the Ann Arbor campus. Jean Blackwell was denied permission to enter the Martha Cook Dormitory, an undergraduate honors residence for seniors, despite having the requisite grades. Belford Lawson, a Michigan alumnus who was not permitted as a black man to participate on the traveling varsity roster, intervened on behalf of Blackwell. Lawson, now a practicing lawyer, had hoped for the university to alter its position. Alice Lloyd, Dean of Women at Michigan, crushed Lawson’s hopes. She refuted charges that Blackwell had been discriminated against because of race. Lloyd claimed that Blackwell was deprived of a room in the dormitory because the “quota for that particular building was already filled by members of the senior class who intended to remain for graduate work.” In dismissing accusations of racism, Lloyd alleged that “scholarship is not the only basis of choice” and intimated that Blackwell’s conduct was unbecoming of a student deserving of residency in the Martha Cook house. “Though Miss Blackwell’s scholarship is very good, she had been a critical and uncooperative member of the student residence in which she lived for two years. That fact might have disqualified her for residence in the honor house even if there had been a senior vacancy.” Blackwell, dissatisfied by the position Lloyd and the university had taken, withdrew from Michigan and announced that she was enrolling at Columbia University in New York City.298
Judging by Michigan’s despicable treatment of Blackwell, which garnered only the slightest attention, and in light of Dent’s calculation that someone connected with the university never ceases in the endeavor to advance racial prejudice, the administration acted predictably in not giving Yost more scrutiny for scheduling the game with Tech. He was untouched even after his attempt to foil the plan by Kipke and others to have Ward join the Wolverines. And it is not as if Yost was unaware of Georgia Tech’s reputation when he added them to Michigan’s opponent list for the 1934 season. As L. Smullin dispelled any beliefs to the contrary in his letter to the Editor of the *Michigan Daily*, “Georgia Tech is a southern school. By the same token, it is a Jim Crow school that Negroes are not allowed to attend.”

Yost was conscious of the fact that Georgia Tech would raise objections to Ward being included in the Michigan lineup. Smullin was also familiar with Tech’s racial habits. “No other school has seen fit to come with such an insolent request: the entire Western Conference and many eastern schools have accepted Ward unquestionably.” Still, Yost purposely arranged the game with the bigoted Tech and remained unflinching in his attitude that benching Ward was the right thing. He was every bit, as William Fisch described him at the time, “a southerner and for this reason…not in sympathy with their movement.” When asked questions about Ward’s status for the contest, he responded indifferently, “I haven’t anything to do with it.” President Ruthven and other officials, however, overlooked Yost’s racial egregiousness. As much as Michigan was berated by NSL, the Ward United Front Committee Against Racial Discrimination, prominent alumni, and many others, most students and faculty on campus and, even, local press
were apathetic to the Ward’s quagmire. What’s more, this listless group regarded Ward’s race as only a trivial matter rather than as the foremost “case… plainly one of not allowing Ward to play merely because he is a Negro.”

‘Time Not Ripe’ for a Racial Revolution

The Ward movement was not considered a large faction. A small note in the *Ann Arbor News* read, “Most of the student body paid little attention to the movement.” As preposterous as this statement might be—there was a significant amount of fierce protests against the University of Michigan by students and faculty who backed Ward—there appears to have been some truth to the fact that the overwhelming majority of students on campus did not become involved. A report conducted by Mr. Healey, City Editor of the *Michigan Daily*, revealed disinterest on the part of faculty and students. The claim was that most of the fifteen-hundred signatures on their petitions were signed by persons unaware of what the movement was about and that most students signed the resolutions without reading them, merely to satisfy the solicitor. Healey avowed, “The University of Michigan acts as host to Georgia Tech on Saturday” and that, in his opinion, “practically all of the Michigan Students would welcome them in a most sportsmanlike and friendly manner in spite of their southern racial discrimination policies.” Students promised Healey that there would be no disturbance over Ward being excluded from the stadium and teased that the sponsoring organizations of the Ward movement composed only a handful of students and faculty. As Edgar Hayes, a sportswriter for the now-defunct *Detroit Times*, recalled, “I thought it was terrible. It would have been great had Michigan
insisted he play, but it was not as hot an item as it would be today. People didn’t get excited because a black was barred.”

A reason for the dispassion on the part of Michigan students and faculty stemmed from their views of the organizations supporting Ward. The Vanguard Club was not considered influential and was reported to have only twenty or twenty-five students amongst its active membership. Healey acknowledged this account, saying that “the National Students League and Vanguard Club, who are sponsoring the Ward campaign are small and inactive as far as constructive things are concerned…they do not have a headquarters…they are anxious to gain publicity and this is usually their motive for making efforts on a campaign such as the one they are now sponsoring.”

Perception was the key to discrediting Ward’s supporters. Healey indicated that he interviewed several students on the campus at the Michigan Union and Student Christian Association and that all of them uttered the opinion that the NSL and Vanguard Club were composed of students who were foreigners, some Orientals, and had radical and socialistic ideas. The latter indictment proved damning given the political climate of the time. With the country facing a depression and animosity steadily brewing for communist and socialist ideas, a mere reference to Ward supporters as “reds”—the moniker attached to communist sympathizers—decelerated any momentum these groups gained in their campaigns to eradicate racial injustice. Long before the Cold War isolated black workers from their most dependable allies, African Americans on American campuses experienced anti-Popular Front impulses that hindered the interracial struggle to remedy racial injustice. Anti-communism did not damage the broad social movements
that began in the 1930s alone; it also toppled those cross-racial crusades that were already in their heyday during the period, although outside of labor circles.309

Even when the epithet “reds” was not deployed, it could be implied simply by referring to individuals by their nationality. Yost, in the immediate aftermath of the Georgia Tech game, diminished the protest by labeling the dissenters as Jewish as if to connote that these were radical communists and not rational citizens defending Ward.

“The agitation was developed by a committee of five Jewish sophomore students, four of them from New York City and vicinity and one from Michigan. They did it in the name of ‘The United Front Committee on Ward.’”310

Ward advocates recognized the smear campaign against them and fought mightily to eliminate the mischaracterizations of their objectives as sinister. In a letter to the Editor of the *Michigan Daily*, five law students belonging to Ward movement underscored their desire for students neither for into the trap of red-baiting nor treating their ideas as extremist. “Simply because a proposition springs from a group professedly radical is no reason to stigmatize it with the name “red,” and avoid pressing it as deserving of the attention of intelligent people. Students are intelligent enough to figure out whether an idea is worthwhile regardless of who propounds it; and The Daily should be as intelligent in fighting for a principle regardless of its source…We hope for better things. We must content ourselves that the editor of The Daily cannot be both a Socrates and a Caliph of Bagdad, though he has cultivated an admirable country squire superciliousness. We want news on the news page and editorials on the editorial page. We do not want editorials in the news columns and doddering aphorisms and affection in the editorial columns.” Apart
from defending their motives, the statement revealed a pronounced irritation with the *Michigan Daily*’s handling both of the Ward matter and of the NSL’s condemnation of racial prejudice. The NSL felt strongly that the *Michigan Daily* was noticeably biased in its coverage and did little to publicize the league’s core ideas.311

Initially, the NSL thought they were able to collaborate with the *Michigan Daily*. In one of their first letters to the editor, the NSL urged the *Michigan Daily* to examine carefully the stance taken by Kipke and Yost in response to the group’s correspondence to both gentlemen. “We feel that the attitude taken by Kipke and Yost toward the open letter deserves the careful consideration of the *Michigan Daily*. The issue demands courageous thinking on the part of the editors; this is especially true in view of the cosmopolitan attitude which the University professes to possess.”312 Ideally, the NSL’s Committee on Discrimination wanted the *Michigan Daily* to decry the ostensible racism that impelled Yost to schedule the game with Georgia Tech and induced Kipke to bench Ward. The *Michigan Daily*, however, evaded the issue and mainly published equivocations about the NSL’s motives, undermining the organization’s best efforts to prevent Ward from being Jim Crowed. The *Michigan Daily*, in addition, presented one-sided arguments that bolstered Michigan’s position in the Ward affair.313

To worsen matters, the *Michigan Daily* demonstrated a blatant disregard for the racism that Ward faced and intimated that the University of Michigan was “guilty only” of imprudence or severe memory loss. “The Daily believes that if the athletic department forgot it had Ward on its football team when it scheduled a game with Georgia Tech, it was astonishingly forgetful: that if it was conscious of Ward’s being on the team but
scheduled the game anyway, it was extraordinarily stupid.” The editors, despite their tough-talk, pardoned Michigan’s actions, declaring “that the lineup of the team—regardless of what motivation there was for scheduling this game—is the concern of the coach and no one else, and that an attempt by any organization to force the playing of any individual is out of place.” If this statement had not been devastating enough, the editors were certain not only to draw the ire of the NSL with their last note but also to curb any enthusiasm in support of Ward’s clash with racial intolerance. The editors stated “that the National Student League is not concerned with the fate of Ward so much as it is with rousing an uproar which will help to propagandize its own principles.”

The Daily, however, had no problem publishing a letter by one NSL critic who ridiculed the league’s posture on racial discrimination and added his liberal-retreat-from-race arguments to the statements already printed in the by Daily:

There is an insidious rumor going about to the effect that one Harry Kipke and not the National Student League is coaching the Michigan team this fall. Of course, this ridiculous rumor must be false for the National Student has decided that either Ward will play or Michigan won’t.

Wednesday, The Daily concisely stated its belief in this matter. With these beliefs, I wholeheartedly agree. I might only add however these points:

1. That this has been the custom of southern schools for a long time and that is why not Western Conference or eastern team has ever made a similar request.
2. That the meddlesome, publicity-loving National Student League have probably made this affair an embarrassing matter for Ward, while if they had not made any fuss about it, it would have passed over unnoticed.

The fact that the Daily was not interested in addressing Michigan’s racial prejudice was disgraceful. But the publication’s apparent endeavor to weaken the measures taken by the NSL to extinguish the flames of racial discrimination was disreputable. In effect, the
Michigan Daily’s dealings allowed Yost and the University of Michigan to escape the sort of robust protestations vital to keeping Ward included in Big Blue’s lineup. The Daily, on the contrary, downplayed the racial implications of Ward’s benching and persisted in letting Michigan off the hook for its culpability. Just as the Ward United Front Committee Against Racial Discrimination emerged as an offshoot of the NSL, the reporters at the Michigan Daily effectively became unofficial spokespersons for Yost and the university.316

The Michigan Daily’s favoritism toward Yost and jaundiced eye for the NSL did not go completely unnoticed by the general public. One letter to the editor expressed disappointment for the Daily’s conduct in the Ward matter and its unjust treatment of the NSL:

Wednesday’s editorial remarks regarding the Ward issue show clearly the usual superficiality and stupidity with which the Michigan Daily editors react to all significant situations.
1. Rather than seriously reprimanding the athletic board for scheduling the Georgia Tech game, they merely pass it off with a satirical sentence, climaxing their supreme chastisement with the word ‘stupid.’
2. Granted that the line-up is the coach’s business, it is also the business of that same man, as leader in American sportsmanship to see that Ward does play, simply because he is a Negro. How would this campus have felt two years ago if a Hitlerite team was scheduled to play here and asked us to keep Newman off the team?
3. I am not a member of the National Student League, but even to me the ‘fate of Ward’ is symbolic of the fate of his whole race, and not only that but of all minority groups as well. If as the ‘Daily’ so kindly informs me, racial equality is one of the principles of the N. S. L., then more power to them. Does the ‘Daily’ object to such a principle being ‘propagandized’ even by the N. S. L.?317

Editors of the Michigan Daily, after receiving the derisive note, chose to forego any further coverage of the Ward issue barring any new developments and decided not to
publish any additional letters on the topic. Notwithstanding, the editors claimed that the “subject had been covered fairly and impartially as possible from all angles.” Yet, eight days later, the Daily saw the need, once again, to share its own thoughts on the Ward matter. The NSL, once again, was blamed for “causing as much embarrassment and gaining as much publicity as possible” though the group “achieved neither its professed purpose of putting Ward in the game nor the better purpose of lessening discrimination against Negroes—both in the North and the South.”

On this occasion, though, Paul J. Elliott, Night Editor at the Daily, took greater exception with the university and impugned the athletic department for putting the entire school in a compromising position. “The athletic department, responsible first for scheduling the contest and then for a willingness to risk serious campus disorder rather than cancel it, was guilty of placing the University and the student body in a very difficult position…It will be unfortunate if the Michigan coaching staffs of other northern universities, concludes that the manner to avoid confrontations of this type in the future is to refrain from coaching and playing promising Negro athletic material…But the easier and most decent way, both for the students who comprise the University and the people of the State who support that University, is not to schedule games with institutions below the Mason and Dixon line…Michigan is democratic. Its history, its tradition, its honor is founded on a bed rock of education for all those who are capable of getting it, regardless of race, or color, or social and financial position. Those principles are incompatible with the South’s position on racial differences. Let Michigan of the future play with those who are of her own eminently worthwhile type.”
The NSL wondered where this high-minded avowal from the *Michigan Daily* had been in the days prior to the game. Only a day after Ward was benched against Georgia Tech because of his skin color, the editors at the *Daily* finally decided to speak up and declare what was already known—that the University of Michigan acquiesced to Jim Crowism by scheduling the contest with Georgia Tech and then by forcibly removing its black superstar not only the Wolverine lineup but also from the Big House. The admission from the *Daily* came a little too late as Ward had already suffered the racial ignominy of being excluded because of his race. *Michigan Daily*’s lukewarm reluctance to condemn Michigan’s poor racial conduct, thus, not only opened the door for Ward to be Jim Crowed but also for the NSL to fall short of fully breaking down the university’s color barrier.321

The NSL could blame the *Michigan Daily* for its lack of success in keeping Jim Crow outside the walls of Michigan Stadium. But, in truth, the support for Ward and the NSL was always tepid. Floyd A. Rowe was not moved to aid Ward or the organizations backing the Negro player even after receiving a leaflet from the NSL. While Rowe wrote a note to William Fisch saying that he believed “it to be a problem for the Board in Control of Athletics at the University of Michigan to settle, and one which after all is of their own choosing, since they elected to invite Georgia Tech to compete with the team,” he ultimately decided to take a halfhearted position on the Ward matter. “So as far as I am concerned as an alumnus of the University of Michigan I am perfectly content to abide by their decision—whatever it may be.”322
Another alumnus, A. Richard Frank, was convinced by President Ruthven that forgetfulness, not race, played a role causing Yost to add Tech to the schedule. Frank forwarded several messages to Michigan officials. In one correspondence, he referenced an article in the Chicago press discussing Ward being kept off the field because he was ‘colored. He asserted, “If, as implied in the article I noticed, the above mentioned two individuals were kept off the field because of the Georgia Tech attitude or threats, it strikes me as a decided mistake in policy for a state university such as Michigan, to book contests with an institution whose athletic representatives adopt such a stand.”\(^{323}\) At first it appeared that Frank was ready to enlist in the Ward movement, upset that Michigan was willing to compete against a school known for its racist posture. He quickly shifted away from any possible denigration of the university after receiving a letter from President Ruthven. Ruthven told Frank, “I have convinced myself that the Board in Control of Physical Education invited Georgia Tech to play in Ann Arbor without any thought of Willis Ward. After the game was scheduled the complication became apparent and the Board sincerely regretted that the invitation had been extended. After the contract was signed the Board had no alternative, in my opinion, than to go through with the arrangements. The fact that Willis Ward was not selected to play was due to several considerations.”\(^{324}\)

Ruthven’s explanation was in direct contrast to the facts. The game was scheduled a year in advance and there was plenty of time to cancel it, especially since Georgia Tech’s Coach, W. A. Alexander, offered Yost the chance to do so as early as January 1934. Alexander’s letter read,
Along the line of our conversation in Chicago, I am writing you about the matter of Michigan using a negro player in their game against Georgia Tech next fall. Public sentiment in the southeastern conference states simply demands that no team in this section play against a negro athlete. Georgia Tech of course has nothing against Ward, or any other negro who may make one of the athletic teams at University of Michigan. Georgia Tech also has no criticism of the University of Michigan for playing such a man if he is a student at Michigan. We feel that if a man is a regular, bona fide student at Michigan, he has the right to play on one of Michigan’s teams.

It will of course be impossible for Georgia Tech to play the game unless some arrangement can be made to leave Ward, or other negro players, on the side line that day. We realize that the loss of such players may handicap the Michigan team to a certain extent and are perfectly willing to have one or more of our players barred from the game to equalize this loss of Michigan’s, if Michigan feels this necessary.

We certainly do not want to put in Michigan in an embarrassing situation in regard to this matter, but feel that it is necessary to have a definite understanding well ahead of the game. It will be far better to simply call the game off than for either institution to receive unfavorable criticism in the newspaper.325

But Yost wanted the game and refused to call it off. He was a southerner who did not include African Americans on any the teams he coached during his close to thirty-year tenure with the university. Ward’s participation on the team was an insult to Yost who had tried unsuccessfully to keep the Wolverines lily-white. President Ruthven was well aware of his athletic director’s racism notwithstanding the excuse he fed to Frank.326

Yost exhibited no racial remorse in a conversation with Dan McGugin, his brother-in-law, where he disparaged colored organizations and campus student organizations just three days after the game against George Tech. He surmised, “The colored race must be in a bad situation judging from the number of national organizations that are organized to insure racial equality or no racial discrimination.” John L. Griffith, the Commissioner of the Big Ten, nonetheless, sympathized with Yost. “You were telling
me up at Minneapolis about the radical students organization that stirred up the rumpus about Ward in the Georgia Tech game. Can you without too much trouble advise me whether or not there are any other liberal clubs in Michigan?” According to John Behee, Griffith “apparently wanted to be forewarned in order to stifle any similar actions on Big Ten campuses.” Still, in the face of what should have been obvious doubt, Frank accepted Ruthven’s explanation and dropped the matter.

It is the lackadaisical support like that offered by Rowe and Frank, along with Gerald Ford and others, that ultimately destabilized the Ward movement. Yet, the battle waged on his behalf should not be misread as completely ineffectual. It shifted the struggle for civil rights from platitudes dressed up in egalitarian idealism into meaningful action aimed at rooting out racial disparity. The protests accomplished the task of preventing any future games from being scheduled with Georgia Tech or any other Jim Crow school for the next nineteen years. The battle for full racial equality also shaped young people, black and white, into up-and-coming freedom fighters who chipped away at the unmovable stone of intolerance even if they were unable to flatten it entirely. And for Phyllis Manson—the young lady who would report some fifty-one years later the bonfires lit in protests of the University’s decision to bench Ward—the Ward movement provided her with a more ethical worldview of the dilemmas facing black Americans. “This overprotected, Northern, Caucasian girl found a conscience that day, as did many others, as we began to understand the degradation of minorities. This episode labeled me forever with that awful word—liberal.”
University of Michigan athletic director Fielding H. Yost ordered me benched. I didn’t play in the that game, and that really hurt…Not playing in that Georgia Tech game has to rank as the all-time worst thing ever to happen to me.\

Phyllis Manson did not remember the final score in the game between Michigan, her alma mater, and Georgia Tech. She, however, evoked a vivid memory from that fateful day, October 20, 1934, in her letter to the *Michigan Daily*. “Several Georgia Tech players left the field on stretchers.” In a twist of irony—during the Ward-era, black players competing against all-white squads often left the field badly injured or dead—it was white players on the Jim Crow team from the South who found themselves black-and-blue. They were physically battered by a Michigan team who proudly donned its maize-and-blue uniform not only in honor of the university but also on behalf of Willis Ward who was benched by Fielding Yost to accommodate the prejudiced wishes of Georgia Tech.

In a sloppily played, muddy contest, the biggest hits were provided by a bitter Wolverine team led by Gerald Ford, who personally conveyed his resentment for the Michigan-Georgia Tech “gentlemen’s agreement” by mauling the Yellow Jackets. Ford was furious at Michigan for surrendering to Georgia Tech’s demand and called the decision to bench his friend and road-trip roommate “morally wrong.” Thus, when Charlie Prescott, a sophomore on the Georgia Tech team, started hurling racial epithets,
allegedly referring to the future U.S. President as a “nigger-lover,” the usually placid Ford lost his temper. Ford, along with another Michigan lineman, Bill Borgmann, slammed Prescott and ended his participation in the game for the remainder of the afternoon. On the following Monday, Ford told Ward that the hit on Prescott was being dedicated to him, cheerfully asserting, “We did that for you!”

A Forgettable Season

The game was, by and large, a quiet affair. Though there had been rumors of “a sit-down in the middle of the field,” the public act of defiance on the part of faculty and students never materialized. The planned “sit-down” was aborted by Fielding Yost whose resolve it was to prevent any such disturbances from taking place. He first dispatched members of Michigamua to the Ward rally held the Friday night preceding the game with the mission to create disorder to interrupt any plans to organize a sit-down. Then Yost hired Pinkerton agents to spy on and identify leaders of the Ward-movement, and to foil any plots by these groups to protest the intersectional contest between Michigan and Georgia Tech. At a rate of fifteen dollars per day plus expenses for the operative detailed, Pinkerton’s National Detective Agency, agreed to “undertake...the investigation of certain matters at Ann Arbor, Michigan.” A letter sent to Yost by W. H. Shoemack, Pinkerton’s Superintendent, expressed gladness in noting “that nothing happened last Saturday” and asked for Yost to indicate whether or not he was “satisfied with the investigation and result.” Yost’s racially-motivated ploys were successful. Short of Ford’s hit on Prescott, provoked by the racist Yellow Jacket himself, no other spectacular incidents arose. Michigan won the lackluster, rained-out affair 9-2.
Ford purportedly frowned at Michigan’s intolerance. He blossomed in America’s “Furniture Capital” where he naively observed the manufacturing community to be broadminded in spite of the overt patterns of racial inequality many African-American migrants encountered. Ford insisted that prior to the 1934 season he had not ever witnessed any racial prejudice, especially not as a child growing up in Grand Rapids. “I treasured the fact that there was no discrimination—you grew up treating everyone equally.” Ford poignantly added that he “was dumbfounded that in some parts of even Michigan there were the old, traditional antagonisms toward African-Americans.” Far from a closeted bigot, Ford’s white privilege groomed him to overlook the racial discrimination. Ford described his Grand Rapids as “a multiracial community” with a proclivity toward racial acceptance. “During my high school years, the Black population was about 13 percent. All public schools and athletic teams were fully integrated…racial differences had no impact in my personal life or my home community.” Ford’s account, however earnest, disregarded the racial inequality that hovered over his hometown. Racism inside the southwest town was unsightly but far from sightless.338

Grand Rapids was one of the first cities in Michigan to publicize unequivocally its alarm over black migration to the North. But white northerners expressed their anger beyond periodicals. Barefaced prejudice gripped the community and the flames of white terror engulfed African Americans who were secluded into budding ghettos. In 1919, a Ku Klux Klan outpost was established at South High School where Ford prepped, and by 1923 the Grand Rapids Herald circulated a history of the Klan to its readers. Two years later, the KKK hosted a weeklong meeting that attracted over three-thousand members in
Grand Rapids. No verifiable acts of racial intimidation cropped up during the gathering. The local black community, nevertheless, was keenly reminded of its vulnerability to arbitrary white aggression.\(^{339}\)

Immune from white racial terrorization, Ford apparently paid faint deference to Grand Rapids’ unsanctioned Jim Crowism.\(^{340}\) David Zeman, writing for the *Detroit Free Press* nearly seventy-years later, reacted to Ford’s assertion that his hometown was free of racial injustice by saying that “whether his black neighbors would share the assessment is unknown.” History, undoubtedly, advantaged Zeman’s ability to discern the white racism that Ford neglected. But in an era where whites’ desire for segregation heightened as the Negro population flourished in northern cities and towns, his point was precise: African Americans did not comprehend their predicament and the injurious treatment they faced daily in the same manner as Ford.\(^{341}\)

The empathy Ford exhibited for Ward’s plight, therefore, neither was couched in racial understanding nor was it an immediate endorsement of amity between the races. To Ford, Ward was a comrade who was to be treated no differently than any other teammate. Ward’s race mattered *less* than the fact that he had sweated and trained alongside Ford and his other teammates for three years. Beyond the camaraderie built from skirmishing on the gridiron together, Ford’s compassion for others, including Ward, matured during his adolescent years. Ford’s mother Dorothy was a strict disciplinarian, who admonished him to control the temper he inherited from his biological father, Leslie Lynch King. When young Jerry sulked in anger over something, Dorothy reasoned with him or pantomimed to show him how ridiculous he behaved. If her good sense was
unpersuasive, she twisted his ear, sent him to his room to cool off, or made him memorize poems. She had Ford learn Rudyard Kipling’s “IF” by rote so that it could help rein in his propensity for bad moods.342

These lessons taught Ford to curb his tantrums. But he also became an admirer of his mother, and emulated her for the kindness she showed to others. Ford remembered his mother collecting old clothes and food for needy families. She possessed an abundant belief in the Almighty, personified a caring heart, and created joyful times out of the otherwise tedious impositions of regular church attendance she placed on the family. She imparted these qualities to Jerry and his brothers in grand measure, and schooled them to be resolute through adversity. On Ford’s most unsettling day in 1930, a year before he met Willis, Dorothy gave Jerry a shoulder to cry on, a tender message to uplift his brokenhearted spirit, and a moral to be there for those persons treated wrongly.343

His real father visited him at Bill Skourgis’s restaurant where he worked lunchtimes. As Jerry slapped hamburgers on the grill and took orders from the register behind the counter, he noticed a man standing near the candy display case. The stranger stared awkwardly at Ford for almost twenty minutes before finally introducing himself. “I’m Leslie King, your father.” Jerry did not know his daddy. His knowledge of King existed merely in a short chat that Dorothy had with him as an early teen about her ex-husband. King’s neglect, however, survived Ford’s memory. Though Leslie was ordered by an Omaha court to pay fifty to seventy-five dollars per month in child support, he never sent a dime to Jerry and his mother. This desertion, along with Leslie’s physical
abuse of Dorothy, permeated Ford’s thoughts. No matter what his father said, Ford was going to be dead set against it.344

King invited Jerry to lunch. Ford, stunned by King’s out-of-the-blue appearance, resisted. “I’m working,” Ford stated as he looked Leslie directly in the eye. King persisted, “Ask your boss if you can get off.” Skougis eventually recommended that it was alright for Ford to go and off he went. King took Ford outside to a brand new Lincoln and a woman sitting inside of it that he introduced as his wife. The rest of the afternoon Ford spent with his father was superficial. When King dropped Jerry off, he handed him twenty-five dollars and instructed him to go “buy yourself something you want that you can’t afford otherwise.” Leslie waved and headed off. “That night,” Ford declared, “was one of the most difficult of my life.” Yet, Dorothy was there to mend her son’s emotions together once more. Ford did not fully recall what she or his stepfather said to ease his grief but he remembered knew that it was a loving and consoling exchange. He broke down and cried himself to sleep that night but his mother’s tenderheartedness shaped him to be a person who would provide a helping hand to others similarly affected by rejection.345

Four years later, Ford witnessed Ward’s dejection and allegedly threatened to resign the team in protest. He negotiated Michigan’s compromise as “morally wrong” even if he failed to perceive of the racial implications that emerged out of the school’s indulgence in Jim Crow. Ford also declared that his “classmates were just as adamant that he [Ward] should take the field.” He communicated his intentions to quit to his stepfather who, in no certain terms, told Jerry to stay on the team. “I think you ought to do whatever
the coaching staff decides is right,” his stepdad instructed. Sadly, Ford frequently claimed that Ward was the person who talked him into staying the course. “I went to Willis himself. He urged me to play.” Ford contended that Ward was adamant in motivating him to suit up. “Look, the team’s having a bad year. We’ve lost two games already and probably won’t win any more. You’ve got to play Saturday. You owe to the team.” None of these things were true. In actuality, Willis knew nothing of the rumored steps taken by Jerry to prevent Georgia Tech’s “Jim Crow clause” from being honored in the Big House. “No, he didn’t discuss it. He discussed with the coach, and he discussed it with his stepfather.” Ward learned of these supposed efforts many years afterward when Ford’s stepbrother shared the story with him. “His brother told me, ‘Jerry was so upset he wrote father asking him if he should quit the team. He was that angry.’”

Whether Ford’s memory grew fuzzy with years or he deliberately sought to play fast and loose with the facts was unclear. But Ford also muddled his account of how Ward was kept out of the game against Georgia Tech. In an op-editorial written for the *New York Times*, Ford stated, “In the end, Willis decided on his own not to play.” Ford repeated this gaffe on several occasions, sharing the same story on *Larry King Live* during a 1996 *CNN* interview. “The story is that Willis went to the coach and said he wanted to personally withdraw so that the game could go on and be played. Even though many of us…urged him to stand fast and say he was going to play he decided on his own that he should withdraw.” Ford’s blunder revealed the acute drawback to the most liberal white support Ward and other Negroes received during the era. In their earnest defense of African Americans, so-called broadminded whites often retreated from acknowledging
the fact that white racism—in its most insalubrious and unpleasant form—not only existed but also was, time and again, the lone cause of racial isolation and black frustration. In fairness, Ford was unable to remember the final score of the game, saying “we won the game 9-7 but would have done much better with Willis Ward who was a super guy.” But the lost minutiae about the particulars of the clash with the Yellow Jackets paled in comparison to Ford apparently forgetting that Ward neither chose on his own volition to remove himself from the game nor asked Jerry to play in it. Whatever the case, Ford’s father vetoed his threat to boycott the contest in dissent to Ward’s benching. Gerald Ford, Sr., made clear the limitations of his stepson’s racial advocacy: it was one thing for Ford to take a stand against discrimination on behalf of a Negro but it would be quite another to take a seat for one.347

Still, Ford’s misstatements exposed another troubling aspect that black athletes who integrated white teams suffered, that is, their strict adherence to the “good Negro” code.348 Even as white northern students increasingly defended the rights of African Americans on their school teams and stipulated that these sportsmen be permitted to participate in all home games against southern teams during the 1930s, colored players themselves were expected to keep quiet. The “good Negro,” in deference to Dixie, was counted on to follow an informal script whereby he would graciously forfeit his individual desire to play for the greater good of the team. The most benign whites, including Ford, anticipated cooperation from their colored teammates. Though black athletes were scarred deep emotionally from such exclusion and the psychosomatic anguish triggered by their coerced silence, unsympathetic African Americans inflamed
matters worse by questioning “good Negroes” masculinity for not quitting their teams in protest. Notwithstanding the criticism he was destined to hear from black media circles, Ward performed the “good Negro” role to perfection. His mild grumbles over being notified of his benching abruptly receded to the shores of polite racial decorum. By failing to air his grievances, Ward invested racial capital into Ford’s impression that he sacrificed his own participation against Tech for the betterment of the team. Willis soared above the fray of racial discrimination but he sat at home on game day.349

Ford trotted onto the field just as he had done in back-to-back shutout defeats to Michigan State and Chicago, only this time without his roommate Ward flanked at his side. Ward wanted to be there to root his teammates on but was denied permission to watch the game from the bench or press box.350 “Well, if I am not going to play, I would rather sit on the bench and encourage my colleagues.” Instead, he spent the afternoon at a local Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity house listening to the game on the radio. Michigan officials, according to Ward, “thought that maybe the Communists and the ultra-liberal groups might make a spectacle. So we thought I shouldn’t dress.” Ward’s willingness to take ownership of his benching belied his true feelings even if it upheld his “good Negro” status. “That game was because I knew that the only basis that I didn’t play was my color. Not my scholastic ability, not behavior patterns. It was a pure case of color.” The Communists and ultra-liberals, therefore, were not interested in making a scene as Ward clumsily put it years after his growing conservatism prompted his disdain for progressives and radicals. These groups, on the contrary, were agitated at the color
prejudice that Willis visibly recognized, and their hue and cry was intended to prevail against it.\textsuperscript{351}

Ward’s conciliation, nonetheless, helped to quell weeks of uproar over his benching as protesters not only accepted his racial fate but also grew weary with his stubborn attempts to absolve Kipke from any blame for the incident. “Kipke didn’t book the game; he was hurt. And it hurt the image of Michigan, the University of Michigan.” His defense of his head coach, perhaps noble, was premised on the way teams prearranged their opponents each season. “The coaches had nothing to do with scheduling… the last word was the athletic director,” Ward averred. It was true that Yost

Figure 13: A photograph of Harry Kipke from the 1948 Michiganensian. Courtesy of the Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
had final say in the matter. But Ward condoned Kipke’s silence in failing to address the issue. If Yost’s actions disappointed Ward, then Kipke’s apathy ought to have been a complete letdown. Kipke was considered such a believer in egalitarian ideals that African Americans all across the country sought him out as a reasonable voice to speak against the Jim Crowing of Ward. In one letter to the coach, W. Rankin Lewis wrote, “Mr. Kipke, I will not believe this of you. I know you…to be a true sportsman, a man who, when I knew you had no race prejudice whatsoever, but a square shooter all the way. I implore you as a citizen of Michigan, a taxpayer, and we might say a part owner or stockholder in the University of Michigan to recognize the law of Michigan.” Rankin tried to appeal to Kipke’s sense of fair practice and warned the coach that his failure to act would shift the racial landscape in the North, reversing the strides that African Americans made in the quest for equality. “Give the Black people of Michigan the right to continue to hold up their heads. Give us the right to continue our honest admiration for your courage to use Mr. Ward last year. Do not be the first to bring the Jim Crow rules of Georgia to Michigan.” But Michigan was steep in its own racial customs and Kipke acquiesced fully to those traditions. He was decidedly mute on the arrangement orchestrated by Yost to sideline Ward despite knowing about the plot for almost a year.352

Black heads bowed on October 20, 1934. The downpour that fell encapsulated the hushed cry throughout Ann Arbor over Ward’s benching. A subdued crowd of 20,901 turned out for the game, nearly five-thousand less than the numbers attracted for the season opener. While Michigan’s pathetic display the first two weeks diminished fans enthusiasm for the contest against Tech, Ward’s forced absence from the game ignited
the second lowest turnout of the year. Those present were able to witness a dazzling, 68-yard punt return by Ferris Jennings in the third quarter to give Michigan its first points of the season and the only score it needed to secure victory. Ward and the disenchanted Maize and Blue faithful who stayed home missed the chance to be spectators to the team’s only successful showing of the season, albeit a deplorable display and humiliating turnaround for a team that had impressively won the previous two national titles. It was the ninth victory in eleven tries for the Wolverines in an intersectional competition. The triumph, however, wrenched at Big Blue’s heart far worse than the two defeats. Members of the varsity, most notably Ford and Ward, insisted that the Tech game killed the morale of the team. Michigan managed to score only 14 points the rest of the season—all by Ward in a pitiful performance where Ford, a center, was named team MVP.\(^{353}\)

Yet, one alumnus all but treated the lone win of the season as a triumph over Jim Crow. He sent a letter to the team emphasizing the fact that they had prevailed over the South. “Congratulations on your splendid victory over Georgia Tech...your defeating them today has certainly put them in their place and taken some of the boastfulness out of them…I’ve been telling these ‘Georgia crackers’ that Michigan would win today and they said she didn’t have a chance against Tech—but the result goes down in history and Michigan has again conquered the South.”\(^{354}\) Michigan’s victory, in reality, was not a conquest over Jim Crow. If anything, the game solidified the North’s version of Jim Crow. Georgia Tech was “put in their place” insomuch as southern segregationist practices now held national significance. The Yellow Jackets did make one bizarre concession. In a highly unusual agreement, the team pulled its star end Emmett “Hoot”
Gibson from the lineup so that its racial principles could be honored without placing the Wolverines at a competitive disadvantage. Gibson reportedly never forgave Tech head coach, W. A. Alexander, for making him sit out the game because of a “nigger.”

In spite of Gibson’s benching, Michigan’s decision to bar Ward from the game established a pattern whereby northern schools performed the lead role in dictating the national etiquette concerning racial exclusion within intersectional games. The gentleman’s agreements that were developed in the early 1900s to provide racial protection for southern teams to avoid any “Negro” surprises on game day, given the lack of specific roster information they possessed about their northern opponents, were now increasingly exploited by northern institutions to deny African-American athletes equal opportunity. Ward was not the only black gridiron star to be benched in a game played northern soil. Dave Myers was forced to the sideline in Yankee Stadium when the University of Georgia visited five years prior to the Ward incident. But in the case of Myers and other black athletes withheld from games, northern schools, while throwing in the towel to southern pressure, listed them as ill or injured. Yost and Michigan’s athletic officials, on the other hand, made Willis the first to be banned as a healthy scratch solely on the basis of race and in homage to Georgia Tech’s Jim Crow tradition.

The final score of the game, thus, was immaterial. Of relevance was the fact that Ward was withheld from the game against Georgia Tech because of Yost’s racism and Michigan’s firmness in deferring to the Jim Crow clauses operational at Georgia Tech and throughout the rest of the South. When Yost was unable to impede Ward’s
participation on the team, he found a southern team to set up a new racial blockade for which Ward was powerless to penetrate.

If the attempt to Jim Crow Ward was not Yost’s rationale for scheduling the contest, it seems strange that he passed up the chance offered by Georgia Tech’s Coach Alexander to call the game off in an effort to save both institutions from any controversy or embarrassment. Why endow Georgia Tech’s Jim Crow reputation with national prominence? The same question must have lingered in Roy Wilkins’s mind as he protested Michigan’s racism. “If this game with Georgia Tech represented a step upward for the University of Michigan’s Athletic Department, if it could be regarded as increasing the prestige of Michigan athletics, there might be some ground for Michigan making the great concession of withdrawing its first string end to satisfy Georgia Tech,” he stated. “It happens, however, that it is Georgia Tech’s prestige which will be increased by a game with Michigan; Michigan’s athletic prestige is too firmly established to be enhanced by a game with a second rate institution like Georgia Tech.” As Wilkins surmised, the game against Georgia Tech did nothing to advance the University of Michigan. It only served to scale back African-American progress and to humble Ward who had broken Big Blue’s color barrier that Yost, in some measure, erected.\textsuperscript{357}

The determination by both schools to elevate the national status of Jim Crow in America proved costly. The day after the game against Georgia Tech, an editorial ran in the \textit{Michigan Daily} announcing that “everyone who touched [the Ward affair] did so only to lose in respect and esteem.”\textsuperscript{358} None lost more than Ward. In an interview with Ted Talbert of the \textit{Detroit Free Press}, Ward agonized, “I didn’t play in that game and…it
ruined my athletic career.” Phyllis Manson poignantly captured the gravity of Ward’s loss. “Georgia Tech refused to play with a Black man on the Michigan team and the University of Michigan was left with a racial dilemma. They solved it, badly in my opinion.”

**Simple, Anglo-Saxon Desire**

The fate of the 1934 season was settled a year earlier. The callousness of Yost’s racial politics was not lost on anyone familiar with his teams at the University of Michigan. Ward offered an unsympathetic description of the former coach as a “Southern gentleman with all the attitudes of an aristocrat, but he wasn’t an aristocrat.” He identified Yost as having a “huckster attitude” and as a person who believed “the game was for white Protestant gentlemen.” Ward’s denigration of Yost might very well have been an appraisal of other white Americans faithful in their beliefs in racial segregation. To these hidebound enthusiasts, football was an American sport that needed to be preserved for individuals whose merits and morals the game represented. It was thought to reflect those who competed. For whites to embrace the idea that football was their own enterprise, they were responsible for structuring notions of inclusion and exclusion. When African Americans attempted to challenge these written and unwritten rules sanctioning intolerance, they were often met with castigation, condemnation, and cruelty. It was an activity for a cultivated breed epitomized by whites who attended college during the sport’s embryonic stages when a vast number of American institutions denied admission to African Americans. It was also the chosen recreation of U.S. Presidents and
Supreme Court Justices, all of whom possessed the ostensible birthright to proclaim racial superiority through their whiteness.\textsuperscript{363}

Football typified American values and sated the need of white Americans to identify with something evocative of an American past rife with white racial dominance. It depicted the American devotion to hierarchal authority in periods of extraordinary difficulty, delaying the push for egalitarian ideals.\textsuperscript{364} Along these lines, whites assigned primacy to white racial capital in determining who could bargain for participation in the sport of football and who could be left out. White men of every educational category, religious creed, and socioeconomic condition were easily accepted. Black men, in contrast, were often spurned.\textsuperscript{365} When African Americans were given the opportunity to participate, they faced peculiar hazards and abuse, and occasionally their own ambition to excel produced tragic consequences. Football, thus, emerged as another arena in which the white man’s supposed divine right to rule was to be fully exercised while black athletes at a moment’s notice—and sometimes without warning at all—could be excluded.\textsuperscript{366}

The practice of rejecting blacks, whose desire it was to play football, was so ordinary that white men guilty of performing acts of racial discrimination were often the most admired and respected persons by their peers. To deny African Americans the chance to play football, inter alia, was a deliberate gesture to demonstrate white racial hegemony and to evince the inadequacy of black pigment. Yet, this repudiation of black players preserved football as a white American social institution and mirrored the country’s race relations. Colleges were expected at the least to sustain the fixed racial
boundaries that delineated American life, if not to shape newer patterns of exclusion.

“America,” as Roy Wilkins acknowledged, “[was] so accustomed to setting the Negro outside any moral and ethical considerations.” Men like Yost, Kipke, Georgia Tech Coach W. Alexander, and Vanderbilt Coach Dan McGugin, amongst others, were beheld as honorable gentlemen in spite of their vigorous commitments to a Jim Crow ethic that left African Americans feeling devoid of a true exercise of citizenship and democracy.

That these football icons perpetuated segregationist mores was unremarkable given the racial climate of the period. It is, however, incredible that these cavalier chaps brazenly maintained Jim Crow customs yet were still measured as sound moral agents. These were so-called Christian gentlemen who were considered to be peerless, pious, polite, and principled ambassadors of a devout tradition that permeated American culture. Their beliefs were grounded in understanding the very nature of Jesus and the foundations of their Christian faith. But their sacred undertakings did not sway them from discriminating against African Americans. There was, in essence, a gulf in the relationship between the way these men believed and the manner in which they behaved. Amid this deficiency of acknowledged creed and actual conduct, white northerners hastened an opening for Jim Crow to flourish in the region and supplemented the meaning of whiteness as identity and ideology were reinforced through black alienation. Football, then, was a sport that whites imagined much the way they did their own religious institutions. They apotheosized heroes and used the sport of football to authenticate the racial pecking order and social arrangements to be found within American society. In so doing, white northerners failed to take seriously racism and
intentionally neglected to shift the ideas of democracy into efforts aimed at eradicating racial intolerance.

Football reflected insular values broadly held by white Americans who sought to establish social conventions that promoted and prolonged white racial superiority. Given this desire for institutions that advanced notions of white racial supremacy and, simultaneously, delimited black social involvement, it was predictable that white Americans expressed admiration for the probity of the leading coaches and athletic officials who preserved football’s pale tradition. The superficial regard for these men as respectable and righteous can be glimpsed in an observation given about Fielding Yost by one of his contemporaries. “Yost had the cleanest mind I have ever known. He was the symbol of upright manhood. He believed in athletics, properly supervised as a builder of men. His religion was simple. He hated intolerance. Creed and race made no difference to him. He was never sacrilegious. Yost loved good men. The Old Man abstained from liquor all his life. Drunkenness he abhorred.”369 Yost’s abhorrence for liquor was a constant ground for praise and was typically noted by his closest friends. Judge Willie Heston, who once played for Yost, boasted that Yost “had no use for liquor” and, true to form, was “always truthful and his morals were the best.”370 When Yost was sent a letter asking for his “opinion of alcohol and tobacco,” he responded by discussing his loathing for both addictions and introduced what he termed “man-power in the individual.” Yost stated, “That the man-power consists of intellectual, moral and physical development; that the boy must be big in all three to render good service in athletics or in any other game in business life.” For Yost, this meant that “the use of liquor and tobacco tends to
rob and cheat the boy out of the fine body he should have at maturity” both in terms of
moral and physical expansion.371

Yost’s refusal to accept liquor as a drink surely reflected his upbringing and his
dedication to what he termed the four-sided man.372 It also reflected his religious zeal. 
Since he was a staunch Methodist, Yost’s committed himself to living a life full of prayer 
and piety. As a teenager, Yost recalled, “The Bible was the principal book read in our 
home.”373 As an adult, Yost belonged to the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Ann 
Arbor. When the church solicited funds to take care of some much-needed renovations, 
Yost stepped forward and donated one hundred dollars to the cause. Yost’s munificence 
to the church was not intended for his own self-aggrandizement. Yost believed 
benevolence to be his Christian duty and frequently supplied charitable contributions to 
various civic organizations. One year, for example, Yost donated funds to Red Cross, 
Sunny Crest School for Girls, Boy Scouts, Friendship Fund, and the Ann Arbor 
Community Fund.374

Yost’s bighearted donations to these organizations, including the Sunny Crest 
School for Girls, were commonplace to his friends. Appointed athletic director in 1921, 
Yost devoted his attention to the attainment of his ideal of “sports for all,” which 
comprised women. Under his leadership, Michigan expanded its athletic facilities with 
such rapidity that his ideal did not take long to fulfill. Yost administered the construction 
of several buildings, including women athletic facilities and the vast field house that 
bears his name. Yost was progressive when it came to women, and built Palmer Field at 
the same time Michigan Stadium was built so that they could have their own athletics
facility. But as Yost’s commitment to “athletics for all” was readily being achieved, but it became increasingly clear that his commitment did not include African-Americans.375 When it came time for the dedication of Yost’s Field House in 1923, Yost articulated his “sports for all” mantra inside a broader statement expressing his love for the University of Michigan and the democratic ideals that funded her existence. He stated, “I believe in the University of Michigan, the maker of men, and in Michigan spirit, conceived in loyalty and democracy, and in her traditions, cherished by all her sons. I believe in the spirit of service to the University in all her activities. All these I promise to uphold to the best of my ability for the greatest of all universities, MICHIGAN!”376

Yost omitted black athletes from inclusion within his concept of “sports for all.” He promulgated a message of equal opportunity and uniformity amongst men and women but his “sports for all” mantra was really sports for ‘whites only’ just as the notion of political and social equality for African Americans across the country was anything but pigmented. Yost excluded colored competitors from participating on the gridiron, and when his prohibitions were abolished, he harnessed a new strategy to keep black faces out of football. Southern schools implemented Jim Crow clauses that outlawed competition by white institutions against northern squads that featured African Americans. Georgia Tech observed this custom and Yost was well aware of this southern tradition when he first arranged for a game to be played between the two schools.

Yost was dogged in his efforts to settle the score with Willis Ward. Ward’s decision to break Michigan gentleman’s agreement of not having any black players on the varsity football team offended Yost who was the architect of that segregationist
policy. Yost’s remedy was to schedule games against southern schools that were certain to object to Ward’s presence on the Wolverines roster. But schedules were contracted years in advance and adding a southern team to Michigan’s calendar proved daunting. Big Blue had last competed against a team with a team unwilling to play opposite a black man in 1928 when it completed a four-year, home-and-away schedule with Navy. The most recent southern opponents were Vanderbilt in 1923 and Oklahoma State in 1926 when Michigan fielded no Negro footballers. Yost’s determination finally paid off in 1933 when he successfully reached out to Georgia Tech.

Yost was friends with W. A. Alexander, the coach of Georgia Tech and a man whose legacy and life nearly paralleled Yost’s own days. Alexander was considered a Christian man of the highest morality with an across-the-board respectability that was matched only by his own prevailing sense of modesty. Similar to the depictions of Yost, a narrative of saintly devotion imbued Alexander’s written biography. “The boy developed a sense of democracy, a belief in the equality of man, a loathing for snobbery and a human sympathy for the unfortunate or underprivileged that became the character of the leader that Tech later was to know.” Alexander’s classmates also thought highly of him and often went to him for advice. “They took their troubles to him. His advice was sound, his moral support encouraging to them as they extricated themselves from their difficulties. He always insisted that they come clean and face the music.” But these portrayals were immeasurably overdone as both gentlemen toiled together in a deliberate attempt to prevent Ward from seeing the field against the Yellow Jackets.377
Yost began sending overtures to Alexander through his brother-in-law, Dan McGugin who was the football coach of Vanderbilt. Kendall Wood, Ward’s classmate, testified during a meeting to discuss the benching that “in November Yost called some friend or relative over long distance telephone in Virginia or some other southern state asking him to arrange a game for Michigan with some southern team.” Wood may not have been sure about the place Yost phoned but he was right about the timing and the fact that Yost had contacted a close friend and relative. McGugin apprised the Michigan athletic director of the Jim Crow clauses in place at southern schools made Ward’s participation in an intersectional game impossible. Yost was pleased with the news McGugin shared and immediately sought to schedule a team from the South. Several Western Union memos were exchanged over the next three days between Yost and Alexander attempting to set up the game between the Michigan and Georgia Tech. Yost initiated the contact with Alexander. “Would you be interested in a football game with the University of Michigan to be played at Ann Arbor on either October twentieth or November seventeenth nineteen thirty-four.” He requested that Alexander wire an immediate reply. Alexander responded by asking Yost to “clear October Twentieth Nineteen Thirty Four” and to “wire terms of contract by Western Union.” Yost then sent an offer on November 9, 1933, in which he guaranteed “five thousand dollars with option of forty per cent of gross receipts.” Alexander accepted the offer on November 10, 1933, and asked that they release the date of the game to the press on November 19, 1933. Finally, on November 11, 1933, Yost sent his approval for a press release announcing the game between the two teams.
The negotiations between Yost and Alexander ran smoothly. But the two men were pressed to explain what would happened with Ward and took longer concocting an excuse as to how a game was scheduled between a team featuring a black man and a Jim Crow school opposed to integration. Georgia Tech’s players were white, favored opponents of the same color, and made their preferences well-known. Georgia Tech sent frequent correspondences to Michigan athletic officials, including Yost and Kipke, forewarning them of Tech’s policy against playing against Negro players. In one of those letters, Georgia Tech’s faculty chairman A. H. Armstrong and Alexander expressed to Yost the need for the two parties to come to an accord on keeping Ward out of the game and offered to withhold one its own players as a sign that Georgia Tech understood the racial awkwardness of putting forth such a request to a northern university it assumed did not operate on the same Jim Crow principles that guided institutions in the South.

“We are sorry that it was not possible during your recent visit to Atlanta for us to get together and reach a definite agreement in regard to the use of the negro players in our game scheduled for October 20, 1934 at Ann Arbor. We know of course that the situation is very difficult and that we are all anxious to avoid any possible unpleasantness. As explained in our letter of January 3, we realize that the loss of such players may handicap the Michigan team and we are willing to have one or more of our players barred from the game to equalize this handicap if Michigan feels that is necessary.”

Similar messages were sent to Kipke by both Alexander and Armstrong. Armstrong reiterated the Yellow Jackets’ racial stance to the Michigan coach. “My athletic board is rather insistent that I secure some definite assurance on the matter.”
The two Techies also enlisted the assistance of McGugin, a former Michigan man himself. McGugin echoed the sentiments conveyed by Alexander and Armstrong, explaining in a letter to Yost that the Wolverines could not “afford to use colored players as it has never been done in the case of games with teams from this section.” This dispatch was similar in tone to an earlier memo that McGugin sent to his brother-in-law relaying Alexander’s retort to someone who asked, in a rather joking manner, what he was going to do about Michigan’s Negro player. Alexander deadpanned, “Michigan would not play a colored man against Georgia Tech...this had never been done by the Northern teams with Southern teams and he was sure it would not be done.”

Yost’s quietness was not a part of some racial change-of-heart. He was just as steadfast that Ward be benched but sought to keep the matter under wraps to ward off condemnation and controversy. As William Fisch, Chairman of the United Front Committee on Ward, contended, “Yost thought he could keep Ward out of this particular game and no one would notice it.” Yost relied on McGugin to communicate Michigan’s plans for withholding Ward to Georgia Tech while staying deliberately tight-lipped on the matter when rumors began to spread through Ann Arbor. At a meeting of conference coaches held in New Orleans, McGugin spoke with Armstrong about Yost’s position and concluded, “I am sure they would not want to play the game if Ward were to take part.”

Yost had ample time to cancel the game if he truly wanted to resist Georgia Tech’s demand for Ward to be purged from the lineup. McGugin counseled Yost, “If you would be embarrassed by not playing him seriously then I believe Tech would quietly
prefer to withdraw from the game and maybe the report could be given out that there was
a mistake of some kind about the date.”

Coach Alexander affirmed McGugin’s recommendation to Yost through his own appeal that the contest be cancelled rather than the two men having to endure the scrutiny for allowing a southern policy to encroach on a Northern university. “Public sentiment in the southeastern states simply demands that no team in this section play against a negro athlete…We certainly do not want to put Michigan in an embarrassing situation in regard to this matter, but feel that it is necessary to have a definite understanding well ahead of the game. It will be far better to simply call the game off than for either institution to receive unfavorable criticism in the newspapers.” But Yost had no intentions of calling the game off. He pretended to have lost sight of Ward’s presence on the varsity but stuck with his plans to host Tech on the third Saturday in October 1934.

Given that they scheduled the contest a year in advance, Yost’s claim that Willis’s participation on the team was mistakenly overlooked seemed an obvious attempt to conceal the southerner’s own racism. Yost could not have forgotten about Ward’s presence on the varsity as it was a thorn in the athletic director’s side. But Ward’s exploits on the field also etched him in the minds of every person who followed Michigan football, especially Yost. Ward was Big Blue’s top player and helped lead the Maize and Blue to consecutive Big Ten and National titles in the two seasons prior to the game with Tech. Ward earned honorable mention on the Associated Press’s All-American Team during his junior campaign even though standout black players were regularly rebuffed for postseason accolades due to blatant racism. And in a season where
the Wolverines struggled early, Ward was one of the lone bright spots on an otherwise
dismal and disappointing team.\(^{387}\) Sure, he ran the ball poorly against Chicago in the
Wolverines’ worst defeat of the season. But his numbers were better than his other
backfield teammates and he was, at least, credited for being Michigan’s “best defense
man” that day. His defensive play was referenced in a game against the Michigan State
Spartans where it was noted that he “stood out because of excellent defensive play.” To
be certain, Yost did not forget about Ward. Instead, Ward was the reason that Yost
scheduled the game in the first place. It took several letters from Georgia Tech officials at
Georgia Tech as well as follow-up correspondences from McGugin, Yost eventually
determined that Ward would be held out.\(^ {388}\)

Where was the respectable Methodist who believed in “athletics for all” and
whose morals were called the best? How could such an honorable, Christian man
committed to the principles of democracy and devoutness capitulate to such a heinous act
of racial discrimination? These questions confounded a group of local clergymen who
formed an alliance to protest Ward’s benching on the grounds of its immorality and
subversion of democratic principles. The ministers forwarded a joint resolution to Yost
challenging him to close the Michigan’s gap between belief and behavior and democracy
and deed. “As members of the Ann Arbor Ministerial Association, believing that God
made of one blood all the nations of men and that especially in a tax supported university
the same privileges should be offered to all races on the same terms; and hearing that
outsides forces are seeking to deprive a negro member of the Michigan team from
playing in the game of October 20th, we assert our belief that such racial discrimination
would be contrary to the finer principles of both Religion and Democracy.”

A similar entreaty came from Joseph H. B. Evans, a former Michigan man from
the class of 1912, who offered a damning prophecy of the consequences for excluding
Ward. “We cannot evade the tendency of our religious convictions to suggest the
visitation of Providence upon the wicked…It makes no difference from which side of the
barring of Ward comes an inspiration, the fact remains that the fine traditions of
sportsmanship have been scrapped because of a blighted and narrow viewpoint on the
part of those whose privilege and duty it is to cement the ties of fellowship among college
men and women. Willis Ward may not play in the game against Georgia Tech, but I
prophesy that you and others will see a distinct shattering of team morale. There will be
teammates of Ward’s, some of them Southerners…who will find it difficult to condone
an affront to their fellow players. And there will be Negro alumni who will accept this as
a challenge to fight for the triumph of right and justice in an institution to which they owe
allegiance and loyalty.”

Yost differed in his opinions of right and wrong. His religion reflected that of the
alumnus who proclaimed that the team was better off without Ward and pleaded to Yost
not to “force ten or more white men to play on a football team, alongside a descendent of
Ham regardless of what his ability may be.” His religion embodied the observations of
the Massachusetts female student who reassured her family “that we don’t have to kiss
the Niggers nor speak to them.” His religion also epitomized Jim Crow practices in the
South where he owned several businesses and held stock interests. Yost’s religion,
moreover, summed up the racial attitudes of countless white Americans, “North as well as South,” who did “not accept the Negro as an equal.”

Yost’s faith accompanied him onto the gridiron. As Allison Danzig writes, “Football was his religion.” African Americans were not to be welcomed to any extent on playing fields alongside white athletes just as they were segregated from white places of worship. Yost was unapologetic in his conviction that football was the exclusive property of whites. He argued, “It originated in a simple, Anglo-Saxon desire for clear, energetic sport.” Yost’s hubris on race was revealed in his description of football as a place of white entitlement. “Football,” he uttered, “has earned for itself a unique place in the life of this country and deserves the position it has acquired. It is a national autumn sport, without a rival, and as such will retain its position as long as Anglo-Saxon blood flows in the veins of the young American.” Thus, if football morally mattered, as the Ann Arbor Ministerial Association implied, African Americans were not to be included in that expression of morality.

In Yost’s view, and in the minds of white Americans who shared his racial outlook, supporters of equal treatment for African Americans violated the treasured history of white superiority and black inferiority. Yost shed additional light on his racial thinking during an incident that occurred in the early 1920s when as Michigan played McGugin’s undermanned Vanderbilt squad. The game was supposed to be a “breather” for the stout Maize and Blue. But as McGugin stood up to address his players, he positioned himself near the window of the visiting team’s dressing room. Pointing at the Wolverines, McGugin bellowed, “Down there are boys who are the grandsons of the
damn Yankees who killed your grandfathers.” Inspired by McGugin’s speech, the Southern boys from Tennessee thundered into battle and nearly defeated Big Blue. The football world chuckled, especially since McGugin was a northerner himself. Yost, however, was not the least bit amused by his brother-in-law’s remarks. He was no racial sympathizer and certainly not a supporter of Yankees. His father had fought for the Confederacy in the Civil War and he obsessed over reading books that were in tune with his racial beliefs. Ralph McGill’s letter to Yost revealed a fixation with Civil War history from the Confederate’s perspective. “I think you might enjoy two civil war novels, ‘So Red the Rose’ and ‘Long Remember.’” Yost, thus, was irate with the strategy employed by McGugin to inspire Vandy. He was twice the confederate than McGugin and sterner in his devotion to racial tradition.

Yost’s debasement of African Americans and his judgment that football was an Anglo-Saxon-only sport reflected, in its microcosm, the racial divide that existed in America. Football illustrated the American concern with the racial conditions of society. Many white Americans did not regard African Americans as capable of high civilization, wanted no social contact with them, and sought consciously to shut them out of every path toward social advancement. Whites, accordingly, were in no hurry to see football, a sport where they fashioned heroes, replicate anything more than the racial realities existing in America. As African Americans grew to be more politically engaged, making clarion calls for equality while expressing harsh disapproval of racial discrimination, whites envisioned football as an institution where notions of both identity and race supremacy could be fortified.
Football ran parallel to American life and captured the essence of national identity. It set apart whiteness and carried with it the fervor of a religious enterprise. As Charles Prebish asserted, “Sport is religion, in the full sense of the term…it may very well be America’s most powerful religion.” Bishop William Manning, likewise, emphasized that the highest ideals of both sport and Christianity were not far apart. His thinking resonated with leading coaches of the era, including Knute Rockne, who professed that “outside the church, the best thing we’ve got is good, clean football.” Like religion, football addressed the need of the spirit. “Because what sports do is real and spontaneous rather than contrived and predetermined, because the outcome of their efforts is unknown in advance to both the audience and participants,” according to Michael Mandelbaum, “the sport figure fills a role that responds to yet another need that religion once monopolized. Sports, like religion, supplies heroes.” Heroes serve two distinct purposes: they are objects of both admiration and emulation. Both types of hero, but especially emulated heroes, in the same manner as religion, impart wisdom to answer the basic question of how life should be lived. Because whiteness and white supremacy were rearticulated inside of football, there were little prospects that whites were going to accept the possibility of having colored heroes. Just as white Americans dared not conceive of the possibility of a black Jesus within their religious identity formation, there was not any chance they wanted to see black men participate in football where they could, through happenstance, become athletic idols worthy of being commended and copied. Football, instead, remained a game that reinforced whiteness and typified the values of dominant culture whose access to citizenship was guaranteed.
The implication that football personified what it meant to be an American, inevitably, required that competition and winning, hard work and self-sacrifice were necessary to define the sport. Yost registered these values as “self-reliance, moral courage…determination, energy, discipline, judgment, self-restraint, and enthusiastic interest,” which were not only thought to be “found in a successful football player,” but also were essential attributes to be paired with sentiment and spirit to promote success in life.402 All of these characteristics, which African Americans were thought to be devoid, were linked to whites’ perception of and point of entry to the American dream.403

The presumption that whites only possessed these values meant that a supposedly uncivilized people were permanently restricted access to the American dream. If America had accustomed itself to setting the Negro outside of any ethical or moral consideration, it was due to a belief that they warranted such handling. African Americans were considered dishonest and dull, indolent and inferior, all of which were antithetical to the religious and social values whites associated with football. These ideals that Harry Edwards terms “the dominant American sports creed” included character building, competition, discipline, mental and physical fitness, nationalism and religiosity.404 In this manner, whites were able to claim both a belief in God and a commitment to democracy and still not see the sin of intolerance or the necessity to challenge racial improprieties. They objected to the purpose of religion as performing any redemptive role in public life. To Yost, a devoted Methodist, it mattered slightly that Ward was a fellow Christian, a dedicated member of Second Baptist Church where he was baptized.405 Ward’s exceptional skill in the classroom and talent on the field were also irrelevant to Yost even
if Willis defied the stereotypes of African Americans as lazy, loutish, and low. None of these qualities, sacred or secular, were significant to Yost whose allegiances to promoting Anglo-Saxon values and prolonging white supremacy distinguished him in his estimation from Ward. The rupture between belief and behavior on the part of Yost and others committed to Jesus and Jim Crowism, in the North to boot, was misconstrued as racial providence. Yet, Yost’s distorted interpretation of racial divine destiny was not accepted by everyone. One Michigan supporter condemned Ward’s benching as being inobservant of “the spirit as well as the letter of our laws and in the spreading of the principles of tolerance and true Americanism.”

If Yost’s behavior failed to match his beliefs, the apathy on the part of Kipke, Ralph Aigler, and President Alexander Ruthven was in direct contradiction with the equalitarian ideas to which each man claimed a conviction. Roy Wilkins, Assistant Secretary of the NAACP, also sent Kipke several letters asking if it were true that he had agreed with Georgia Tech not to play Ward. Receiving no reply from the coach, Wilkins pressed Kipke further and indicated to him that a serious moral question was involved. He further interrogated Kipke, asking, “What about the feelings of Negro athletes who have carried the name and fame of the University of Michigan to the ends the earth with Olympic victories?” But Kipke had been given instruction to ignore every inquiry he received. If the entire incident bothered Kipke, it was only due to his avoidance of it and his reluctance to confront Yost.

Other Michigan officials complemented Kipke’s dastardly indifference to Ward’s plight. Francis Dent, a Detroit lawyer, knew that Ralph Aigler, a law professor at
Michigan, was an influential member of the Board in Control of Athletics. He requested a direct answer from Aigler on Ward’s status for the game but was given an ambiguous response that suggested that issues of racial propriety were involved. An irate Dent replied to Aigler’s vague message and pinpointed school’s potential violation of state laws. “This may seem to be a matter of etiquette and courtesy to the Board in Control of Physical Education at the University, but when we take into consideration that Mr. Lett, another colored athlete in the University of Michigan, was not allowed to play on the basketball team because of his color, the whole matter takes on a different aspect. Four or five years ago the responsible officials of the University attempted to open a separate dormitory for the colored girl students at the University of Michigan. The Honorable Fred W. Green, who was Governor of Michigan at the time, ordered the matter stopped immediately and it was stopped. It would seem that someone connected with the University never ceases in their efforts to create discrimination and segregation therein which, as I said in my previous letter, is a direct violation of Act number 328, Public Acts of 1931, especially Sections 146 and 147.” Dent had witnessed Jim Crowism on the Ann Arbor campus in the past and recognized that it portended bad things for Ward. Aigler’s vagueness only exacerbated an already annoying issue for Dent. Aigler finally came with an answer for Dent, one that revealed his lack of concern for Ward. He first indicated that participation in intercollegiate athletics was not a matter of right or duty but of privilege. He also stated that as a well-bred host, Michigan should take the feelings of Georgia Tech into consideration.  

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Aigler had previously given the same excuses to Joseph H. B. Evans, a Michigan alumnus, who also objected to the benching of Ward. Aigler stated his belief that “the home institution and team are in a very real sense hosts of the visiting team. Accordingly, the customary courtesies…hosts are expected to display toward their guests are to be normally anticipated in the relationships between college and athletic teams.” But Evan countered with an analogy that exposed the racial coldness on the part of Aigler and the university. “Let’s say that I invite guests to come to my home and be a part of the family circle but I find that the guest has antipathy for my two fine Spitz dogs whose presence adds greatly to our family’s enjoyment and pleasure. He still objects to the dogs no matter how gentle and well-bred they may be. Will I put my dogs outside to cater to the feelings of my guest? Most certainly yes. But now suppose that same guest insists that the presence of my daughter, who to me represents one who had held high the family name and traditions, is distasteful to him. Shall I then give way to this whim and banish my daughter from the family hearth during his stay? If I did I should not be worthy of the name of father and my relatives and friends would be right in branding such action as contemptible. There is a distinct difference in the treatment of my daughter as opposed to the treatment of my dogs.” In Evans’ mind, Michigan was putting Ward on the back porch and treating him as something less than human—a dog—while its bigoted guests enjoyed their visit. That Aigler could be so unconcerned for Ward was a symbol of moral cowardice that white northerners showed by ignoring racial prejudice.

Ward was benched due to Michigan’s lack of ethical fortitude and inability to sustain the democratic principles that purportedly shaped the institution. Kipke and
Aigler, like Yost, aborted the chance to exercise a conduct consistent with the democratic and devout creeds to which they subscribed. President Ruthven also was complicit in Ward’s exclusion from Michigan Stadium. As the Ward incident became a cause célèbre on campus and in the press, Ruthven declared to a friend, “My life is being made miserable by arguments with the colored brethren…I wish now that I had taken the Ward matter into my own hands.” It was not as if Ruthven did not have the opportunity to do so. Several correspondences mailed directly to him requesting that he get involved were never personally returned to their respective senders. Ruthven admitted that he chose not to answer the letters. As an alternative, he enlisted Aigler to respond to the complaints and to acknowledge that he entrusted the Michigan lawyer with handling the problem.411

Ruthven’s insouciance conflicted with his own feeling that the Board in Control of Athletics should have foreseen the difficulty of scheduling a game with a southern school. He also believed that the Board in Control of Athletics was in error for their role in producing the racial quagmire that caused so much backlash and protest on campus and throughout the community. Ruthven wrote in a letter to A. Richard Frank, “I have convinced myself that the Board in Control of Physical Education invited Georgia Tech to play in Ann Arbor without any thought of Willis Ward…the Board was in error for scheduling the game and should avoid anything of this kind in the future.” Ruthven, nevertheless, opted to have Yost and others oversee the issue. “I have not been answering letters received in reference to the Georgia Tech game because the task of selecting players and scheduling games is entirely in the hands of the Board in Control of Physical Education.” His frustrations, thus, were self-provoked. Rather than choosing to vocalize
his displeasure with Yost’s hard-to-miss racism, Ruthven acted aloof. Just as Yost barefacedly breached the Christian code of ethics by conditioning an atmosphere of Jim Crowism in the North, Ruthven had done the same through his reticence to espouse the democratic principles that supposedly undergirded Michigan.412

The University of Michigan botched every opportunity to turn moral creed into magnanimous conduct in an effort to stall Jim Crow from reaching the doorsteps of the Big House. A telegram from the Detroit Medical Society fittingly captured the school’s racial ineptitude. “The leading Northern University” appeared “not morally strong enough to take the proper stand against the damnable Southern race prejudice.” Such was the way of the North.413

Racial Conformity and the Coin of Paternalism

Ward’s status for the contest was kept unknown to the general public up until game time. Officials at both schools, Michigan’s Fielding Yost, Harry Kipke, and Ralph Aigler and Georgia Tech’s W.A. Alexander and A.H. Armstrong, were deliberately quiet on the matter. Even Willis himself refused to make any statements whatsoever, choosing to stay tight-lipped during the entire affair. He uttered not a word at the rally held on his behalf the night before the game despite having the support of 1500 students as well as alumni, faculty, and concerned parties from across the country. But the lack of transparency concerning his availability for the game provided little in the way of the racial subterfuge Michigan officials sought. It was evident that he was to be a spectator on the bench alongside Bill Renner, the team’s injured quarterback. Willis was informed by Yost during the summer prior to the start of the season that he was not permitted to
play in the much ballyhooed intersectional bout because of Georgia Tech’s segregationist clause. When given the news he was to be Jim Crowed, Ward reportedly “hung his head in disgust.”

It did not take long for Ward’s friends, both black and white, to shift their attention from interrogating the University of Michigan on how the school planned to respond to Georgia Tech’s request to questioning Ward directly. Given the racial ignominy he experienced upon learning that he was to be benched, this biracial coalition sensed the need to urge his repudiation of Michigan’s version of Jim Crow. They badgered him for answers: “What [are you] going to do; [are you] going to bow to those racists; whose side [are you] on?” Initially, Ward tried to placate their fears of his pending exclusion by claiming that the roster for the game had not been published. “Well,” his patience wasting away with every plea for clarity, “the lineup has not been posted.” His confidence, nonetheless, receded as doubts escalated. “Obviously the schedules are made four and five, six years ahead of time. They make the lineup.” In his heart, Ward wanted to believe that he was a victim of an arrangement contracted years before he considered enrolling at Michigan. In truth, the Georgia Tech game was scheduled a year earlier, prompted by a prejudiced pact between two southerners and a carpetbagger. Though intersectional games between northern and southern football teams began as early as the 1890s, the desire by “Lost Cause” Dixiecrats for racial exclusion and white supremacy to regulate these competitions made organizing them harder. For Yost, his willingness to invite the racial customs of the South to Ann Arbor not only furnished states’ rights advocates with a figurative rematch of the Civil War and the
chance to gain a symbolic victory but it also granted him the opening to reawaken Michigan’s own de facto segregationist practices. With Ward becoming the university’s first black letterman in 40 years, angering the school’s hidebound athletic director and effectively breaking its color barrier, Yost added Georgia Tech to the team’s opponents list in a last-minute deal. During the latter stages of the 1933 season, with Ward leading the Wolverine’s march toward a second consecutive National Title, Yost was maneuvering to escort Jim Crow to the Big House.415

Yost’s scheme to debase Willis grew into a public controversy. Local rumors, sparked by an ambitious reporter’s exposé, persisted all summer long and aided Ward’s backers who grew frustrated with his excuses as to whether or not he would play. When it appeared in the town newspaper, Ward, though upset with the lack of journalistic integrity he deemed the writer showed in his coverage, finally confessed he had been snubbed. Persuaded by his supporters that quitting was the only appropriate response, he informed his closest associates of his intentions to resign from the team. His followers grasped that a successful resignation from the squad necessitated financial backing to insure continual payment of his instructional fees for his final year of matriculation. Though tuition was not offered to athletes during this era, it was not uncommon for schools to sponsor black players who were given financial assistance to fund their education. If Ward left the team, this aid would indeed be curtailed and the jobs that he secured through Coach Kipke terminated. His allies were cognizant of these consequences and quickly offered monetary provisions to assist him. As John Behee writes, “Friends were delighted and began collecting whatever money they could to help
finance his senior year. There would be no stooping to the white man.” Black churches also took up collections. If Jim Crow was to make inroads into Michigan, it was not going to trample on the rear of Ward.416

These efforts to facilitate his departure from the Wolverines were wasted. Willis wrote Coach Harry Kipke to notify him of his decision to depart the team. Taken aback, Kipke reminded Ward of the battle waged by [James] Murfin, [Guy] Miller, himself, and others to get him into a Maize and Blue uniform. Kipke did not hesitate to convey his own personal sacrifice with having Willis on the team, almost describing it as a nuisance. Even if his biggest problems amounted to a few lodging issues, he explained emphatically to Willis that he suffered many troubles precipitated by race during the previous years and directed his star not to abandon the team. Kipke insisted that he “would never do…for another black” what he did for Ward if the star back walked out. The patronizing tone of his Head Coach’s appeal likely dismayed the naïve youngster who esteemed Kipke as “one of the fairest men [he] knew—ever.” Willis once professed that the evenhanded coach “loved me as a boy and was determined to fight anyone who might appear to try to hurt me because of race.” Willis heard from reliable sources that “on several occasions Kipke took his coat off…with those who bitterly opposed having a Negro play for Michigan.” Kipke had also helped him secure a job washing dishes at the Michigan Union where black students were once barred from crossing the threshold, a fact his frat brother H.B. Evans, a 1915 Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University, once disclosed to him.417 Yet on this day, the old ball coach bargained for Ward’s calm and compliance with the coin of paternalism.418
Paternalism delineated the relationship between white officials and black athletes in the North. Kipke’s warning to Willis was a part of a larger pattern adopted by coaches and other athletic representatives to intimidate players who threatened to quit a team due to racial discrimination. Eddie Tolan, Michigan’s celebrated track star, was a victim of such an ultimatum in late 1930. Tolan, along with Gus Moore and John Lewis, were denied temporary housing at the Illinois Athletic Club and the Chicago Athletic Club where their teammates were residing. Just two months after Tolan rose to national prominence for setting a new world record of 10.2 seconds in the 100-meter dash, with impressive victories over George Simpson and Olympic champion Percy Williams, he was unable to outrun Jim Crow. Determined to relinquish his spot on the team, Tolan was chastised by an AAU official who declared the talented trackman would “be through in athletics forever” if he quit the team.419

Four years later, Willis confronted the same racialized coercion. His reaction to Kipke’s bigoted blackmailing was fraught with discomfit and dread. On the one hand, if he deserted the team he might jeopardize future opportunities for other black athletes looking to suit up for the Wolverines. Even if only hypothetical, the artificial guilt Kipke was eager to assign him for quitting stood contrary to Ward’s own willingness to defy the school’s racial prejudice. Given that it had taken a court injunction and close to forty years for Michigan to field its second black letterman, sacrificing the destiny of other African Americans solely to demonstrate his own displeasure with the University’s curtsy to racial discrimination appeared to him a tad hasty and injudicious. On the other hand, by not turning in his jersey, Ward saw it possible for Michigan to escape criticism for
having segregated him, the school’s lone black player, in observance of the South’s Jim
Crow customs. Such an outwardly toadyish move on his part was certain to be readily
interpreted as cowardice.

Sensing Willis’s vacillation, Kipke summoned Harry Bennett, Henry Ford’s Head
of Internal Security in the Ford Service Department, for help convincing Ward. Bennett
had known Willis for several years and gave the young lad summertime employment at
the Ford Motor Company. A close friend of Kipke, the two men had a hush-hush
agreement that provided Michigan athletes with seasonal work. Ward started out driving
trucks in the Transportation Department, and prided himself off the opportunity that was
extended to him. “That [driving trucks] was an effort to teach me what the physical
layout of the Ford Motor Company was. For vacations and one summer I drove a truck.”
His understanding was always marked by a gratifying sense of exceptionality, of being
treated distinctively from other Negroes. “You see, I had Mr. Harry Bennett as well as
Mr. Henry Ford interested in me inasmuch as it was unusual for a colored boy to play
football on a team of the caliber of Michigan football during that period.” Thus, when
Ford suggested that Willis consider a career at his company, offering him part-time labor,
the young man was elated.420

The opening to join the Ford Motor Company was read differently by his father
who toiled in the company’s foundry for years. Though the company was one of the least
discriminatory when it came to employing black labor and putting them into semi-skilled
and skilled work, it also placed them mainly into “the most distasteful jobs, such as those
in the metal foundry, where workers were paid the same as co-workers who worked in

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less onerous jobs.” The foundry at the River Rouge Plant, in fact, was often referred to as the “black department.” Colored workers, upset with the strenuous work doled out to them, repeatedly quit. In 1919, alone, the Ford Motor Company lost 868 of its 1597 black staff. Whereas Henry Ford could allude to the longevity of William Perry, the first African American he hired, could publicize his significant black workforce at a time when Cadillac, Chevrolet, Dodge, and Fisher Body refused to breach racial tradition, or could even tout the successful rise of James C. Price, who became his first salaried employee in 1924, he could not deny the fact that the majority of his Negro personnel found themselves laboring in the foundry where incidents of pneumonia and tuberculosis were rampant. Even if Willis was tasked with more respectful work, Henry Ward’s memory of slogging and sweating in the foundry pushed him to admonish his son not to take a job with Ford.421

Henry and the family yearned for Willis to become an attorney. His father dreamt of the day when his youngest kid would be practicing law. Willis had an enormous burden on his shoulder to fulfill his father’s aspirations since he was the only Ward child that went to college. “I seemed to have been the family champion so to speak,” he acknowledged. He continued, “An opportunity with the Ford Motor Company didn’t appeal too strong at that time.” Willis, nonetheless, disregarded his father’s wishes, at least initially. He gladly accepted work as a truck driver rather than focus on the long-term goal of becoming a lawyer. To Ward, the job allotted to him at the Ford Motor Company was tantamount to penetrating Michigan’s segregationist barricade. In a corporation where Henry Ward experienced slight dignity, Willis proudly remarked,
“They did not remember when they had another colored truck driver in the Ford plant.”

For a second time, he became a racial pioneer just as he was the day he stepped on the practice field as a Michigan Wolverine. By the next summer, he was placed in the employment office as a clerk under Arnold Miller and trained in the method of handling employees for purposes of hiring. It was his first encounter with Don Marshall, an African American whom Ward recalled as “very fine” yet “a controversial character.” He and Marshall later co-managed the Ford Motor Company’s Employment Department, which was primarily responsible for attracting and supervising black workers. Willis, once again, had made it.

Bennett seemed aware of Ward’s sense of accomplishment with being able to work holidays and summers at the Ford Motor Company. Thus, he exploited the youth’s emerging fondness for individualism. Bennett mocked Willis’s connections while harking back to Henry Ford’s benefaction. “Who are your friends?” Bennett derisively inquired. Who can help you with nothing gained for themselves?” he demanded. In spite of Bennett speaking to him “like a Dutch uncle,” as Willis later portrayed it, he casually acquiesced. Undoubtedly deflated, and with self-esteem wedged deep in his chest, Ward chose to “ride it out and not quit the game.” The entreaties by Kipke and Bennett were successful. Paternalism won the day.

Willis Ward—Coward or Hero?

Hardly a victim, Willis elected to adopt a philosophy that men like Forrester B. Washington and John C. Dancy of the Detroit Urban League (DUL) and prominent clergymen like Father Everard W. Daniel and his father’s pastor Reverend Robert Bradby
long embraced: continual dependency on Henry Ford and white patronage. Ward’s decision to remain on the team in the face of obdurate racism, in reality, was a racial compromise grounded in accommodationist-thinking and stranded in lost opportunity. He not only committed himself to suffering the humiliation of being benched because of his skin color but he also put himself in a position to have to bear the psychic torment of having to run daily into the men who were complicit in the effort to Jim Crow him. The choice to stay on the squad also disturbed his staunchest supporters. These advocates, particularly black Americans around the country who attached themselves and their own prospects for racial equality vicariously to his fate, were disappointed by his obsequious capitulation. It outwardly signaled that another battle was lost to Jim Crow, only this time in a northern venue where the absence of legal underpinnings authorizing racial separation and the ostensible belief in racial egalitarianism were abruptly undermined by the segregationist practices now being sanctioned and set up to reign.

The majority of Ward’s circle turned into critics, belittling the fallen star for what these rapidly growing detractors perceived as a dastardly and gutless act. Very few individuals, in contrast, viewed him as a hero for stomaching Jim Crow. Art Randall, a former roommate of Ward, captured the essence of this lopsided appraisal of Ward in an editorial column entitled, “Willis Ward Coward or Hero,” which Randall wrote for the Atlanta Daily World shortly after his graduation from the University of Michigan. “Many persons have condemned what they chose to call Willis Ward’s spineless attitude in regard to the reported decision of the University of Michigan officials not to allow him to play in the Michigan-Georgia Tech game. They say that any player who knuckles down
under a raw deal like that after he has clearly proved his merit to a position in the starting lineup is a coward. He should turn in his suit, they say, and refuse to play in another game for a school that discriminated so grossly against him.”

Black newspapers across the country, ever true to their “main function” as “an organ of protest,” echoed Randall’s sentiment. The Negro press was the vanguard for censure of northern schools guilty of racism. But black journalists also opposed colored athletes who yielded to racist decrees. They were especially antagonistic toward African-American sportsmen who ignored not only their influence across the country but also their instruction not to cater to racist organizations. They urged Jesse Owens, for example, not to attend Ohio State University. The Chicago Defender asked, “Why help advertise an institution that majors in prejudice?” The black press accused Ohio State University of drawing “a color line on our girls in its [home] economics department, shamefully insulting and mistreating Miss Doris Weaver and at least two other girl students of color who preceded her in that department, wholly on the account of their racial connection.” Owens was “begged…to attend any other university or college that properly treated Afro-American students, and he refused to do so.” Black journalists abruptly vilified him for rebuffing their recommendation. Once labeled a “credit to his race” by Floyd Rowe of the Cleveland Board of Education, the Negro press concluded that “under the circumstances…we do not think so.”

Black athletes such as Owens “were also reminded by the black press that…neither the major leagues nor the National Football League admitted blacks.”

Conversely, the chiding of African-American athletes for succumbing to racial injustice
did not prohibit journalists from offering commendations when black competitors provided great performances. When Owens put on a mind-blowing display of incredible athletic prowess, posting three world records at the National Intercollegiate competition held in Ann Arbor on May 25, 1935, the Negro press was effusive in its praise of him. The black media was also critical of the theories concocted by self-styled white experts to explain African-American athletic dominance. During the interwar period, it was not uncommon for anatomy and physiology to be invoked to rationalize the success of African Americans and to put a ceiling on declarations that prowess in contests of speed, stamina, and strength bespoke fitness for other realms of endeavor. This “pseudo” science simultaneously connected innate racial differences both to account for Negro athletic ascendancy and to buttress prevailing notions of Negro inferiority. Edwin Bancroft Henderson, a prominent African-American sportswriter, penned several articles for the Messenger attacking racial stereotypes associated with black athletes and organized sport. Likewise, the black press condemned white newspapers that did not cover the celebrated feats of black superstars thoroughly or sometimes at all.

In all instances, including its disapprovals of those individuals who ceded to white racial prejudice, the Negro press demonstrated just how critical to black progress African-American athletes were even as these reporters lamented seeing colored sensations on competing on behalf of white institutions. For this reason, Ward was denounced as a race traitor who kowtowed to the University of Michigan and armed its administration and athletic officials with the racial weaponry to assault Negroes whenever the school reckoned it necessary to adhere to a rigid Jim Crow system. His own
perspective did not ease the blame he received. “I am only a player,” he explained, “and I shall do as my coaches and officials order. If my school chooses to make a martyr of me who at all times has been loyal to my school and obedient to their orders, I shall accept their decision without question. The responsibility rests in the hands of these men who dictate the policy of this ‘liberal’ institution.” Black reporters were not swayed. When Ward appeared at the very next game, ultimately missing a kick that would have tied the score against Illinois, Richard Jackson of the St. Louis Argus lamented that “mist must have covered [Ward’s] eyes so that they were dim when he…recalled that the Saturday before he was kept on the bench like something less than a man.” Frank A. (Fay) Young, dean of the trade, led a more scathing stampede against Ward for his racial accommodationism. He charged, “There are too many of us who want to go along and continue getting ‘batted down as fast as we get up.’” His unsympathetic critique of Willis did not end there. Instead, Young elaborated on his contention Willis should have permanently suspended his participation on the team. “I am not a radical but I do think when a guy comes along and keeps knocking the chip off your shoulder, you ought to quit turning the other cheek to him to get punched in the jaw. It is time for us folks to wake up.”

Young’s unflattering assessment of Ward epitomized the shift between Afro-Americans steadfast in their dedication to a politics of respectability and those who were ready to engage a more militant political struggle. Reminiscent of the race uplift ideology that infused black politics since the late Nineteenth Century, Ward’s vision of counteracting racial discrimination was dressed in propriety and restraint. His racial
etiquette clinched tightly to the aim of winning whites over with moral suasion rather than vigorously contest white assumptions about black inferiority. These tactics, habitually glimpsed as wanting by more outspoken black activists, were cemented in racial self-interest. Supporters of this approach, however, interpreted the pleas for Willis to be more candid and courageous in his response to racial unfairness as unreasonable.  

Randall’s defense of Ward encapsulated the belief that respectability offered a more progressive way forward for black Americans. Randall argued that Ward had no other option but to comply with the verdict rendered by the University of Michigan. Quitting, he reasoned, would be a visceral act of racial selfishness, thwarting the prospects of other colored athletes playing for the school. Randall sardonically asked, “What if Ward had turned in his suit in a burst of justifiable though hasty emotion? If he were but an individual, such a course would perhaps be the right one to take. It would be a tit-for-tat affair: if the team doesn’t appreciate using his services, he doesn’t appreciate the team enough to lend his efforts to its winning of games.” If Ward imagined himself a trailblazer for other African Americans, Randall indemnified that outlook. “Willis Ward…is not an individual. He is a symbol,” he elucidated. Randall continued, “He [Ward] is the first Negro to win a place on the football team in that school in recent years, and he must consider himself a foundation stone upon which all future colored athletes who attend that school must build.” Randall overlooked the ineffectuality of respectability, neglecting to address the fact that black athletes who cooperated with their team still were at risk for haphazard racial embarrassment. In a roundabout way, he disparaged African Americans who were belligerent in their outburst against racial
injustice. He concluded, “Truculence and sullenness upon his part would probably mark ‘finis’ to the Negro football player in his university…No! Ward should not be condemned as a coward. He should be praised for swallowing his pride and disappointment like a man, and sticking on the glory trail despite its bitter humiliation.”

By Randall’s estimation, Ward was a racial icon whose primary aim it was to carry the “burden of representation” for the rest of the race. This change in responsibility for Ward, from a regular man to a racial mark, was embodied previously in a letter sent to Harry Kipke by Michigan alumnus W. Rankin Lewis less than a month before the game between the Wolverines and the Yellow Jackets. Lewis’s letter revealed the racial duality that encumbered African-American athletes during much of the Twentieth Century as they were caught in the vicious cycle of having to appeal to two separate worlds: a white world that did not regard them as equals and a black world that placed them on the pedestal as the race’s only hope for progress. The latter was a part of the enlistment of athletics as a transformative site of racial reform. Rankin asserted, “It is generally rumored that you are not going to let Willis Ward, the Negro who represents all to us in the athletic world, the man whom we are telling our children about as an example of manhood, a man who has won recognition because of his ability, in fact the man who is rebuilding the morale of our younger Negroes and stands as an encouragement to higher education to us as a group, play in the above mentioned game because of his race.” Like Jack Johnson before him, Ward was an emblem of black hope.
Lewis’s correspondence also evinced the affect that Willis’s benching had on the entire race. Within the racial mythology of black America, sports were interconnected with notions of freedom, mobility, and racial progress. The goals of racial improvement were united with a strategy of “muscular assimilationism” whereby the triumph over racism in sports were seen as illustrative of African Americans’ potential to contribute to the economic, political, and social life of the nation. Black leaders envisaged sport as opportunities for white Americans to observe their Negro counterparts as competent, distinguished, and skilled. Groups such as the NAACP and National Urban League enlisted muscular assimilationism in the burgeoning civil rights crusade, and they were joined by HBCU administrators who envisioned black athletic achievement as having the enormous potential to enhance African-American life. Hampton Institute President Arthur Howe asserted that the gold and silver medals won by Eddie Tolan and Ralph Metcalfe at the 1932 Summer Games registered more than a “source of pride and inspiration for black Americans.” Their Olympic conquests, per his observation, also incarnated “many less advertised victories…in more significant realms.”

Black journalists, notably Edwin Henderson, further promoted this principle of muscular assimilationism. Henderson once noted that even if black intellectuals “[had] risen to high planes of social relationships with individuals of other races that transcend the physical,” it was colored athletes who made the significant contributions to racial understanding and sensitivity. Black athletes, in Henderson’s opinion, were endowed with an odd sense of race-transformative hegemony. Their presence and prominence permitted them to flout every unconstructive stereotype used against African Americans.
to establish their supposed inferiority. White supremacist ideology, which was carefully maintained through persuading Negroes that they possessed unattractive bodies, were mentally inferior, and were uncultured, was best confronted by African-American athletes whose exceptional sport performances were unparalleled in producing the primeval responses necessary to alter racial attitudes and generalizations. As these apocryphal tales of Negro inadequacy were erased, black progress was assured. All of these things were true in the case of Ward who signified the prevailing optimism of a collective black aspiration to overcome racial segregation. Thus, the decision to force him to the sit out the game was equivalent to sidelining black political and social advancement.

Likewise, Lewis’s petition to Kipke laid bare the epiphenomenal limbo that black athletes found themselves in during this brutal period of racial inequality. By their mere participation in sports, African-American sportsmen were forced to cozy up to white America’s embrace of the values and virtues of Jim Crow. Black players were typically alone and isolated, were obliged to hear the patented roars of “kill the nigger,” and were subjected to random benching and brutality. Still, an auxiliary phenomenon emerged for black athletes. Like Ward, they drifted in a dichotomized space of racial ambiguity that engendered a sense of “double consciousness” in these players. They were forced to negotiate the contradictory tension of the divided self in which what it meant to be an American citizen in a milieu where their inferiority was presupposed and what it meant to be ‘black’ in a venue where individualism was rebuffed in favor of collective witnessing proved negating. In a very real sense, black athletes moved in and out of their roles as
African Americans, Americans, and athletes.\textsuperscript{443} The scope of this racial vagueness was easily noticed in the racial incidents that simultaneously earned a black athlete both admiration and antipathy. Whereas Art Randall proclaimed that Ward “has brought great honor to his race by cinching a position on the best team in the country,” other Afro-Americans accused him of being a traitor for his timidity and allegiance to the team that disgraced him.\textsuperscript{444}

Black athletes tackled this racial quagmire as they intended to counteract their ambiguous status in American culture. For Ward especially, it seemed improbable that he could maintain his own epitome as a symbol of racial progress and survival and, at the same time, not adhere to the values upheld by the dominant society. Yet, he gave legitimacy to racial intolerance by following the orders of Bennett and Kipke. In either case, the Michigan-Georgia Tech game was devastating for him. Except for a victory over the eminent Jesse Owens at the Ohio State indoor dual meet, his senior year was a lackluster one. While Yost insouciantly announced to Georgia Tech Coach W. A. Alexander his faint embarrassment in the episode following the game—“I never dreamed there would be so much agitation about the matter”—the hurt experienced by Willis was not superficial or so casually dismissed. Ward summed up his feelings years later. “It was not the fact that I was not made a captain of either football or track that destroyed my will. It was the fact that I couldn’t play in the Georgia Tech game. That all of a sudden, the practice that you just did because it was the thing to do that was good…all of a sudden becomes drudgery.” Ward conceded that his will to work was substantially affected by the benching. “I went through the motions, both in football and track,
excepting the time I ran Jesse Owens and beat him. I got motivated and beat him twice, but Jesse beat me the next two times out. Aside from those two instances, I would have preferred to quit."
CHAPTER 5: LOST OPPORTUNITIES

It is but human experience to find that the complete suppression of a race is impossible. Despite inner discouragement and submission to the oppression of others there persisted the might spirit, the emotional rebound that kept a vast number struggling for its rights, for self-expression, and for social uplift. Such men, in many cases, became targets for the white race. They were denounced as trouble makers. They were denied opportunity. 446

If Willis had any ounce of pride remaining after the Michigan-Georgia Tech game, it was enough for him to avoid seeking advice from his father, Henry. Although Ward felt profound humiliation over being benched against the Yellow Jackets and banned from Michigan’s stadium, he elected not to telephone his dad. He also did not bother to send a telegram. That the two men had hardly been on speaking terms for years removed some of the peculiarity out of Willis’s decision not to call Henry. But Willis had other reasons for thinking his “father couldn’t be of much help.” Of course, he wanted to convince himself that his father’s deep, religious convictions and robust ties to the church prevented him from possessing the know-how to handle his son’s regrettable run-in with Jim Crow. “He was a strong Baptist deacon, the oldest black church in the state,” Ward explained corroborating his own claims regarding his father’s racial artlessness. “He didn’t know about a problem like this.” Willis’s reluctance to contact his father, then again, had very little to do with the senior Ward’s penchant for piety or his inability to grasp the ferocity of racial intolerance in the North. Henry warned his son repeatedly
against becoming too comfortable at Michigan “because he knew” that it was only a matter of time before the school was going to turn its back on him. He was not convinced that “a white kid would ever block another white kid for a black.” Whereas Henry acquired a Midwestern caginess for tackling thorny issues, he liberated his reticence when it came to confronting Willis’s racial gullibility head-on. “Why are you playing with all these white kids?” wondered Henry. Doubtless, this question lingered in Willis’s mind. He could either endure his father’s “I told you so” pronouncements or keep the matter to himself. He opted to remain silent just as he did during the summer months prior to the 1934 season when he was first notified that he was to be sidelined in the game against Georgia Tech.\(^447\)

**The Fear of Hitler and the Lost Redemption of Olympic Glory**

The incident decimated Ward’s confidence. Despite his achievements on the track field and his besting of Owens in the sixty-yard dash and sixty-five yard hurdles at Yost Fieldhouse in 1935, he lost his competitive will. He abandoned his dream of competing in the 1936 Olympics where he was not only a shoo-in to make the U.S. Decathlon team but also a favorite to capture gold. Ward cited his fear of further racial exclusion as his rationale for not desiring to participate. “I could have won the high jump—I’ll always believe I could have owned the high jump. I could have won the hurdles. I could have won the decathlon…But that Georgia Tech game killed me. I frankly felt they would not let black athletes compete.” Ward’s self-assurance that he could have starred at the Olympics was not soiled in delusion. Michigan developed a reputation as “Black Olympic” University. The school had sent DeHart Hubbard, Ralph Metcalfe, and Eddie
Tolan to the Olympics in the past decade. As the only man to have defeated Owens in a
dash event, Ward was urged by Wolverine assistant track coach Ken Doherty, himself a
bronze medalist in the 1928 Olympics, to train for the decathlon because of his all-around
skills. Ward’s performance in the 1932 Olympic Trials, where he barely missed
qualifying for the team after finishing fourth place in the High Jump, raised Doherty’s
enthusiasm. Further, an unofficial vote by an informal committee comprised of writers
from the San Francisco Spokesman, St. Louis Argus, and Boston Chronicle predicted the
inimitable Ward to make the team, and specifically to take part in the high jump, hurdles,
and sprint and relays.448

There was, nonetheless, reason for Willis to presume that he might be barred from
partaking in the Games in Berlin, namely the frightening possibility that Adolph Hitler’s
uncompromising racial stance appeared an issue. Black newspapers began pointing to the
looming Second Italo-Abyssinian War as an ominous sign in the late summer of 1935.
The black press believed that Hitler’s racial feeling toward African Americans hinged on
the impending outcome of the war. A victory by Ethiopia might militate against Negro
athletes receiving their right to vie for Olympic glory. Ed Gordon, Cornelius Johnson,
Metcalfe, and Tolan had already exposed the myth of Nordic superiority during the 1932
Olympics. Tolan’s unforgettable display made him “the toast of the colored races and
Japan,” which also honored him for his athletic dominance. The last thing Hitler wanted
is for a minority group to undermine his white supremacist order on a national stage with
Berlin as its backdrop.449
Hitler’s ascension to power in Germany deepened Jewish anxiety, as Nazis promised to eliminate Jews from economic life. By the early spring of 1933, American Jews held a mass rally in New York’s Madison Square Garden to protest Hitler’s anti-Jewish policies and to organize a boycott of German goods in an attempt to put pressure on the Nazi regime. But Hitler’s rise also preoccupied the attention of others, above all African Americans who lamented the prejudice against Jews and likened Nazism to American racism. Walter White, Secretary of the NAACP, gave a preview of the “Double-V” campaign that typified black militancy during World War II, when he encouraged his comrades to fight the emerging fascism abroad and racial atrocities at home. “We Negroes know what this means since it has happened to us. What happens to one minority can happen to others—a lesson which Jews, Negroes, and all minorities must know.”

Although White’s musings on Hitler may have not seeped into the thinking of Ward or his closest acquaintances, the menace of Nazism worried them. “Hitler was going crazy over in Europe in ’33, 34…the Reichstag and all those things,” Ward recounted. “And some of my friends said that while supposing you make the Olympic Team, you go over there, and Hitler doesn’t want…blacks to play? Just like Georgia Tech. And it made sense to me. So it killed my desire to excel.” Though he ultimately eschewed the advice given to him by his supporters to quit Michigan football, he stuck with their recommendation to avoid “Hitler’s Olympics.” He attended the Olympic Trials in Randall’s Island, New York, in July 1936. But Ward pulled out of the competition and went home. There were rumors that injuries hampered his fate and ended
his quest for Olympic berth.\textsuperscript{452} Willis hurt himself at the Penn Relays in April 1935, over a year beforehand, while running in the 100-meter dash. He pulled a muscle after covering less than 50 meters and was obliged to withdraw from the event. In spite of this, the injury did not prevent him from rejoining his team two weeks later for a major track meet against Owens and rival Ohio State. Willis claimed that he “was in good condition.” It also did not impede his participation later that May for what was to be his last race as a Michigan Wolverine.\textsuperscript{453}

The knee was definitely healed by June 1935. He starred on the first day of National Decathlon Championship held in San Diego, California. He captured four of the first five events to take the early lead over defending champion Bob Clark and four other Californians contending for the title. He collected top totals in the 100-meter dash (running it in 11 seconds), the broad jump (with a leap of 23.59 feet), the high jump (clearing the bar at 6.26 feet), and the 400-meter dash (with a time of 0:50:8). Ward ultimately lost to Clark who retained his title, and he finished in a disappointing fourth place. But his lackluster performance on day two of the competition had little to do with the knee and everything to do with his relative inexperience. He did not score any points in the pole vault, an event in which he participated for the first time. He also did not fare well in the javelin and discus—two contests he had not competed in since high school.
Ward, who won only one additional event on the last day of the meet, indicated that if he could learn to vault and could improve his performance in the javelin or discus, he would be hard to beat. He did, however, mention the knee injury.\footnote{454}

If Ward was seriously hurt, the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) was unaware. The committee only reported the injuries AAU Champion Eulace Peacock, who starred alongside Ward and Owens on many occasions. Ironically, Peacock pulled a thigh muscle at the ’36 Penn Relays a little over two months before Olympic trials. Though he won an appeal from USOC after missing the remainder of the track season, he ultimately was unable to contend. There was no mentioning that injuries derailed Ward’s fortunes, however. Instead, the USOC pointed to the Georgia Tech game as ruining his odds.
Willis confirmed the committee’s knowledge of the situation. He divulged, “To be a champion, you have to work at it. You may have natural ability, but you have to sharpen those tools and work and work and work…And you have to be dedicated. Well, it hit me there: Why should I be concerned about knocking my brains out and then I go over and they do this to me. I would be stir crazy.”

Ward admitted that he did not contemplate the Olympics. While many people thought the event created a platform for him to do what he did best—run track—Willis’s resolve was to concentrate his attention elsewhere. He finally turned to law, perhaps to the delight of his father. Ward stirred doubts that he was going to enter several months before the Olympic trials and referred to his newfound interests as a motive. “I’ve become so interested in law that it’s crowded out my interest in athletics, as far as competition is concerned. Law School isn’t like undergraduate work. It takes plenty of study, and I’m afraid the training necessary to go to the Olympics would hurt my standing for a degree.” No matter how noble his legal ambitions, he could hardly evade the excuses that accentuated just how much the Michigan-Georgia Tech game devastated his aspirations. “Then…there’s the cost of the trip to be considered.” He even brought up the leg injury he suffered during his senior year, which handicapped his execution. “I haven’t done a tap of training and I don’t know about the leg,” he rationalized, stoking the flames of gossip by local reporters that surfaced later during the week of the Olympic trials when it appeared he had mysteriously pulled out.

There were incentives to be gained from staying away from the Olympics, regardless of his motivations. His circuitous boycott may have redeemed him in the eyes
of some of his cynics who were also of the opinion that shunning the Berlin Games was obligatory. The United States and other Western democracies were disturbed by the reports of Jewish exclusion and mulled over a boycott of Germany. In 1933, Avery Brundage, President of the American Olympic Committee (AOC) stated, “The very foundation of the modern Olympic revival will be undermined if individual countries are allowed to restrict participation by reason of class, creed, or race.” There was even talk of moving the venue though that plan was quickly scuttled after Hitler assuaged worries of anti-Jewish prejudice by inviting Olympic officials on a sham tour of Germany. No matter how hypocritical the United States’ promotion of racial goodwill, black organizations and even segments of the colored press were ready to ‘close ranks.’ Some of the black newspapers that berated Willis supported the movement to prohibit black athletes from gracing the 1936 games. The *Baltimore Afro-American* penned an editorial unmistakably aimed at black athletes steering clear of Berlin: “Boycott the Olympics.” The *Cleveland Gazette* believed censure was justified. The *New York Amsterdam News* shared this opinion and tried to dissuade Negro Olympic hopefuls, sending letters directly to Owens and others. It helped that groups such as the American League against War and Fascism opposed American participation in the Berlin games and articulated their perceptions to black newspapers like the *Pittsburgh Courier*, contending that Hitler’s anti-Jewish discrimination might extend to include Negro groups later. To solicit support, Jewish Americans also wrote articles to the black press describing the atrocities and racial transgressions in Germany.\(^{457}\)
The NAACP had plenty of reasons to champion the cause of American and European Jews. The association witnessed firsthand the poor treatment of African-American athletes during the 1932 Olympics in sunny California, a paler version of Germany in its judgment. The NAACP was demonstrative in its call for African Americans to pass up the international sporting competition, with the Crisis imploring the AOC to “keep American athletes at home in 1936.” The NAACP’s chief concerns were the plight of the Jews and also American racism. “In the meantime,” the NAACP asserted, “if we just have to work up a lather over discrimination in sports, let us address ourselves to the color line in our own backyard.” The Crisis singled out specific incidents involving black athletes slated to partake in the Summer Games, noting how Jesse Owens was refused a room by a hotel in Los Angeles during his 1935 visit there for an event against the University of Southern California. The magazine also detailed the racial bias in organized baseball as well as professional golf and tennis where Negroes were denied involvement. Amongst the many occurrences of racial discrimination, the publication alluded to Ward’s ban from the Michigan-Georgia Tech game.458

If there was any logic in Ward retrospectively clinging to the fiction of having personally elected to boycott the games, it may have been due to the NAACP’s utilizing the controversy at Michigan as an example of American racism. Unfortunately, not every entity adopted the sentiment that Olympics should be bypassed. The majority of the black press endorsed black athletes going to Berlin and recoiled at the discussion of shirking the games. The Pittsburgh Courier offered biting criticism of the New York Amsterdam News and other colored boycott sympathizers, and launched salvos at American
hypocrisy. They distrusted America’s newfangled racial morality, arguing that the ideal way to combat Germany’s racial policies was to dispatch black athletes to the Olympics and have them trounce the Nazi youth. At the same time, black newspapers promulgated that the prestige of African Americans could be elevated as the “despised darker races” lowered the stature of the “proud and arrogant Nordic.” This radicalized adaptation of muscular assimilationism was part and parcel of a mushrooming, bellicose posture toward America’s distressing pattern of racial exploitation, insult, and oppression.459

This budding insurgency, in which colored athletes were expected to be more revolutionary in assailing racial injustice, planted the seeds for the rising black militancy of the early 1940s. Whereas those black groups partisan to entreaties for African Americans to stay home argued that America’s race relations were improved, mostly in the wake of a responsive New Deal, the black media was dubious. That African Americans enhanced their stake in the country’s economic life through New Deal programs and relief measures, even if to a far lesser extent than whites, gestured toward progress. The outreach by public officials like Eleanor Roosevelt and Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes inclined black leaders to credit America with taking interest in the welfare of underprivileged of Negroes. The growth of the Congress of International Organizations (CIO), which clamored for equal rights and allied black and white workers for the first time since the Knights of Labor disbanded a half-century earlier, only lent credence to African Americans fervent in their impression that America’s race relations were significantly ameliorated. But the recognition that things were better for America’s colored population neither betrayed the reality that Negro plight in the United States was
not any less diminished than the racial problems faced by Jews in Germany nor did it suggest that the country did not have a ways to travel to arrive at true racial equality. Racial imbalances in support aid persisted, and did not substantially improve until 1939 when Congress amended the Emergency Relief Act to mandate equate treatment for all applicants regardless of race or religion. Southern states and other local organizations frequently skirted the rules in directing New Deal assistance. In the midst of these abuses, President Franklin Roosevelt neglected to enforce regulations barring racial discrimination. None of the racial advancements, thus, warranted a boycott.460

The black athletes who earned a place on the Olympic team in track and field, consequently, were revered. In a sense, they were doing much more than participating in broad jumps, dashes, high jumps, and hurdles for the right to international acclaim and national pride. They were also globalizing the battle against white supremacy. Between 1908 and 1932, only ten African Americans made the team. In 1936, ten colored competitors qualified, doubling the previous black representation at the Summer Games and generating a heightened feeling of dignity for African Americans across the country. The black press bestowed extensive coverage to them and sneered at white media that underreported the accounts of colored athletic superiority. Owens, Cornelius Johnson, and others became instant Olympic heroes and a badge of racial uplift. Ward, sadly, was not to be included in this idolized collective. The black press lobbied for him to participate. “They were urging me to go out in ’36,” Ward said. But his doubts about Hitler kept him home. By dodging Berlin, he lost not only the chance to fulfill his Olympic dreams but also the occasion to achieve redemption and respect.461
In spite of everything, there was no compunction on Willis’s part. “I’ve never regretted not having competed in the Olympics. Yet, it has to be wondered why he even went to New York for tryouts after stating publicly in February 1936 that he was unlikely to change his mind, notwithstanding Michigan Coach Charlie Hoyt’s faith in him that he was capable of training late and “still making a showing in some events.” Ward intimated that after his benching nearly two years prior to the Olympics, he settled on skipping the Olympics and focused on law. “And so it [the Michigan-Georgia Tech game] killed my desire. I said, well, I will go through the motions and play this season and get my degree and go about my business and try to get a law degree and practice law.” Ward appeared to have second thoughts even if his lack of spirit to excel overwhelmed his tenacity to prove that he was one of the world’s best athletes.\footnote{462}

A Legacy of neither Father nor Friend but of Ford

With the Olympics no longer a preference, law school was a fruitful alternative albeit a practical endeavor that removed him from the athletic limelight and a slight distance away from the Jim Crowism that tarnished his integration of Michigan football. Could the incident transform him into a race advocate? Would he be compelled to skirmish against racial segregation? Was his career going to follow in the footsteps of his Big Blue predecessor and fellow Alpha Phi Alpha frat brother, Belford Lawson? Lawson, a practice squad player for the Wolverines who was left off the varsity in 1923 due to Yost’s strict observance of America’s racial color line, also became a lawyer. Morris Brown College President John Lewis, an alumnus of Yale University, facilitated Lawson getting into the Yale School of Law where he spent the first two years of his study.
Depleted of resources, the son of a railroad switchman and a schoolteacher withdrew from Yale and headed to the Howard University School of Law. Lawson wasted little time converging with the school’s Talented Tenth of judicial scholars and public intellectuals who impugned American racism and pursued racial reform by means of learned, legal, and legislative action. He coerced NAACP special counsel Charles Hamilton Houston to empower Thurgood Marshall to file the case of *Murray v. Maryland* (1935) challenging the University of Maryland School of Law’s racial biases. Marshall prevailed, and Ward’s erstwhile client Donald Gaines Murray was admitted into the university’s law school.\(^{463}\)

While Willis was still a junior at Michigan in 1933, Lawson, along with John A. Davis, Sr., and N. Franklin Thorne, founded the New Negro Alliance (NNA) in Washington, D.C. The NNA, which served the purpose of resisting white-owned businesses operating in black neighborhoods that refused to hire colored laborers, trademarked the “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” campaign that later became the hallmark of the Black Power era. Lawson’s NNA proved ephemeral, lasting only eight years. Still, the association shaped the rapidly flourishing Civil Rights Movement through strategic organizing and jurisprudential crusades, much of which occurred for the first time beyond the auspices and workings of the NAACP. The venerable William Hastie, Clyde McDuffie, and Howard Fitzhugh were some of the group’s notable members. They became disillusioned with the Washington NAACP’s lack of commitment to targeting the economic dilemmas that entombed poor black residents in the district as well as throughout the country. They organized boycotts in opposition to white businesses that
discriminated, including a picket of Shaw’s U Street Grill for firing its lone black employee. Fearful that they might lose commerce due to the boycotts, several white companies filed injunctions to halt the picketing. Lawson fought back and became the first African American to argue a case before the United States Supreme Court. He, along with Marshall, won the case of the *New Negro Alliance v. Sanitation Grocery Co.* (1938), safeguarding the right to boycott. The landmark decision accorded viability to the efforts by African American to remedy discriminatory hiring practices and validated the “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” line of attack as an unofficial policy of the black freedom struggle. Within months of the verdict, “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” groups multiplied throughout the nation, affirming Lawson as a prominent civil rights activist. Even if Ward was not interested in fulfilling Lawson’s legacy, his undertaking to enter law would have been enough to satisfy the Ward family, namely Henry, had he not also decided to go work for Henry Ford. Willis seized the opportunity bequeathed to him by Harry Bennett to become a full-time employee of the Ford Motor Company much to the chagrin of his father. The two men whose relationship was already strained never repaired their bond prior to Henry’s death in 1938. Willis’s rapport with his daddy was doomed from the onset, besieged both by the passing away of his mother in 1918 and Henry’s remarriage two years later. He despised his stepmother as a woman who cared more about her own four children from a previous marriage than his old man’s seven, especially when it came to schooling. The patriarch of the Ward-household “cared about education,” Willis recalled, “but my stepmother was one of those you read about who wanted everything for her kids and none for my father’s.” He went on, “I certainly got no
encouragement from my stepmother. The best thing I could say is…from the age of eight through high school, if I wanted to quit, I wouldn’t have because it would have satisfied my stepmother.”

Willis’s unflattering opinion of his stepmother impinged on his dealings with Henry. He became very bitter toward his father and never conceived of him as a motivation, despite the latter’s “solid urgings toward education,” which Ward did adopt. Though he appreciated the puritan values his pop instilled in him as a man “to grow up, marry, tend to his own property, behave himself,” he often opted not to defer to him when it came to important life matters. He virtually regarded Henry as a man limited by matrimony and morality and never forgave him for choosing to hitch himself to a woman Willis loathed. If Henry’s preference was to love such a self-seeking and intolerable person, Ward rationalized, what good and guidance could he truly offer? He only pictured his father as a churchman and a good deacon who “could read a Bible” and could preach when he was called on to do so. Ward claimed he was proud of his father for these things. Nonetheless, when queried on his impetus for attending college, Willis did not mention Henry but his white teachers at Northwestern as his true inspiration. “There were no black teachers at Northwestern when I was there but some of the teachers were remarkable in their interest and encouragement of me.”

Willis believed his athletic achievements merited him notice rather than his academic success even with being in the top ten percent of his class. “That caused me to get ink.” He also gazed himself as an exceptional Negro, set apart from most black students. “They were doing things they ordinarily would not do with a black kid. The
teachers got a hold of me early and helped me because they could see I was a kid it would be worthwhile to prepare because he was going to college.” Willis was especially fond of Sam Bishop, his teacher, who he alleged “made no distinction amongst his kids, black or white.” As a consequence,” he stated, “some of it rubbed off on me and gave me encouragement.”

Ward attuned himself to listening to those who took remote interests in him. He enjoyed the prospect of whites noticing him almost as a sign that he had arrived just as other African Americans were rendered irrelevant. Willis dismissed his father’s worth as the upshot of a bond lost because of the social company he kept, and hardly trusted his wisdom or wishes. His arrogance and animosity influenced his path into law and his temporary desertion of it. That Henry Ward wanted him to be successful in school or to practice law was never the driving force for his career. Law acted both as an escape from the racial humiliation of being benched and as a buttress for his doggedness not to face up to Hitler. So when Henry Ford handpicked him to be a junior executive for the Ford Motor Company, Ward gladly accepted the offer.

Ford long discouraged Willis from pursuing law and promised the young chap he could pay him more money than any law firm. “I can make you a millionaire,” Ward recalled Ford telling him as early as 1933, punctuating his own words with cheerful guffaws that signaled his gratification with being individually selected for a significant role by the automobile chief. Ford first met Ward in 1932 after being introduced to him by his son Edsel Ford during a Michigan game against Princeton. It was Willis’s second start of the season and his play was particularly outstanding. Early in the game, Ward
tackled Princeton’s celebrated halfback John F. Bales for a safety, slowing the Tigers’ momentum. Later on, he caught the first touchdown of his career, putting the Wolverines ahead for good. Ward’s performance not only keyed Big Blue’s victory but also won him a new fan—the “People’s Tycoon.” Ford congratulated Ward for his feats and wasted no time drafting the fine sportsman to work in his automobile plant, as was his practice of staffing Michigan football players. But Ford took his recruitment efforts further with Ward, pledging to compensate him generously especially if the young star relinquished his legal career aspirations. He drastically embellished just how wealthy Willis could become, hoping to prevent Ward from studying law with the chatter of making him rich. Still, the $12-a-day Ford paid him was higher than the $5-a-day wages most workers, black or white, earned at the company. To Ward, it was more than adequate. “Mr. Ford liked me personally and paid me that way,” Ward stated snobbishly, ignoring the fact that white labor relations managers netted substantially larger salaries. Willis, nonetheless, withdrew from Michigan School of Law where he was enrolled during the 1935-1936 school year, and registered for night classes at the Detroit College of Law to accommodate his daily schedule at the River Rouge Complex in Dearborn, Michigan.

White Folks’ Nigger

Ward’s tenure at the Ford Motor Company held immense potential for African Americans seeking better workplace breaks and conditions. Ward, along with Don Marshall, was assigned to run the Employment Department at the Rouge plant.
Together, they were primarily responsible for the hiring of African Americans and placed in charge of spearheading the company’s ongoing racial integration efforts. They were also given the power to fire whites who mistreated Ford’s black workforce. Marshall, an ex-policeman, was hired into the Service Department as a special investigator by Bennett who at one time lived near a beat that the former Detroit cop walked. Bennett routinely sought Marshall’s services. “If you ever want a job, you can come work for me out at Ford’s,” he assured the burly officer. When Marshall ran into some difficulty with the Detroit Police Department and quit, he became “the first colored man to be put on

Figure 15: Willis Ward and an unnamed gentleman standing outside the Ford Rotunda located in Dearborn, Michigan. Courtesy Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.
Service.” His ability to coerce other black employees helped Marshall gain the trust of his superiors who appointed him as the titular head of the Employment division after barely a few months on the job.\(^{474}\) In this new role, Marshall was authorized to oversee black personnel, reporting only to Charles Sorenson and Bennett. “We plan to have every colored employee processed through you,” Marshall was told. “You do the colored man’s hiring.”\(^{475}\)

Thirteen years later, Ward was selected to work under Marshall’s wing. Marshall had served as the company’s “Negro-relations” man since 1923, but was viewed as a menacing manager who bullied African-American personnel. When Ford and Bennett needed someone to “cool these [black] men down,” it was Marshall who “took the situation in hand.” Violent disputes between black and white employees happened regularly, and it was not uncommon for knifings to ensue.\(^{476}\) Southern migrants, of both races, were especially prone to reconciling their differences through brutality and the use of blunt objects.\(^{477}\) To eliminate these interracial brawls, Ford executives determined that it was far better to get rid of the colored minority and to render integration a failure just as other industries that refused to employ Negroes perfunctorily assumed would be the case.\(^{478}\) Marshall threatened the African Americans with warnings that their jobs would be in jeopardy if they carried knives on company premises. “Marshall,” Ward asserted, “saved the day, because through his firm stand with respect to some 10, 000 colored people working at Rouge, he got them all to work together.” Arnold Miller joined Ward in praising Marshall, stating, “My gosh, I don’t remember when we’ve had a knifing out at the Ford Motor Company.” Marshall was commended as having “cleaned up the
terrific problem.” But to Ford’s black employees, Marshall was a racial sellout and a tyrant who browbeat African Americans at the behest of the company’s isolated white management. “They felt he was a Simon Legree painted black,” Ward recalled though he was convinced that Marshall’s “purpose was never fully understood by the group he was protecting—the colored people.”\textsuperscript{479} Even if Marshall “would tell colored fellows…you can fight…if you want to fight with your fists,” the fear that they could be terminated for unavoidable skirmishes with white men irritated Ford’s black workforce who felt vulnerable to the antagonistic impulses of their dogmatic boss. Marshall did not safeguard their interests. He imperiled their safety and welfare, making him the object of scorn.\textsuperscript{480}

Marshall’s waning popularity prompted Ford and Bennett to recruit someone who could soften the Employment Department’s moribund image. “They realized that there was such a thing as public relations too and that is where I fitted in,” Ward affirmed. Ward judged that his ability to stomach racial intolerance, along with his educational background, attracted Ford and made him an ideal candidate for the position. “I had the education, and I proved that I had the guts by playing on a football team with white kids
and breaking down the prejudices and taboos and all that allegedly existed at U. of M.”
He also believed that he possessed a unique understanding of the issues concerning
“Negro relations” at the company. “My father worked out in the shop so I should have
known the problem, and if anybody could have solved it, I ought to have been able to
solve it.” Bennett and Ford agreed with Ward’s presumptions.⁴⁸¹ He was brought in
immediately not only to serve as Marshall’s second-in-command but also to improve
labor-management dealings within the Negro employment branch. Yet, his caricature of
racial fairness and his unhurried efforts to advance skilled-work opportunities for African
Americans exasperated the colored staff he hired and supervised. Christopher Alston, a
black auto worker and Communist union organizer who was radicalized by the 1932 Ford Hunger March, attested to the disproportionate number of African Americans confined to non-skilled jobs. In his 1940 booklet *Henry Ford and the Negro People*, Alston highlighted the fact that 6,457 of the 9,852 black employees laboring at Ford in 1937 “worked in the worst and hardest jobs in the company—namely: the foundry, rolling mill and open hearth.” He continued, “The remaining 3,386 were found in the motor building, the foundry machine shop, the ‘B’ building, the spring and upset building, the pressed steel building, in tool rooms, construction departments, as sweepers, and on miscellaneous jobs.” Ward’s reluctance to address this disparity triggered his disparagement. In short time, African Americans lambasted him as the Ford Motor Company’s version of “Uncle Tom” next to Marshall’s deplorable black Simon Legree.

Alston’s enumeration of the black labor rundown at Ford contrasted with Ward’s own assessments of how African Americans fared at the company. It was not that Ward failed to grasp the task before him. He knew that it was it his and Marshall’s job “to integrate this large category of colored people who were so easily distinguished and therefore easily discriminated against.” But Ward aborted his chance to bring about real changes, instead choosing to praise his co-manager Marshall for having done a “marvelous job” despite his condescending attitude toward his staff and his unyielding maintenance of the racial status quo. He also extolled Ford for the auto magnate’s supposed espousal of racial fair play. He bragged that Ford “had a very unusual attitude toward colored employees in that he differed from his competitors because he would use
colored employees according to their skill.” Prior to their unionization in 1941 through alliances with Walter Reuther and the United Auto Workers, Ward contended that African Americans at Ford were able to secure jobs as electricians, plumbers, bricklayers, and tool and die-makers—the latter of which had been a closed trade. Ward claimed that as early as 1938 a representative share of the 10,000 colored employees were trained in skilled work. “There was no other place where colored men could ever become skilled tool- and die-makers,” Ward elucidated. “It was primarily controlled by your A.F. of L. on the theory that the scarcity of supply of tradesmen is what raises their wages.”

Apart from controlling earning potential by producing skilled trade shortages, the American Federation of Labor’s had a long history of exclusionary practices that bolstered Ward’s argument that the opportunities afforded to black Americans at Ford were unique and therefore laudable. Hostility aimed at black workers typified the stance of the AFL and its president, Samuel Gompers, nearly from the organization’s inception in 1886. At the turn-of-the-century, local AFL affiliates either denied African Americans membership or consigned them to separate all-black associations. This pattern of discrimination lasted through the Depression and New Deal years under the leadership of William Green as the AFL continued to sponsor national and international unions that barred black laborers through arbitrary orders and practices. Thus, Ward endorsed Ford’s policies of racial integration where “colored kids” were placed into the same training programs for skilled trades “as the white kids.” Further, he boasted that there was “nowhere on this planet that a colored man could aspire to and become a tool-and die-maker excepting the Ford Motor Company.” In his estimation, “there was no discrimination.”

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Ward’s one-sided yet well thought-out labor analysis aside, discrimination existed at Ford, some of which he and Marshall propagated. He neglected to scrutinize the paucity of African-American skilled tradesmen in his observation that Ford employed colored electricians, tool- and die-makers, draftsmen, chemists, bricklayers, plumbers, painters, inspectors, radio technicians, clerks, and foremen. By the time he entered the army in 1941, however, he counted less than 100 black tool and die-makers. This problem of skilled-worker allocation magnified Ward’s culpability in shrinking black progress through the company. Quotas on the number of African Americans who could be hired for these positions were imposed neither through constitutional fiats nor unwritten directives. “I never was told by Mr. Ford or Mr. Bennett not to put a kid in a certain category because he was colored,” Ward insisted. “They never told me to go along with discrimination.” If Ward was truly given “a completely free hand in placing colored employees according to their ability,” he botched the opening afforded him to do so. He alleged that it was difficult to locate African Americans to perform some of the skilled jobs available. Whereas he criticized the AFL for its restrictions in the patternmaking craft, he emphasized how in his own “efforts to integrate colored and white in the Pattern Shop,” he “could never find a colored boy with either the brains or the physical equipment with which to undergo the pioneering such a move to integrate would entail.” In an interesting racial juxtaposition, Ward, who thought himself a quintessential race pioneer, was once more unable to visualize other African Americans as possessing the capability to cope with the challenges, pitfalls, and stresses that accompanied crossing the color line.
His penchant for tying exceptionality to elevation decelerated African-American advancement through the skilled ranks of the Ford Motor Company. Ward embraced a concept he called “practical integration.” If the Welding Department, for instance, needed to increase its skilled workforce, as it did during war conversion when production exceeded what was required at peacetime, then the more senior black employees were permitted to be trained to fill the positions by upgrading. Demand, to Ward, made integration requisite, and it was difficult for even the most racist and recalcitrant whites to bicker at the increased hiring of Negroes for skilled trades when unusual circumstances dictated. Ward was even willing to reprimand white foremen who opposed this policy, although he rebuffed chances to exercise his power to fire them when they resisted much to the chagrin of his colored staff. 

On one occasion, he conducted an inquiry into reports that there had been discrimination by a white foreman in the Welding Department. Ward chastised the foreman and confiscated his ‘clock card.’ One Ford worker, unacquainted with whites having to take orders from Negroes, demanded to know, “By what authority do you fire a white man?” The foreman’s superintendent also chided Ward and begged for his employee’s clock card to be returned. Raymond Rausch, Ford’s chief production manager, repudiated Ward after learning of the incident. Ward had every incentive both to ignore the insults and to press on. He was reassured by Ford and Bennett that he possessed the ‘right and rule’ to terminate the foreman, and any underlings who challenged his clout. When he spoke to Arnold Miller’s secretary in the Labor Relations Department about the entire episode and pointed at the knockback by some employees
“to recognize me as a supervisory employee,” he was yet again advised of his “authority to fire a man.” Stan Faye, Ward’s former teammate and Bennett’s personal assistant, also alerted him that Rausch was put on notice by the Service Department. Still, Ward caved. He even confessed that he had no real intention of letting go the foreman. “I was more interested in teaching him that he had to be more conscious of the color question and of our job of trying to integrate.” Ward theorized that relieving the foreman of his duties was counterproductive since “we would have to teach the next one coming in” and “we tried not to be vicious.” He added, “My technique was not to fire unless the guy said, ‘Well, it’s either going to be my way or else.’” His own indisposition toward dismissing racist whites who discriminated against African Americans, then again, made such a statement by even the most committed racist unnecessary.492

Ward’s apparent display of racial fairness troubled Ford’s black employees. Worse, he offended them by later making excuses on behalf of the foreman. “I don’t think the fellow was discriminating personally,” Ward astonishingly uttered. “I think the fellow was probably busy and he might have been pressed by a schedule as to why his cost was jumping up.” He also insinuated that the black men who filed discrimination charges against the foreman may have been lying. “Whether the colored boys were ‘teaming up’ and complaining in an effort to ‘do a job’ on a supervisory employee we didn’t know.”493 Ward frequently absolved whites of blame, apologizing for their bigoted actions. He also impugned African Americans, attributing white acts of racism to some innate Negro characteristic or perhaps a misdeed they evidently had performed. When the Ford Motor Company held segregated interviews, though he did not prefer them, he
described the motive as good. “Personally it was against my grain…Yet still I knew that
the purpose of segregating was to get them to someone who would understand their
problem and not for the purpose of degrading them.” Ward not only delineated
segregated interviews as a benefit for Negro employees “because of a desire to help them
in a practical way,” but he also pinpointed “the propensity of the colored employees” to
utilize violent aggression as a rationale for keeping the races apart. “They far
outnumbered the whites…I will say that the colored employee tended to carry a knife and
use it more than others…Therefore, you have a separation of employees on a color
basis.”  

His logic was indistinguishable from the scientific racism proliferate during the
era that validated segregation on the groundless assumption that African Americans were
predisposed to crime and therefore needed to be racially demarcated. It also echoed
Ford’s racial outlook. Ford regarded “race lines” as cast-iron and, thus, did not consider
racial assimilation to be achievable. African Americans, to be sure, deserved better living
conditions but residential segregation and social separation needed to prevail. Ford’s
opposition to racial intermingling was so acute that he deemed it the obligation of the so-
called dominant race of well-intentioned whites both to aid and to assure justice for the
lesser race so that the latter could eventually make their own way in their own
neighborhoods. Indeed, in the city where Ford resided and black people were barred,
local residents crowed as late as the 1940s that “the sun never set on a Negro in
Dearborn.” Like Ford, Ward recognized African Americans’ yearning for better lives,
and offered up wage work to them to help secure it. But he also accepted Ford’s view that
blackness had a fixed, racial destiny—a permanent place from which there was to be no escape.  

Similarly, Ward angered Ford’s black workforce by permitting whites to refer to them as “niggers” as long as it was done behind closed doors. If a black worker was called a nigger, “he could hit you with his fist, and it would be a fair fight,” he maintained. He accused union leaders of exacerbating the problem. Ward provided the example of union representatives who questioned one superintendent on the absence of skilled black laborers in his cement department. The manager countered, “Well, what do you want to let in them niggers for?” Ward charged that unionists, in an underhanded attempt to recruit African Americans, betrayed this administrator’s trust by improperly informing the colored fellows that they were labeled “niggers.” Ward concluded it was a setup. “This scene was planned, and the trap was laid. They wanted to get the superintendent down where the colored fellows were.” Justifiably upset, the black cementers refused to work and were then fired for loafing by the superintendent who later reported that he was unaware that the men were ticked off about his racial name-calling. The shop steward refuted the supervisor’s story, and clung to the narrative that his boss had “called those fellows niggers.” The superintendent denied the allegation to Ward and Marshall who were sent to investigate. They accepted his clarity on the issue and defended him to Jack Blott and Harry Mack, Ford’s Labor Relations executives who were otherwise ready to terminate the seemingly prejudiced manager. Ward stated, “I called Mack and Blott and told them, ‘What happened was, the superintendent used the word nigger, but he didn’t use it in the presence of, or hearing of, colored fellows. He was
talking to white fellows.’’ Ward continued, ‘‘How are you going to fire a guy for doing
that?’’

Ward was adamant that racial practice could not be altered. He stated, ‘‘That’s one
thing I know you’ll never stop.’’ He even suggested that the use of the racial epithet was
customary, and something to be expected to be a part of white parlance insomuch as it
was not being verbalized publicly to belittle a black person. ‘‘I’ll bet you, Harry, and I’ll
bet you, Jack, although I think you are nice guys, I bet you ten to one in your
conversation when you speak of colored people you are apt to say the word nigger. That
doesn’t necessarily mean that you have any animosity, and at the same time, I don’t think
you would use the word nigger in the presence of a colored person.’’ African Americans,
predictably, were livid over what they opined to be racial appeasement. ‘‘Those fellows
thought that I was what used to be referred to as a white folk’s nigger, just because I
could condone the use of the word nigger by white people when they were no colored
people around if they saw fit to use that word.’’ Ward disregarded the racial torment
Negroes suffered from the flagrant consumption of the insolent slur and bristled with
cynicism at their annoyance with what he saw as his display of racial goodwill and
tolerance. He fumed, ‘‘Their opinion of me, as a man, is that I’m chicken.’’

Chicken or not, Ward did not have any intention of gainsaying racial misconduct.
He brushed aside Marshall’s abuse of Fordism. As Ford manufactured and sold more
cars, lowering the cost of production, automobiles became more affordable to the workers
who assembled them. To prevent layoffs, some Ford personnel who acquired cars pointed
to their lingering auto loan debts. ‘‘If a fellow was buying a Ford car and he was about to
lose it because it was layoff time he would say, ‘Look, I’m going to lose my car. Can I be kept working?’” Marshall and Ward put off firing employees who were buying company vehicles not only to assist them in protecting their investments but also to safeguard Ford’s economic plan. News traveled quickly throughout the Rouge plant that a potential termination could be averted by purchasing a Ford car, triggering an impetus for workers to become automobile owners. Salesmen eagerly took advantage. To boost sales, they offered under-the-table kickbacks in exchange for jobs to be provided to car buyers. “If you give me an unusual percentage of job openings for my customers,” they promised, “I’ll see to it that you get a part of the commission.”

No stranger to controversy or corruption, Marshall entered into several fraudulent arrangements with certain Ford dealers to sell jobs. His earnings swelled.

Ward never participated directly in selling jobs. Part of his duties was to foster amity between “the colored people and the Ford Motor Company” so he “had to be very careful with reference to jobs.” Since he was hired to improve the Employment Department’s public relations image, he treaded lightly when it came to matters that held the prospect of drawing the ire of Detroit’s African-American intelligentsia, especially if they suspected black workers were getting swindled. “It was assumed that I wouldn’t divorce myself from the colored people simply because I had a supervisory job at Ford’s. They wanted me to be able to move around among intellectual groups and create good will toward the Ford Motor Company.” Ward also knew that selling jobs was exploitative, mostly for Negro personnel with limited resources and, thus, the incapability to use purchasing power as a bulwark against dismissal. In a rare instance, he evoked his
own father’s struggles to compete at the Ford Motor Company. Henry Ward was unable
to save enough funds to pay for an automobile, reminding Willis that his dad would have
lacked a buffer against being laid off. Ward, likewise, empathized with some of his own
staff whose resentment he appreciated since they “could never get to a position to buy a
car.”

Still, he did nothing to curb Marshall’s skullduggery. Ward privately disapproved
of Marshall’s dealings, convinced that it impaired his co-manager’s judgment and
tempted him to give preferential treatment to a privileged few. “When it got to the point
where you could make a salesman’s commission out of giving out a job…you would
discriminate against an employee who might have a worthy case for an exception to be
made in the disposition of him.” In spite of his enmity for selling jobs, Ward barely
addressed the situation in public. He cautioned community leaders not to sell jobs but
was averse to extending those same warnings to the Employment Department he co-
headed. “My job was not to supervise Marshall,” he rebutted, pardoning his own inaction.
He poured out other excuses. “It wasn’t a direct sale of a job.” “Times were so darn
hard.” Ward, every bit a seasoned ‘company man,’ also implied that selling jobs was
honorable given its affect on commerce. He appealed, “Obviously, any employer would
want his employee to buy his own product. If a fellow was gaining that favor by buying
that product, and was not buying a competitor’s product, I don’t think there is anything
particularly wrong with that.” Ward even painted Marshall as gullible and despoiled by
avaricious salesmen who conned him. “I don’t think Marshall went that far knowingly,
but once he opened the gates he was going to be victimized.” None of Ward’s palliations,
however, shielded him from African Americans’ impression that he rubber-stamped selling jobs or wiped away the perspective that he put comrade and company over community.  

In some ways, there was insufficient recourse for Ward to address the job-selling bribes that tainted Marshall and tarnished his own reputation. Selling jobs were embedded into the philosophy and rituals of the company. The Ford Motor Company established a church-company entente with prominent black churches inside Detroit, most notably Second Baptist Church in 1919 and St. Matthew’s Protestant Episcopal Church by 1923. Marshall and Ward ran the day-to-day, internal operations of the Employment Department and had the final say in who was hired and fired. But Reverend Robert L. Bradby and Father Everard W. Daniel, the two leaders of these respective churches, figured prominently into the recruitment of African Americans. It was almost impossible to secure employment at the Ford Motor Company without their blessing, or the recommendation of some other influential member of the black community. Ford supplied select black churches with sizeable financial handouts, and ministers routinely acclaimed his largesse in the pulpit. Edsel and Eleanor Ford also contributed monetary gifts to the NAACP at the same time as Bennett and Sorenson cultivated bonds with other leaders in the black community. These alliances, while assumed to be driven by Ford’s antiunion self-interests, gratified black Detroiters. They perceived Ford to be the “Negro’s friend” and equated the Ford Motor Company to be “a haven in an otherwise unfriendly industrial world.”
Hundreds of black men were able to obtain gainful employment through the church-company pact. Yet, the system was susceptible to corruption and exploitation from day one. Aside from the corporate paternalism it generated, which forced a sense of dependency on Henry Ford within African-American circles, the clergymen that were favored by Sorenson (Ford’s chief architect of the church-company alliance) augmented their influence in the black community. Churches like Second Baptist and St. Matthew’s morphed into “the gates” leading “to the kingdom of Ford.” The power possessed by Reverend Bradby and Father Daniel to vouch for workers assured them great status while churches kept out the system had only a modest chance to achieve the same growth, prestige, and prosperity.

Ward lamented the church-company union. Despite the fact that Bradby, Daniel and others helped to facilitate the Ford Motor Company’s quest for dependable black workers, the scheme allowed the ministers to profit additional subsidies for their services by selling jobs. As Ward stated, “You will find out that these men had made an extra large contribution, far out of proportion to their income, to the minister. So…you get an iniquity.” Ward regarded the ministers as crooks and faulted them for ruining Ford’s “good idea.” “So you see that you start with the idea of helping people, but you have too much failing in between in the human beings that you are dealing with.” He alluded to cases in which churches recommended men who did not perform adequately and were laid off. In turn, these men, having bequeathed substantial donations to the churches that helped them get jobs at Ford, were left bewildered and upset while the priests did not “see anything wrong with it.” The treachery, as Ward observed it, was nonetheless
cyclical. “You can’t do it [inform Ford of the bribery], and the minute the letter comes in to Mr. Ford, he wants to know why the Reverend so-and-so said he can’t get some of his congregation to work…you can’t tell him he’s a thief…because Mr. Ford might like the man and not believe he’s a thief.”

In his spite of his complaints about the system, Ward did not mind using it to intimidate black workers into politically supporting the Republican Party. He and Marshall carried out surveillance for Ford, spying on African Americans and their families in order to keep a lid on union activities and to enforce discipline. Marshall, widely known as the unofficial “mayor” of black Detroit, had already served as the “eyes and ears” for Ford and Bennett. Black Detroiter shifted their opinions on unions during the mid-1930s, intensifying Ford’s concerns and his vigilance to maintain an open shop floor. He subsequently appointed Ward, in part, to assist the company’s industrial stakeout and to slow pro-union momentum. Franklin Roosevelt’s National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) pressed African-Americans leaders—locally and nationally—to reconsider their stance with respect to unions. The Detroit Civic Rights Committee (CRC), simultaneously, reinvigorated black community organizing on a local level by demanding jobs for Negroes. Roosevelt’s reelection aggravated matters for Ford who agonized over the budding evolution to the economic interests and protest politics advanced by black Detroit. Thus, even as Henry’s wife Clara entertained black clubwomen and church groups at luncheons and teas hosted at her estate in Dearborn, Ford beefed up the Service Department, resolute in his efforts to reinforce his hegemony within the black community.
But industrial espionage functioned as just one aspect of Ford’s defense against the union radicalization of his colored workforce. He also entrusted Ward and Marshall to coerce African Americans into championing the GOP, especially in instances where to do so proved advantageous to his antiunion campaign. If voting returns from predominantly black districts showed that Democrats were backed overwhelmingly, adding to Ford’s displeasure, Marshall ensured that Negro personnel in those precincts paid the full price of their ballot in lost jobs. Ford’s black employees dreaded the thought of losing their jobs so much so that in 1931, when Marshall endorsed a Republican named Harold H. Emmons, the majority of the African-American community sheepishly followed his lead. Economic pressure was also applied in 1932 to sway black voters to oppose Frank Murphy’s bid for Mayor. The vast number of African Americans who supported Murphy were discharged, this despite Sorensen’s promise that Ford employees were not to be penalized for voting their conscience. Affidavits were sent to the Crisis magazine, many of which claimed that Marshall ridiculed the suddenly jobless workers. “You who voted for the Honorable Frank Murphy ought not to be insulted when I advise you who are out of work to go to Mayor Murphy for jobs.” Ward underpinned this policy with a new diktat—any potential black hires sent to him by Democrats were not going to be employed.514

As Ford grew more angst-ridden over his chief political nemesis’s return to the White House, and the unrelenting drive by the UAW to force his compliance with the Wagner Act, Ward and Marshall sustained their endeavor to recoup the losses that Republicans suffered among black voters since 1932. They pushed for the formation of a
black Republican organization to aid their cause, guiding Marshall and state labor commissioner Charles Mahoney to establish the Wayne County District Voters Association. Ward and Marshall operated the organization as a political machine that closely resembled William Magear Tweed’s Tammany Hall system in New York where local capos controlled various political wards within the city. Although they declined to own up to their influence over the association, the two men in charge of black employment at the Rouge awarded token jobs to some of the organization’s membership. By 1939, the Wayne County District Voters Association evolved into the most powerful political bloc in Detroit.515 That same year, Ward and Marshall cemented their political clout and credibility during city’s mayoral race. In the process, Ward and Marshall gave Henry Ford just what he desired—the loyalty of black Detroit, even if through fear and patronage.516

Civil Rights Unionism and Black Defiance at Ford

Black allegiance to Ford underwent testing during the late 1930s. CIO strategists transformed Detroit into a crucial industrial battleground, setting their sights on converting Ford’s employees into unionists. They targeted African Americans just as vigorously as they solicited working-class whites. The CIO wanted to organize the entire shop regardless of craft or skill level. “They believed that one should unionize even the janitor, which meant that you had to unionize the Negroes too,” Ward affirmed.517 Yet, whether thankful for Ford’s initiative to staff African Americans or timid over the job threats engendered by Ward and Marshall, the Motor City’s black community appeared unwavering in their commitment to antiunionism. They played a passive role in the Battle
of the Overpass in 1937, and in the sit-down auto strikes that transpired that year and into 1938. \(^5^{18} \) Ward mocked the CIO as well as communists for their failure to make inroads. \(^5^{19} \) The UAW’s anti-Jim Crow decrees, and their announcement in 1937 that they were following the United Mine Workers’ egalitarian approach, were not enough to wrest away black support from the clutches of the Ford Motor Company. There was a tremendous resistance to the communist and union movements by Negroes in the industrial Midwest, and Ford’s colored personnel refused to unite with the UAW. \(^5^{20} \) The robust efforts of union organizers like Richard Frankensteen, Walter Reuther, and R.J. Thomas to sell the union movement to African Americans often fell on deaf ears. A debate held at Hartford Avenue Baptist Church epitomized black reaction to the UAW. As Ward recalled, “R.J. Thomas, Frankensteen, and Reuther came out there to that congregation and talked to those men like they were talking to their brothers, but nobody would believe them.”\(^5^{21} \)

Black distrust of unions, even for the CIO who promulgated a message of racial consensus, went beyond Ward and Marshall’s political coercion. Some African Americans opposed unionization due to its protracted history of racial discrimination. Antiunionism ran through Ward’s blood. His father was antiunion, just as many colored migrants were since picketing white laborers glimpsed the black strikebreakers that management temporarily hired as their enemies. It was true that companies employed African Americans as a tactic to break the backs of unions. But black workers also knew that impending labor peace between capital and striking white workers jeopardized their jobs, especially given that unions in the past “solidified segregation against Negroes.”\(^5^{22} \)
The CIO’s promises of racial inclusion, thus, could not alter the permanent skepticism that black workers retained.\textsuperscript{523}

Anti-black union discrimination, alone, did not impel antagonism toward the push for unionization. The Ford Motor Company was a bellwether of welfare capitalism.\textsuperscript{524} Ford not only bankrolled colored churches but he also financed the all-black model suburb of Inkster, regularly offered relief to unemployed Negroes, and included black balladeers on his Ford Sunday Hour.\textsuperscript{525} Ford’s colored personnel also had to be aware of how the New Deal marginalized black workers. The 1935 Social Security Act, a hallmark of Roosevelt’s reform, did not extend to agricultural and domestic workers, whom New Dealers did not consider to be independent, full-time breadwinners. 55\% of the African-American workforce and 87\% of all wage-wage earning black women were ineligible for unemployment insurance.\textsuperscript{526} Frozen out of one of the monumental and most protective benefits of the New Deal, Ford’s black labor force could ill-afford to put their jobs and its accompanying safety nets at risk by taking pro-union stances. Instead, they had to keep their antiunion begrudging private.

Still, Ford’s influence over the Wayne County Voters District Association is what primarily kept Detroit’s black political leadership in his palms, and left most of the African-American community firmly pro-Ford and dead set against the UAW. In 1937, black leaders in the city threatened a boycott of the NAACP’s annual conference to force the association to remove a UAW organizer from its program. The local National Urban League chapter, likewise, was willing to disobey the policy of its national office by siding with Ford against the UAW.\textsuperscript{527}
Prominent African Americans were also spurned for their pro-union stances.
Mordecai Johnson, President of Howard University, was barred from speaking at Bethel A.M.E. Church for a second time because of his pro-labor endorsement. Marshall, who was enraged by Johnson’s first speech at the church, grew more incensed when the Reverend William Peck, Bethel’s pastor, offered his facilities to A. Philip Randolph and the National Negro Congress (NNC). Marshall retaliated by firing several Bethel members from the Ford Motor Company as a punishment for Peck’s seeming betrayal of Ford. When Johnson was invited back to speak by Snow Grigsby in 1938, Negro ministers banded together to curtail him. They warned Peck he might lose his recommendation privileges. Some of Peck’s own members, themselves employees at Ford, also worked to stave off Johnson’s return. They pleaded to the church’s board that “they would lose their jobs if Johnson spoke…for a second time.” Peck capitulated and Johnson was turned away. The church was so browbeaten by the duress it was under from Ward and Marshall that it also deprived the Detroit Scottsboro Defense Committee the chance to hold its meetings there. The church’s rationale was that “the Committee was regarded as a left-wing organization and hence unacceptable to the Ford interest.”

In 1940, the Conference of Negro Trade Unionists was denied the go-ahead by the YMCA’s black branch to make use of its facilities owing to the terror instilled into the group by Ward and Marshall. The secretary of the YMCA’s local division admitted that he “couldn’t let them hold that meeting here” because “if I had, the next day Ward and Marshall would have been down here to know why. That would have meant that I couldn’t recommend any more men to Ford.” In December 1940, Marshall fruitlessly
attempted to blackmail the Reverend Charles Hill, telling him he would “fire every Negro in the neighborhood” if the minister consented to hosting a UAW sponsored meeting at his church. The next month Ward and Marshall reiterated this warning to black clergymen and civic leaders throughout the Detroit during a pro-Ford banquet they coordinated. Black Detroiters had to wonder “Who Owns the Negro Churches?” just as the Reverend Horace A. White pondered nearly two years earlier. The Reverend Robert H. Pittman, pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church, rejected White and the West Side Improvement Association’s (WSIA) request utilize its facilities to host its annual New Year’s Day emancipation program because of Pittman’s fear that his members might be fired. \

White’s question cut into the viscera of black industrial relations inside Detroit. In it, he accused the black church in Detroit of having deserted black workers while also condemning Ward and Marshall for being racial turncoats. Others took the two disgraced employment chiefs to task for their political bullying. The Detroit Tribune’s editorial staff spoke of Marshall’s dishonor in choosing to spy on the black community on behalf of the Ford Motor Company. George S. Schuyler, the eminent black journalist, was harsher in his appraisal of Ward and Marshall. He accused Ford of operating an “industrial plantation” and paralleled the “well-regimented and policed” Rouge plant to a modern-day version of the milieu Harriet Beecher Stowe attempted to capture in her book, Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Schuyler reproved Ford’s black adherents as apple polishers who behaved just as slaves acted in response to their masters. “Since every Uncle Tom’s Cabin must of course have an Uncle Tom, it need occasion no surprise that there are any
number of Uncle Toms in the Ford setup.” Yet, White’s analysis was more trenchant because in it he revealed the changing attitudes of the African-American community, particularly concerning unionization. Detroit’s black churches remained the “property of the big white industrialists,” but colored laborers did “something nobody expected”—they “waked up.” Once awakened, as Schuyler hinted, it was time for Ford’s black personnel to look out for “their own interests” and to become “masters of their own fate.”

Slowly, black Detroit began to dictate its own destiny. While Johnson was snubbed for a second opportunity to speak at Bethel A.M.E., he was permitted to address a biracial coalition of 3,000 at the Brewster Community Center. During his talk, Johnson characterized the nascent freedom struggle not as one just for “economic liberty” but also a battle for basic human rights and democratic equality. True to form, black workers began embracing trade unionism, engaging in strikes, and assuming leadership roles within the movement, just as John Conyers, Horace Sheffield, and Shelton Tappes had done in 1938 to spearhead the crusade for social and economic justice. In 1939, African Americans comprised the majority of the workers who crossed picket lines in strikes against Chrysler in both Detroit and St. Louis. Ward and Marshall sustained their forceful grip on black churches, but somewhere in black Detroit’s “hidden transcript,” Negroes tacitly constructed a “dissident political culture” while operating in spaces controlled by Ford.

There were signs that African-Americans engaged surreptitiously in alternative forms of political insurrection, unbeknownst to Ward and Marshall, even as they
panicked about being laid off. In September 1937, Marshall was invited to speak at
Ebenezer A.M.E. Church for an event sponsored by the Loyal Worker’s Club. On this
night, he castigated President Roosevelt and argued that the Wagner Act harmed
employers. One observer noticed that the audience was mainly unresponsive, and likely
attended only out of apprehension about losing their jobs. They might not have been able
to voice their displeasure with Ford’s policies, out of fear of retribution, but they were
able to demonstrate their repugnance for Marshall through their hushed reaction to his
antiunion and anti-New Deal call to arms. Some African Americans also feigned
Republican support to preserve their jobs, but revealed their true identities and political
viewpoints at the ballot box. As one black conservative construed, “I get the impression a
lot of them [blacks] are saying they are all for the party but when they get in the polls,
they vote Democratic. They like Roosevelt too much for that.”

Marshall experienced black Detroiter’s tepid support for the GOP when he ran on
the Republican ticket for Congress in the First District in May 1940. He was defeated in
the primaries as Democrats continued to gain a foothold in the federal and local political
order, in large part due to the emergence of African Americans as swing voters. Joe
Louis, the heavyweight boxing champion and devoted Republican, was also unable to
halt the GOP’s mounting political decline in the black community. Louis was able to
generate larger crowds, sometimes numbering in the thousands, as he spoke on behalf of
Presidential nominee, Wendell Wilkie. But African Americans chose not to abandon
Roosevelt, displaying a singular grit to fashion their own political identities.
African-American political consciousness was anything but inchoate even though it seemingly became visible overnight to an industrial world inebriated with a belief in unbounded black loyalty. It was molded quietly away from the typical ideological-building spaces of church, home, and workplace where Ward and Marshall roamed, kept constant surveillance, and throttled free and open debates of labor and politics.\textsuperscript{536} It also was shaped, in some capacity, outside the auspices of the faction-ridden UAW whose alienation of the antilynching movement and primary complaint regarding pay differentials did not coincide with the black community’s more urgent focus on racial discrimination. Black workers’ political fate and the genesis of their political thought, instead, was formed through gatherings held in Detroit’s barbershops, poolrooms, and other unmonitored social spaces where they discussed political and racial issues.\textsuperscript{537} They were press-ganged by Ward and Marshall, were goaded into being antiunion, interacted with a fickle UAW, and were forbidden from accessing local black churches as a respite from the quotidian racial conflicts encountered at Ford. Still, Detroit’s black community was more prepared to confront the harmful exigencies of worker exploitation and racial inequality, even if it entailed overtly rebelling against Ward and Marshall whom were immutable to such public dissents.

The acid test of black defiance to Ford came in 1942. War conversion hastened Ford’s hiring of white women for jobs vacated by their husbands who were drafted into the military during WWII. White women were told to “come on in and take your place” as they were “entitled to preference.” Ford, however, declined to offer black women the same wartime opportunities to work at the newly-built Willow Run Plant. Ford sought to
uphold its racial occupational patterns—entrenched in policy, practice, and the public mind—despite the federal prohibition on defense industry discrimination.538

In some respect, the company’s decision not to employ black women followed a larger precedent of discrimination that materialized during the war. In a striking reversal, Ford’s hiring system became more discriminatory than Detroit’s other large corporations as the company ceased recruiting black males.539 In what may have been a sign of Marshall’s declining influence and a slight hint that Ward may have fought harder to secure jobs for African Americans than recognized, the Ford Motor Company began limiting the employment of colored men during the summer of 1941 when Willis was away completing basic military training. A timid Marshall wrote Ward a letter informing him of the changes that had been made during his absence. “I hesitate to put this in writing and must rely on you to keep it confidential but for the first time I have been in the employment office I have had a restriction placed on me in regard to the hiring of Negroes.” Ford executives allotted only twenty-five spots a day for African Americans and inhibited the employment of black men outside the state of Michigan. The situation agitated matters for Marshall whose reputation in the black community had all but decayed. Demoralized and exasperated, he confirmed his frustrations to Ward. “You can imagine what the mental pressure is on me when every Negro agency, Y.M.C.A. church, minister, preacher, politician, official etc. is asking me to do something and I am unable to explain the change that has come about without putting myself on the spot.”540

But the Ford Motor Company was especially hostile to African-American women, trotting out excuses to justify its de facto rules excluding black women from work. Ward
claimed that it was due to the abundance of black men who needed jobs. “You would go from Gate AA at the employment office all the way down to the edge of the Foundry Machine Shop at Miller Road and you would find that line of 2,000 [colored] fellows and maybe you would find ten white fellows in it.” Rather than focus on the right-to-work, wage-earning pursuits of black women, which augmented the power of women in African-American communities, Ward worried more that the increased hiring of black men during the war might stymie white men. “The color count is going up in leaps and bounds…you are going to run into a problem where the white man would not want to come out to Ford’s to work…we had to put on restrictions.” For their part, Detroit’s white male workforce fretted the influx of African-American personnel who they feared would be utilized by factor managers to erode labor standards and weaken job security. Black women, thus, were told that the wartime preferences did not apply to them.\(^{541}\)

Busloads of two-hundred black women responded with protest and pressure. They stormed the offices at Willow Run after being refused entry at the plant’s hiring gate. Their strong show of solidarity and strength attracted attention from the UAW who, along with the NAACP, entered into negotiations with the Ford Motor Company with the aim to initiate some program to employ black women.\(^{542}\)

Months of talks produced little progress. UAW officials tried to secure an agreement during talks with Ford management to have black women constitute at least seven percent of the women hired but were cold-shouldered. Union negotiators felt obliged to accept vague promises that there would be no discrimination though black women readily denounced the assurances as worthless. In April, the Ford management
announced that black women were not to be staffed since integration created “disturbances.” Richard T. Leonard, director of the UAW’s Ford Division, along with Oscar Noble and Horace Sheffield, met with white women at the Willow Run who invalidated that assertion. Standing in the presence of Ford’s personnel officers, the white female employees expressed overwhelming support for the UAW’s outlook that integration would not yield any problems. In the interim, black leaders in Detroit became more aggressive in attacking the company. Charles Diggs, a state senator, sponsored a meeting of five-hundred black women that same month to censure Ford. Bealah Whitby, a longtime union sympathizer, led another group who sent Bennett and Ford a resolution in which it referred to the company’s attitude toward black women as “unpatriotic” and “indefensible.”

In June, UAW representatives met with executives from both the River Rouge and Willow Run plants in a three-hour meeting. The Ford officials, irritated by the external agitation they received and accustomed to attributing labor tension to unions, declared that black women would not be employed until “outside pressure” stopped. Ward, who presided over the meeting, asserted that the UAW possessed no right to interfere in the matter since the women were technically not workers. He voiced the opinion to the Metropolitan Detroit Fair Employment Practices Committee that unions were “cutthroats and liars” that were “communistically controlled.” He also contended that the Sojourner Truth riot evinced that “the time was not right” to hire black women and proclaimed that the black leaders’ own antagonism kept black women out of Willow Run. Ward recommended that the leaders apologize to Henry Ford for their “vicious
attacks,” since “committees, letters, and the sending government investigators and agitators” would not win over the company. Further, he scoffed at Executive Order 8802 and ridiculed the effectuality of the Fair Employment Practices Committee, infuriating the UAW.\textsuperscript{545}

Black women were also outraged. With the backing of the UAW, they organized a second massive demonstration—this time at the River Rouge plant—that blocked the gates of the employment office. Flyers for the event publicized the UAW’s fight to secure jobs for black women. Ward was also pilloried. The UAW circular lampooned him as “Willis Ward, ‘the Yes and No Man’ of the Ford Motor Company relative to the Negro question” and as “a traitor to the cause of the Better Labor and Race Relations among the Ford Workers.” Picketers at the rally assailed him more caustically. He stated, “They had marched on the gate there and the agitators were egging them on and the union was egging them on to embarrass Marshall and I as well as the company…they marched up and down Gate AA with signs with my name on them.” Placards read: “Down with Jim Crow.” “Down with Marshall.” “Down with Ward: Employers Stooge.”\textsuperscript{546}

The protest march against Ward and the Ford Motor Company was the lowest point of his career with the corporation. “When I came out of that…and it comes up in a discussion at my frat house or my church, it looks like I am endorsing a pattern of discrimination against our people.” Ward accused the “unions and subversive organizations” of distorting his motives. “By the time they [the unions] reported what I
was doing, I had a horn and a tail; I was carrying out the policy of discrimination for the Company. Ward divulged that the altercation with the UAW affected his home life. “You would be lucky if your sisters would speak to you when you got home. You wound up lonely and that was the thing I couldn’t take.” Ward was not alone. “Marshall couldn’t take it.” The pressure tactics of black women and UAW organizers working in tandem succeeded though the latter refused to christen it a strike since they had previously agreed to a no-strike pledge in support of the war. “That is when Mr. Bennett told me to hire some. We hired them.”

The Ford Motor Company began hiring a small number of black women at the end of 1942. Bennett directed Ward to oversee the process though the defeated personnel supervisor restated his belief that these women “had no business working in a factory.” He insisted his views were based on “the class” of “these women” and argued that the government agencies and private industries who wanted talent should have hired them.

Figures 17 and 18: African Americans and UAW organizers protest the Ford Motor Company’s discriminatory hiring practices against black women at the Willow Run Bomber Plant. Courtesy Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.
Yet, Ward did not raise the same objections when Charlotte Ward, his first wife, was given a job in the Sociological Department alongside Henry Ford’s niece, Connie Bryant, during his own army stint.548

Ward wiped away any doubts of his chauvinism as black women joined the company. He exposed his sexist opinion of women and his enduring objections to their fundamental right to work through his admonishments of them. “So I got these girls and I gave them all their lectures about the differences working in a plant and working in an office. I told them that they weren’t in church and they weren’t to get offended if men were rough and all that.” His strategy to persuade white men to accept black women also revealed a troubling case of sexism. When white men complained about having to work with black females, adamant that they were “enough colored fellows” around, Ward enticed them by bringing in eye-catching women. “I started out by taking two of the best looking chicks I could find.” He added, “I have never seen a man yet that never appreciated a pretty figure or pretty face, so I picked me…darn good looking gals.” Though he insisted that the women “didn’t have to do anything to keep” their job, his concentration on their appearances rather than their abilities laid bare his outlook on women’s occupational purpose.549

Ward’s treatment of black women, in some ways, mirrored his lengthy dealings with black men at the company who were bestowed slight respect. When black women and the UAW assembled at the Rouge to express indignation over Ford’s discriminatory hiring policies, black men, many of whom were disgruntled Ford employees, coalesced. Their frustrations with Ward fermented over their years of slaving in the foundry where
he assigned them. He also confined black college-educated men to the foundry where they poured steel with no potential for earning a promotion to another department more reflective of their educational attainments. Not surprisingly, they berated Ward. One worker deduced, “Willis Ward was the only man in the world who could get you bread for your table and make you hate him.” Another worker claimed “he abused people who applied for work, screamed at them and made them feel like cheap jobs.” Other workers stated, “We should have called him anti-colored. He was always friend to the white people, but acted like he hated us.” Ward, for the most part, escaped such maligning in the past. He came out unscathed from the Battle of the Overpass, mainly because “Mr. Bennett” told him “to stay away from that. He…wanted to keep me clean, to come back and be able to talk to the employees without the stigma of blood on my hands.”

Ward also avoided being derided as one of the “stooges for Ford” as Marshall and others were characterized during the 1941 UAW-CIO strikes at company. In anticipation of the work stoppage, black workers from outside Detroit were hired as strikebreakers. Ward, however, was dispatched into the army seven months after President Roosevelt signed the Selective Service and Training Act. Ward confessed, “I went as a volunteer with the first enlistment around here, and they [his bosses at Ford] felt, along with me, that during the state of flux, it would be a good idea if I would get my year out the way.” Ward returned to Ford December 4, 1941, three days before the bombing Pearl Harbor. The army tried to enlist him for active duty in March 1942 but Ford executives negotiated two separate six-month extensions to delay the start his military career. In a twist of
irony, the Ford Motor Company placed Ward into the line of fire by trying, once again, to keep him out of it.\footnote{551}

In truth, Ford executives prevented Ward from going into active duty to clean up the turmoil that Jesse Owens stirred. Ward hired Owens to work in the Sociological Department at Ford in 1941. When he left to fulfill his basic training obligations, Owens was transferred to the employment office to replace him. Owens, unlike Ward, was well-liked by Ford’s black workforce. Owens placed African Americans in jobs once set aside for white men and was willing to advocate on behalf of black workers. “He was not scared of the white people” one Ford employee averred. Black men perceived Owens to be “fair and courageous.” They “loved Jesse Owens, and threatened to strike when he was fired as a result of what appears to have been malicious gossip” a white informant revealed to a reporter for the \textit{Baltimore Afro-American}.\footnote{552} Ford executives, conversely, branded him a racial rabble-rouser. Ward attached himself to the view of Owens as a troublemaker, believing that the former Olympic hero failed to grasp “the problem or what the company had in mind.” He confessed, “I didn’t think he [Owens] was fitted for the job. He was a friend of mine…but I wanted to fire him because he was obviously going to ruin anything that I thought was worth trying to maintain.”\footnote{553}

Ward eventually returned to the military for active duty on February 15, 1943, and Owens was canned nearly four months later. But Owens’ firing was just a start of the changes the Ford Motor Company underwent during Ward’s time away. When he was
finally discharged on September 27, 1945, Ward returned to work at Ford. By that time, the infamous Employment Department he and Marshall operated with cruelty and a concern only for preserving the racial status quo had been abolished. Marshall passed away while Ward was in the army. Henry Ford II also fired Bennett and his lieutenants in a shakeup that ended the Service Department’s reign of terror. If Henry Ford II had it his way, it is likely Ward would have also been dismissed. But as a returning veteran, Ward was entitled to his job. He stayed there only nine months. It was just enough time for him to study for the bar and finally put to use the law degree that he had earned from the

![Figure 19: Willis Ward and Jesse Owens working together at the Ford Motor Company’s Employment Office. Courtesy Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.](image-url)
Detroit College of Law in 1939. He was admitted to the Michigan Bar on June 11, 1946. When he left the Ford Motor Company to enter private law practice, he summed up his nearly decade-long tenure in economic terms. “It was a job I wouldn’t take now for $20,000.”

Ward’s sense of regret was understandable. As he indicated nearly a decade later, “I had the wonderful chance to serve.” He was positioned to become a racial ally to the community where he “grew up in Detroit.” Ward also had the ability to alter the job conditions and prospects for black employees at the Ford Motor Company, many of whom labored in the same foundry the elder Ward worked until his death. Ward’s tenure, however, was marked by his role marshalling the company’s discriminatory employment practices and slowing the pace of racial equality for black Detroit. He catalyzed resistance only through racial betrayal. His maintenance of the racial status quo keyed the labor-civil rights union, furnishing the incipient freedom movement with a rare black foe. Yet, he spent most of the 1930s and 1940s trying to convince African Americans that Ford was their version of “Lovejoy” and “Garrison.” Tragically, he missed out on the chance to be the black community’s Frederick Douglass.  

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CHAPTER 6: Willis Ward’s America

Do we really want to risk turning back the clock to an era when the Willis Wards were isolated and penalized for the color of their skin, their economic standing or national ancestry?...

Less than seventy years after Willis Ward’s benching generated local and national outcry, another controversy erupted at the University of Michigan that placed the institution’s racial practices back into the spotlight. In 2003, the university litigated two landmark affirmative action cases, *Gratz v. Bollinger* and *Grutter v. Bollinger*, before the United States Supreme Court. Whereas Michigan denied Ward a chance to compete on the gridiron against Georgia Tech because of his race, the school had committed itself to a race-conscious admissions policy that favored underrepresented minority groups as a part of its compelling interest both in correcting the effects of historic discrimination and in promoting class diversity. Critics of affirmative action charged Michigan with racial bias for creating what they deemed to be a quota system unconstitutional under the 1978 *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* precedent.

Gerald Ford, the former President of the United States, dissented. Although he kept his distance from political controversies after leaving office, he did not resist the chance to address this racial cause célèbre that embroiled his alma mater and endangered an affirmative action program that he measured as invaluable to the military during his White House tenure. Ford weighed into the matter in an op-ed he penned for the *New...
York Times. He sided with advocates of racial equality who observed affirmative action to be a useful tool intended not to be a form of reverse discrimination but instead a mechanism to reverse discrimination. He expressed concerns that the two lawsuits, if successful, could prohibit Michigan and other institutions “from ever considering race as one of many factors.” Ford believed that the program needed to remain intact as it was still necessary to structure inclusion for ethnic and racial minorities disadvantaged in the educational process by centuries of racism. He asserted that such a decision to eliminate affirmative action would otherwise condemn “future college students to suffer the culture and social impoverishment that afflicted my generation.”

On the face of it, Ford had chosen to take a stand against racial unfairness for the second time at the university he loved. He admitted that the Ward incident shaped his racial opinions. “His [Ward’s] sacrifice led me to question how educational administrators could capitulate to raw prejudices.” His stance revealed not only a former president who had fallen out of step with his own party’s strong drift rightward but also a conservative who represented one of the last bastions of a Republicanism closing in quickly on becoming a historical footnote. In a departure from the neoconservative ideology of political individualism ascendant in the post-1960s GOP, Ford’s Republicanism was grounded in political pragmatism with an inclination toward fairness. He was not quite a “Rockefeller Republican” but he was every bit more judicious than the pro-Goldwater “Far Right” who were more extreme in seeking to combat the hegemony of liberalism, in rejecting the counterculture of the 1960s as “self-indulgent, thoughtless, and immoral,” and in desiring to become in fact, though not in name, the
His brand of moderate conservatism allowed him to support legislated remedies to racial exclusion, and he, at times, meted out justice on behalf of African Americans vulnerable to the caprices of American racism. His politics, alternatively, were scorched by his own burning stubbornness with believing that the route to racial equality could be achieved through “all deliberate speed.”

Ford’s political views were indistinguishable from the conservative variety of Willis Ward. Ward, on occasion, seemed poised to confront Jim Crowism and to embrace the burgeoning civil rights campaign that emerged, in part, because of the racial abuse she and other African Americans suffered and in response to the exploitation he triggered. At other times, he championed practices and policies that were ineffectual, choosing to endorse the opinion that black Americans needed to be patient on the question of equal opportunity. By the end of his life, Ward’s America was not much different from the one he inherited growing up in Detroit. Progress had been attained just as his father realized after relocating his family from Birmingham to the North where segregation was outlawed. But the search for dignity and equality remained elusive as racial practice survived Jim Crow laws.

Gerald Ford’s Republicanism

January 1976 appeared a crucial turning point for Gerald Ford who was fighting to stave off Ronald Reagan’s unexpected bid to win the Republican nomination to become the 39th President of the United States. Unemployment, which ticked above 9% by June 1975 as the two-year recession was coming to a close, dropped to 7.7% by December. The inflation that “haunted Richard Nixon, stymied Ford,” and later “all but
destroyed the Carter presidency,” eased its grip for a short period, coming in lower than what the Administration estimated in the President’s budget.\textsuperscript{560} But while the economy showed signs of life, the black community remained trapped in privation and troubled by the slow pace of school desegregation that was exacerbated by Ford’s strong anti-busing stance. The overall black jobless rate hovered at 12%, with 30% of teenagers out of work and 31.1% living in poverty. And Ford continued to demonstrate his support of the High Court’s 1974 ruling that placed a curb on racial busing in Detroit by reiterating his neighborhood school concept and favoring many anti-busing measures.\textsuperscript{561}

Willis Ward was unable to conceal his disappointment concerning Ford’s record on racial matters. He confessed, “I can’t say” that the president’s performance “is all I’d ask for.” His friendship with the President, however, restrained him from taking a harsher stance. Ward suggested that Ford, though unsatisfactory, grasped the issues that African Americans confronted. “But he is not totally indifferent to the problem. You can’t say he’s antiblack or not concerned.”\textsuperscript{562} Others were dimmer in their view of Ford, less willing to offer the incumbent any benefit of the doubt. “Certainly President Ford is not a carbon copy of the former president [Nixon],” said Charles Harris, “but Black people have to look very carefully at the record of this man since he has ascended to the position…on far too many issues that directly concern black people President Ford has been less than even in his positions.” He further charged that Ford and Ronald Reagan were each “trying to ‘steal’ the right wing spotlight from former Governor George Wallace.” Another observer lamented the mediocre field of presidential candidates in the 1976 race, taking Ford, Reagan, and Jimmy Carter to task. Phil Smith accused Ford of
placating black voters “while impressing white voters” by proving he was a hardliner “about ‘social give-away programs’ and not necessarily for Black and low-income people moving up into the so-called mainstream.”

Vernon Jordan, the famed civil rights activist and attorney, levied similar criticisms at Ford. In an op-editorial, Jordan blasted Ford and others who he deemed to be hypocritical in their condemnations of Jimmy Carter after the Democratic hopeful mentioned “ethnic purity” during some remarks intended to opposed a forced housing quota. Jordan ridiculed Ford as having, in one breath, expressed his dislike for the term “ethnic purity” and, in another breath, having proceeded to laud America’s “ethnic heritage.” Ford called “ethnic heritage a great treasure of the country” and confessed “I don’t think that federal action should be used to destroy that ethnic treasure.” Jordan not only identified Ford’s political semantics, but also alluded to the racial doublespeak by the President. “Politicians can now talk about preserving ethnic heritage and voters will know that his is a valid promise to keep neighborhoods white. It’s a new addition to the vocabulary that produced ‘neighborhood schools’ and ‘law and order,’ terms that were unmistakably understood as messages against school desegregation and as a promise to ‘get tough’ with minorities.” Accordingly many minorities, the vast majority from the black community, perceived Ford to be lukewarm on civil rights.

Ford prized African-American attitudes about him long before his relationship with the black community seemingly soured, causing him to muster less than ten percent of the black vote in a very narrow presidential defeat to Carter. Ford, who was swept into the White House on the back of the Watergate scandal, set out to make good on the failed
promises by the ousted Richard Nix onto “Bring Us Together.” The lack of consensus affected the entire country but African Americans and other minorities felt especially shunned by Nixon. Ford discerned his former boss’s missteps. Black access to the White House was severely limited, if not nonexistent—something that Ford glimpsed early into his service at the Ceremonial Office. “For the past several years, the Nixon Administration had closed the door to minorities, particularly to blacks. I wanted these groups to know that I could be—and really wanted to be—point man for them in their dealings with the government; that there was at least one man in the Administration who would listen to them and try to solve their problems.” As Vice-President, Ford tried to act as a liaison between minorities and the West Wing of the White House, and met with black leaders approximately three months after joining the Nixon Administration to replace the departed Spiro Agnew. But his recommendations, spawned by this session with some of the country’s most prominent African Americans, went unobserved by the White House. “Unfortunately,” Ford stated, “there was no follow-through; the people there didn’t care.”

Ford exhausted his first two weeks in office trying to evince the attentiveness his Administration would have toward the concerns of various parties, albeit allies or adversaries, outside the White House. He also wanted to bear out his commitment to maintaining an “open” West Wing. He invited George Meany of the AFL-CIO who had not visited the Oval Office in over a year. He convened a meeting with thirteen Congresswomen who were pushing the Equal Rights’ Amendment (ERA). Ford signed the proclamation endorsing the measure much to the delight of Bella Abzug who was not
only a Democratic foe but who also had been placed on the “master list of Nixon’s political opponents” for her outspoken liberal advocacy. Members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), most notably Shirley Chisholm, John Conyers, Ronald Dellums, Charles Diggs, Ralph Metcalfe, and Charles Rangel, were also named to the infamous list. Ford moved quickly to meet with them, phoning Chairman Rangel to arrange a summit.

The meeting with the CBC was productive. Ford recalled Rangel later saying that it was “absolutely, fantastically good.” Rangel’s colleagues concurred. They termed the talks “an open and frank exchange of ideas.” The gathering was the first at the White House in more than three years and some Caucus members remembered it taking thirteen months to orchestrate a similar visit with former President Nixon. But apart from the racial symbolism of assembling with the Commander-in-Chief, which likely heightened the post-meeting mood for both sides, the CBC sensed that real progress was achieved. Ford responded to the request by the Caucus for him to appoint an African American to a position where access could continue to be guaranteed by informing the organization that Stanley S. Scott would be staying on as the top ranking black official on the White House staff. A former reporter for the United Press International who witnessed Malcolm X’s assassination, Scott was expected to maintain an ongoing association with the CBC even as President Ford invited members each to telephone him directly to discuss any problems or concerns.

The open line of communication that Ford looked to establish with the Caucus seemed reassuring to the sixteen House representatives who gave the President a variety
of papers that dealt with domestic and urban issues. Among their specific requests, the CBC asked Ford for a public employment program specifically targeted for areas of high unemployment; additional federal money for daycare and family planning programs; changes to the Federal Revenue Sharing formula to permit poor urban areas an opportunity to secure a larger allotment; extension on the Voting Rights Act; and an effective agency to address poverty, comparable to the Office of Economic Opportunity. Ford offered to consider them and also assured the Caucus that he would consult them on future administration moves that affected minorities or the poor. The CBC assumed Ford to be earnest. Rangel answered a newsman’s question about the President’s record in the area of civil rights by stating that he had studied the performances of former Presidents Harry S. Truman, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson when they were members of Congress and concluded that after they were elected into the White House “they were considered friendly…by the Black community.”

Chisholm added to Rangel’s assessment explaining that some CBC members “had problems with President Johnson yet he brought about some of the greatest domestic changes we’ve ever seen. I think President Ford wants to do what needs to be done. Let’s give him a chance.” Barbara Jordan, the Congresswoman from Texas, echoed Chisholm’s thoughts. “I think it was a good meeting. The lines of communication are open between the President and the Black community in a way they have not been since the Caucus came into existence.” Diggs commended Ford for the change in mood throughout the nation. He then called on Ford to refocus the international front for better insight into the third world developing nations of Africa and praised Ford’s recent action to call for a
repeal of the Byrd Amendment, which permitted the import of chrome from Rhodesia in violation of United Nations sanctions.\textsuperscript{572}

Ford’s conference with the CBC was particularly striking since the group opposed his selection as Vice-President. The Caucus were upset that Nixon discharged Archibald Cox, the first Watergate special prosecutor, calling the act both “irresponsible and unconscionable.”\textsuperscript{573} The group had introduced resolutions the past two years, believing Nixon operated an illegal war in South Asia. Nixon’s executive crimes, shady company contributions and payoffs, the bevy of illegal impoundments of critical social program funding, and the ubiquitous Watergate, amongst other wrongdoings, only intensified the CBC’s frustration with him. As a result, the black Congressional representatives deemed it premature to permit Ford’s ingress into the Vice-Presidency until the Nixon matter had been properly adjudicated. “The members of the Congressional Black Caucus oppose any consideration of Gerald Ford’s nomination for Vice-President of the United States. The consensus is that to do so before the question of impeachability of Richard Nixon is resolved constitutes utter misinterpretation of basic principles.”\textsuperscript{574}

The CBC’s opposition to Ford’s nomination was predicated on their conviction that Nixon needed to be prosecuted before any of his executive decisions could be taken into consideration. Yet, Ford’s own anti-busing campaign weighed heavily on the black Caucus members mind. Just a year earlier, the black press pointed fingers at then Congressman Ford for being a “staunch supporter of Nixon” with an “attitude to do-no-more-than-we-have-to-do in the field of human rights, especially in education.” The article vilified Ford as a person who seemed “determined” that no one was going “to out-
black him,” citing his proposed constitutional amendment to outlaw the busing of school children. Ford favored the principle of school desegregation. In 1956, he voted “yea” on amendment to H.R. 7535, a school construction aid bill that prohibited the allotment of funds to States that did not comply with the 1954 Brown v. Board ruling. Then in 1964, he supported the passage of the Civil Rights Act, which, in part, contained provisions intended to expedite the process of school desegregation. But Ford was unreceptive to the idea of transporting black and white students as a solution. He treated spatiality and temporality as impediments to underpinning the Brown v. Board decision. “I happen to think it is far wiser timewise for kids to be in their neighborhood schools rather than to spend a lot of time traveling from their home to a school which may be 3, 4, 5, or 10 miles away.”

Ford disregarded the relationship between social and spatial exclusion. Geography affected American race relations, and narrowed black and white interaction. The pervasiveness of residential racial segregation shaped social dealings and zoned the school choices African Americans possessed not only to pursue integration but also to decide on where to educate their children. These geographical dividing lines were not novel creations, but were structured through decades of racial separation and through the sanctioned practices of redlining and restrictive covenants, steering and signs, accepted or actual, that conveyed “white only.” Ford, nonetheless, adhered to the voting pattern of his party, specifically other Michigan delegates, and backed Nixon’s Emergency School Aid plan.
The Nixon Administration favored the program of offering school funding assistance both as a supposed remedy to the unequal instructional opportunities arising out of segregated educational institutions and as a means to ease the burdens of court-ordered desegregation. Nixon’s policy position was reactionary, and couched in the same antibusing hostilities most acute in America’s growing suburbs. The White House endorsed the antibusing movement by plying a strategy embedded in suburban protectionism and driven toward constitutionalizing neighborhood school “choice” as a civil right, if not a moral freedom. Ford concurred with Nixon, portraying forced busing as grievously wrong for its parody of preference. In 1970, the then Congressman voted for H.R. 19446 to establish Emergency School Aid. The bill passed the House, but was filibustered in the Senate. A modified version of the legislation reappeared in 1971, and with Ford’s support, was appended to the Higher Education Act for that year. Ford believed that money, not busing, presented the cure to the country’s educational ills. “It [Emergency School Aid] is equity and justice on the part of the Federal government to provide that financial assistance. I am interested in the best education that we can get at the elementary and secondary level. The best way in this emergency to obtain that best education is to provide Federal financial assistance rather than to force busing. Forced busing to attain racial balance is not the best way to get good education.”

Ford fortified his anti-busing viewpoint by voting in favor of other major busing legislation considered in 1971 and 1972. He supported the Broomfield Amendment that postponed the efficacy of any Federal court order requiring busing for racial, sexual, religious, or socioeconomic balance until all appeals—or time for all appeals—had been
exhausted. Ford also sponsored John Ashbrook’s proposal prohibiting the use of appropriated funds for busing, and a third amendment by Edith Green that inhibiting Federal departments from promising to reimburse school districts for busing expenses. Ford voted on a motion instructing House conferees to retain all three amendments. When the bill came out of conference, Ford uttered his displeasure that the busing measures were weak. “The antibusing provisions are inadequate. The only meaningful part of the conference report in the busing field is the Broomfield amendment. But even when we are getting a part of a loaf, not all of the original amendment passed by the House.”

Ford’s spoken advocacy of school desegregation hardly vanished, even in the midst of his hard-hitting appraisal of the post-conference bills he wished had been more muscular in legislating opposition to busing. But he appeared more vigilant on the topic of integration as his antibusing stance emerged more vigorous. His enthusiasm on maintaining neighborhood schools pleased conservatives, some of whom the Congressman once assailed as a member of the “Young Turks.” The Young Turks, comprised of such men as Thomas Curtis, Charles Goodell, John Lindsay, and Donald Rumsfeld, challenged stalwart House Republican leadership. In 1958, the group supported Charles Halleck’s successful bid for Minority Leader. But the Young Turks might be best remembered for their assessment of Republicans on Capitol Hill, which was revealed in the March 1962 issue of *Advance*. They were disparaging of the party’s negativist attitude, the deficiency of impactful legislation, the “immoral” and “foolish” pursuit of the segregationist South, the neglect of black voters, and the deterioration of
the minority, labor, and ethnic divisions within the RNC. The Turks also carped at the party leadership’s tolerance of Goldwater and his southern strategizing. Now less-than-a-decade later, Ford was exhibiting his own devotion to alienating black voters and applying a southern strategy.⁵⁸⁰

Nowhere had Ford’s progressive retreat been truer than in his sponsorship of the Whitten Amendment to the 1970 Labor-HEW appropriations bill. The amendment, which was drafted by Representative Jamie Whitten of Mississippi and cheered loudly in the South, prohibited the use of appropriated funds to force a school district to bus students, abolish schools, force pupil assignments against the choice of students’ parents, or to require these actions as a prerequisite for receiving Federal resources. Ford added his voice to the chorus of whites who foresaw the amendment as a sign that “Congress and country are fed to the teeth with the doctrinaire methods that have been employed to achieve racial integration as the be-all and end-all of federal aid to education.” Opponents of the modified legislation were livid. They classified the provisions as “dangerous, disastrous, obnoxious, and iniquitous—calculated to crush civil rights, rape the Constitution, violate the Bill of Rights, and trample upon the conscience and dignity of man.” Other critics went further, judging the Whitten Amendment, if accepted, as guaranteeing a return to segregation and slavery through the device of “freedom of choice.” The seeming absurdity of their slavery prediction, aside, the buzzword “choice” hewed white commitment to desegregation. In their struggle to preserve segregated education, white parents emphasized their right to choose what kind of schools their
children attended and, consequently, what type of children attended school alongside their own.\textsuperscript{581}

Freedom of choice, euphemistically, reflected another conservative catchphrase—“freedom of association.” African Americans were entitled to their rights but not at the expense of whites’ right to select their own associates.\textsuperscript{582} To infringe on this privilege of choice, in Ford’s interpretation, was to demolish fundamental autonomy while propping up forced amalgamation—the latter he reasoned as unnecessary for accelerating school desegregation. Freedoms of “choice” and “association” were entrenched in segregationist ideology. But for Ford, whether deliberate or not, it epitomized his beliefs on racial and social hierarchy. He was fervent, on the one hand, in his conviction that the Ward incident shaped his politics and swelled his penchant for getting behind major and minor civil rights legislation. Unlike white southerners, he possessed the mindset to breach racial customs. Yet, on the other hand, Ford insisted on limiting the degree to which he or others enforced that break with tradition. He situated his busing policy right alongside his goals for school desegregation whereby an exceptional black figure could achieve the latter without requiring that former to exist.\textsuperscript{583}

Rather than articulating a strong desire to preserve the racial order, Ford was primed to be more subtle and, thus, appear nobler in framing his stern, antibusing posture. Socioeconomics, not the persistence of segregation, was the reason that white children went to school together. White parents, and more specifically their children, were the beneficiaries of their own labor and success. Proximity to good neighborhoods and excellent public schools was not an indication of white flight but, instead, represented the
consumer reward for the sacrifices parents made in lieu of their children’s future. African Americans, without the need for busing, could secure the same benefits of location through middle-class accomplishment and personal progress. In this regard, the freedom of choice, based on Ford’s perspective, was a part of the meritocratic ethos of hard work ‘paying off’ with white children having earned the unapologetic right to enjoy the fruits of their parents’ success. This abiding philosophy normalized educational inequality even if it prompted Ford and other conservatives to deem federal forced busing as an oppression of choice.  

Ironically, Ford enabled the meaning of “freedom of choice” to be inverted. In the immediate aftermath of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, “freedom of choice” was the description given to plans developed to desegregate schools in compliance with Title VI. The Supreme Court made these plans shatterproof through its 1968 ruling in the Green v. County School Board, making it possible to rely on such strategies as zoning to abolish segregated school systems and to grant every citizen the freedom of choice to choose the best public schools for their children through coordinated efforts to integrate. Now, “freedom of choice” was upturned to characterize the right that individuals enjoyed to carve out their own associations. The Whitten Amendment passed the House by a vote of 191-157, but was defanged in the Senate after Hugh Scott motioned to insert the modifying language, “except when required by the Constitution.” Even if those persons aiming to stop busing for the purposes of desegregation would not yet command a majority in the Senate, they were still able to nullify the original purpose behind freedom of choice. By the early 1970s, none of the “freedom of choice” plans remained intact.
Ford did not evade belittling for his role in eroding freedom of choice. He clocked his otherwise hostile response to busing behind the veil of diplomacy with thumbs up toward liberty but failed to delude his detractors. As Arnold Aronson, founder of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, observed, “Mr. Ford…walked up the aisle with Dixiecrats in favor of the Whitten amendments, symbolizing the marriage of convenience between his party and the Southern Democrats.”

Ford seemed undeterred by the criticisms. As President, he prolonged his opposition to busing. The deteriorating American economy, ravaged by the rises in inflation and unemployment to levels not seen in the post-World War II years, keyed his domestic policy agenda. Early on, he proposed a tax hike, asked for a reduction in spending, and solicited Americans to cosign his economic program by wearing buttons festooned with the acronym, “WIN”—Whip Inflation Now. Millions of buttons were printed but Americans barely requested any of them, making the inflation-fighting badge the butt of many jokes. Indeed, one member of the White House press corps designed his own “SIN” button for “Stop Inflation Now” and possibly to signify the iniquitous state of the economy. Yet, as devastated as the economy was, it was not the problem that most divided Americans during the Ford Presidency. Busing continued to be a conflict-ridden issue not only for America’s unsteady race relations but also for the Ford Administration. In his three years inside the Oval Office, Ford gave forty interviews on the topic of busing alone, usually where he reiterated his attitudes on court-ordered busing. “I have been against court ordered forced busing to achieve racial balance since the mid-
1950s…I don’t think court ordered forced busing is the way to achieve quality education.”\textsuperscript{586}

No worse place was the concerns over court-ordered busing more dramatized than in Boston where violent eruptions resulted, deepening racial tensions for a city that once symbolized abolitionism and was dubbed “the cradle of liberty.” In 1974, United States District Court Judge Wendell Arthur Garrity ordered the city to integrate its schools immediately by busing black students to predominantly white schools. When busing began that fall, white mobs greeted black children with racial taunting. School brawls were so common that beleaguered administrators rarely reached the office in time to say the pledge, causing the practice to fall into disuse. A riot ensued after one white student but Ford was reluctant to intervene, other than sending Attorney General H. Edward Levi and a few others to authorize the use of Federal funds to improve the situation. In spite of this, he sided with the opinion of busing opponents who saw themselves as victims and insisted that they were fighting for the right to control their own lives.\textsuperscript{587}

At his Rose Garden news conference, Ford stated his willingness to obey and enforce the law. He implored “the citizens of Boston [to] respect the law” and added “I hope and trust it is not necessary to call in federal law enforcement officials.” But his allegiance to busing attenuated the federal court orders put forth to hasten school desegregation. The President challenged federal court desegregation rulings and spark controversy after answering a question that seemed a mere change of pace from economic issues. A reported asked, “As chief executive, what do you plan to do, and what comments do you have on this situation?” Ford did not hesitate in airing his
position. “I wish to make it very, very direct. I deplore the violence that I have read about and seen on television…I would like to add this, however: the court decision in that case, in my judgment, was not the best solution in Boston. I have consistently opposed forced busing to achieve racial balance as a solution to quality education and therefore, I respectfully disagree with the judge’s order.”

Boston Mayor Kevin White lashed out at Ford. “President Ford’s statement yesterday acts to impede the enforcement of the federal court order to desegregate Boston public school system and thus threatens the safety of our school children. In doing so, he has jeopardized the civil and human rights of this city, and his statements challenge the rule of law throughout this land.” White indicated that he would not underwrite further school desegregation programs as long as the federal government dithered. “I will not publicly support of my own volition the implementation of the second phase of the (desegregation) plan unless and until” Ford establishes “clear guidelines as to what circumstances will allow federal resources to be committed to support implementation.” The mayor also was upset that the Ford Administration had not provided any federal security and chose not to apply Phase Two until greater guarantees were given to help local authorities ensure the safety and well-being of Boston youth. When questioned as to what he would do if ordered to deploy the National Guard, White refused to respond. A reporter pressed further, asking White if he was implying that he was not planning to comply if directed, the mayor said, “Obviously.” Ford stated he was unaware that White required federal assistance to execute the busing order. White cried foul and asserted that the President’s statement was “inaccurate” since a Justice Department official was in
Boston telling Judge Garrity that Ford rejected the mayor’s request that federal marshals be sent to the city.\textsuperscript{589}

Ford, effectively, repeated the same claims that Nixon made that ending “de jure” segregation was the only responsibility the federal government possessed, and that “de facto” segregation was impossible to topple. “Individuals have rights. I would hope they would not [turn someone away on the basis of color], but individuals have a right, where they are willing to make the choice themselves, and there are no taxpayer funds involved.” Nixon shared this outlook that racial practice was unending even if it was unreasonable. He evinced no yearning to eye busing as a strategy—albeit imperfect—to overcome the racism of mind that laws and legislation could not conquer. He had exhorted his aides to “do only what the law requires”—halt de jure segregation and ignore de facto segregation. With both administrations ducking the matter of de facto segregation, they begged off the opportunity to move America’s race relations from desegregation toward integration, from tolerance to equality.\textsuperscript{590}

Ford, like Nixon, exposed the “monumental hypocrisy” of the North as one Connecticut senator referred to it. Men like Ford were willing to stamp out the laws that conditioned segregation in the South but were averse to remedying the racial practices that demarcated black and white northerners.\textsuperscript{591} None of Ford’s actions, however, occurred outside the purview of the black community. African Americans were not bamboozled by Ford’s “say-one-thing” and “do-another” approach. Nixon was a known nemesis to the cause of civil rights and was said to have “set a moral example which encouraged the downgrading of integration as a social ideal” by motivating “the
American people to question the relevance of quality, integrated education.” Ford was thought to hold a higher standard of morality and compassion than his predecessor. His dealings with African Americans suggested otherwise. “His civil rights record is weak at best,” noted one black reporter. “And Ford has often expressed unequivocal opposition to busing; moreover he has encouraged Republican candidates to milk the busing issue for all it is worth.”

Outside of racial symbolism, Ford’s promises to the CBC and other black leaders as he entered the Oval Office were meaningless. To be certain, he followed through on the request by Dr. Carlton Goodlet for him to name an African American to his cabinet, appointing William T. Coleman as the Transportation Secretary. He provided them unfettered access to the White House, gratifying Jesse Jackson, Vernon Jordan, and Roy Wilkins, amongst others, with subsequent gatherings in the West Wing. “One of the positive results of the meeting is that we have a commitment from the President for a continuing dialogue with us,” said Jordan. Ford also supported the extension of the Voting Rights Act just as he guaranteed Clarence Mitchell he would do. “I favored broadening the Voting Rights Act five years ago and I supported the bill.” But neither meetings nor metaphors moved African Americans forward in their quest for full equality. It was not that these black dignitaries were naïve about Ford’s ability to help them secure integration. In addition, they were just as inclined to being frank about his letdowns. Jordan told the President that “if you ask us how you did in Boston, we must say you didn’t do too well.” Bayard Rustin added, “We are convinced it was not your purpose to do so, but your statement opposing the court’s decision contributed to the
violence in Boston.” And Leon Sullivan urged Ford to “look toward eliminating slums in America” and to provide the black community with job training to “meet the new day.” Yet, Ford’s civil rights record was up-and-down. On big racial ideas, such as integration, he was an advocate. But enforcement and implementation were something else, altogether. Just as he did with school desegregation and busing, Ford arrayed his Midwestern tact of racial appeasement to other civil rights issues. He favored legislation intended to address racial discrimination but this support coincided with a number of procedural votes, viz., votes to recommit, seemingly at odds with his ultimate decision to pass the bills in question. In 1949, Ford voted to pass legislation to outlaw the poll tax and to guarantee fair employment practices (FEP). Of the four roll call votes on the measure, he is recorded as voting “yea” on the rule, on consideration, and on passage but “nay” on the motion to recommit. He voted with an overwhelming majority of House members against recommitting the Railway Labor Act Amendments of 1950 with instructions to insert an anti-discrimination clause. Civil rights groups resented these apparent equivocations even if they could be explained in procedural terms. Ford’s position on Fair Housing in 1966, along with his backing of the Administration’s alternative proposals on voting rights and equal employment opportunity in 1970 and 1972, respectively, were likewise denounced as efforts to “gut…the final product.” Ford did oppose housing legislation in 1966 but publicly expressed support of the principle of
open housing a year later. Neither his shifting stance on Fair Housing nor his consistent “yea” vote on passage, however, altered the negative opinions of him.594

On some civil rights issues, Ford was silent. In an unsuccessful attempt to recommit the Military Housing Act of 1949 to conference because it did not contain a non-discrimination clause, Ford did not register a vote. He was also recorded as not voting on a resolution to consider a bill that not only authorized judges to appoint referees to help “Negroes” register and vote but also to provide criminal penalties for bombing, bombing threats, and mob action designed to obstruct court orders. He eventually voted “yea” on passage but “nay” on the motion to recommit. In all these instances, Ford seemed determined not to vote to consider a bill, likely as a tactic to avoid controversy whenever his party did not support the legislation. He did this in 1956 in supporting then President Eisenhower’s civil rights recommendation, which included a bill to create a bipartisan Commission on Civil Rights to investigate charges that “in some localities…Negro citizens are being deprived of their right to vote and are likewise being subjected to unwarranted economic pressure.” The bill also sought to establish new civil and voting rights safeguards and to authorize an assistant attorney general to head up a Civil Rights Division in the Department of Justice. Once again, Ford voted “yea” on passage but “nay” on the motion to recommit.595

There were other occasions when Ford sponsored a bill but refused to support measures intended to guarantee enforcement. In 1950, civil rights proponents were successful in bringing a FEPC bill to the House floor for the first time. The proposed law provided for a compulsory FEPC commission having broad powers and recourse to the
courts for enforcement. Pennsylvania Republican Samuel K. McConnell, Jr., offered an amendment substituting a voluntary FEPC without any enforcement powers. The substitute was adopted. Ford voted “yea” to substitute the voluntary bill, “nay” on the motion to recommit it, and “yea” on the passage. In 1971 and 1972, the House renewed its efforts to strengthen and broaden the coverage of the equal opportunity provisions contained in the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Civil rights groups had been upset with the House for its adoption of a weaker bill but were somewhat encouraged by the Senate’s passage of a “stronger” bill that ultimately prevailed. The Committee’s recommended measure, generally supported by civil rights advocates, would have given the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) cease-and-desist powers. The House, instead, approved the Erlenborn Administration—backed substitute to enforce federal laws against job discrimination. The bills different in a variety of ways, but it was the dissimilarity in enforcement that served as the prime source of contention. Ford endorsed the Erlenborn substitution on the grounds that the courts were not the proper venue to settle human rights issues.596

Ford appeared to mollify civil rights advocates and detractors. He readily backed legislation to curb discrimination but did so in a way that placated segregationists if not preserved the racial order. There were a few times he flouted this convention, but largely in instances where his party supported it. Following a wave of protests that produced a domestic crisis in 1963, President Kennedy introduced new and far-reaching legislation address access to public accommodations, fair employment, school desegregation, and voting rights, amongst other things. House Republicans proposed their omnibus bill that
went beyond what the Kennedy Administration had requested to combat civil rights deprivations. Ford lent support to the Republican bill, which additionally called for a permanent Civil Rights Commission, equal employment opportunity, school aid to the states, and a measure to presume literacy (for persons who completed at least the sixth grade of education) for voting purposes. Ford expressed regret that the Committee work [on national security] had made it impossible “to participate in this floor discussion on the House Republicans proposals for better civil rights legislation.” Some of the House resolutions were viewed by the Senate as “going too far” and eventually a slightly weaker bill was passed into law, becoming Civil Rights Act of 1964. His support for the 1965 Voting Rights Act ran similarly though he sponsored a substitute to the Administration’s bill. Ford’s substitution eventually died as the House got behind the Administration’s less objectionable proposal. But Ford In both cases, Ford demonstrated that he was willing to be more vocal in his support of legislation to prohibit discrimination as long as his party was also willing to do the same.597

Ford was not the racial rabble-rouser that Nixon was but his record on civil rights was woefully uneven. By 1976, his tepid stance on race relations discouraged African Americans who no longer trusted Ford to help them achieve equality. He ignored the howls of southerners to scrap the Voting Rights Act and directed Congress to extend it by five years. But he stumbled on every other issue pertaining to African Americans, prodding one editorialist to state very early on, “There is a strong streak of Richard Nixon in Gerald Ford.” Another called him “Pure Nixon” on civil rights. Even his meetings with black leaders no longer held any cachet. A forum in June was labeled “futile.” Ford
started the dialogue off stating that he does not believe in a segregated society. “Never have, didn’t grow up in one.” But every word he uttered thereafter surely sounded as if he was siding with segregationists. Ford claimed that “in some instances federal courts have gone too far in (directing) massive court-ordered busing to achieve racial balance.” Members of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR) lobbied Ford to specify cases in which courts have gone too far but the President declined to do so. It was something he said to advantage his campaign and to appease whites even if it aggravated the black community.\textsuperscript{598}

While the dialogue was cordial and serious, there was certainly a feeling amongst the LCCR that it made little impact. The President listened, sure, but participants wondered to what avail. Clarence Mitchell pointed out that in the early of days of the fight for constitutional rights terrible damage was done by opponents who used the term “social equality” as a warning of the consequences of ending segregation. The President’s usage of the phrase “forced busing” was equated with the past employment of “social equality,” which Mitchell claimed “strikes wells of deepest anger in blacks.” Ford thanked Mitchell but shortly after he was back hustling delegates to the Republican convention and voicing his opposition to “massive court-ordered, forced busing.” It was a curious phrase for Ford to have used seeing as though “forced’ was not inserted into any busing order. It was these types of underhanded tactics that prompted black leaders to accuse the Ford Administration of “sweeping problems of race relations ‘under the rug.’”\textsuperscript{599}
It was Ford’s way of pacifying two crowds. He went on an offensive against “big government” and faulted “politicians and the theorists who have intruded upon individual rights.” He targeted “25 years of reckless Democratic spending” on social programs, many of which benefited African Americans. “Every new dollar appropriated, every new law that fetters free enterprise erodes personal freedom.” These messages saturated his stump speeches at GOP pep rallies and fundraisers, putting Ford on firm conservative ground contrary to the more liberal or moderate wing of the party, including his own Vice-President Nelson Rockefeller. But he also spent the latter part of 1975 on a busing campaign, urging compliance with the law but also attacking federal courts for not obeying the Esch Amendment he signed into three days after he took office in 1974 listing seven alternatives to busing. It was difficult for the country, much less federal judges, to know Ford’s plan when he failed to articulate it. He touted the proposals given to him by two aides but offered no details. His taciturnity provoked Roy Wilkins to ask rhetorically, “What is Ford’s ‘better way?’”

Ford, nonetheless, closed his eyes to Wilkins and other civil rights leaders. Ford met with Bob Abernethy, Jesse Marlow, and Warren Olney for an interview at the Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles, California. During the interview, they asked, “The whole option to busing tends to get confused with racism and there are a lot of racial epithets and what not being thrown about on the protest line. Do you have anything to say about that?” In a stunning response, Ford stated, “I don’t think opposition to busing really has any relationship to racism on the part of most people.” Ford cited William Raspberry, an African American and a relentless moderate, to make a blanket case that black people
were not in favor of busing. The next May, while conferencing at the Neil House Hotel in Columbus, Ohio, Ford was again invited to address the relationship between racism and antibusing. He was reminded by a reporter of the civil rights groups who believe that the word “quality education” is a code word and not in conformity with the Supreme Court’s 1954 decision. Ford retorted, “I respectfully disagree with some of the civil rights leaders,” and argued that the best way to achieve “desegregation is set forth in legislation under the title of Equal Educational Opportunities Act…passed in 1974.”

Mark Udall, the Democratic president aspirant, declared that Ford compromised his presidency by dragging the busing issue into the campaign. “Racial issues always lie close to the surface and can be exacerbated very readily…President Ford betrayed the office of the President by playing politics with little children.” Ohio civil rights leaders were in agreement. Ford, of course, denied he was politicking. He reiterated that it was his position since 1954 and alluded to the burden white communities endured in the wake of busing. “We all know the tragedy that has occurred in many communities where the court has ordered forced busing on a massive basis. I think that is the wrong way.” Ford’s denial that he was playing politics was unconvincing. As one black journalist William Brower averred, “He disclaims that is playing politics with the desegregation issue. Well, if he isn’t politicking, he must be nitpicking” and “using every convenient forum to try to corral votes in Boston, Detroit, Louisville, and anywhere else the question has passed a civic tenderness.” Brower continued, “By such a slick tactic Mr. Ford appears to be writing off the black vote.”
Brower, nevertheless, knew that Ford would secure black votes. “I’m not sure that he will alienate all of it. Some blacks are going to vote Republican even if Mr. Reagan, John Wayne’s favorite candidate, is on the ticket. Referring to these African Americans as “Nixon apologists,” he insisted that the “resigned president did some terrible things to try to reverse the progress of integration” though he still had black support. True to form, seventy black delegates attended the Republican Convention, the most since the days of Reconstruction, and provided the President with the votes he needed to defeat the proposal by Reagan that he name his running mate. The Republicans followed that key moment in the convention up by expressing disapproval for busing. Ford’s efforts to draw attention to his antibusing stance worked and he earned the Republican nomination.603

Ford had a keen eye for good and bad publicity and for knowing how to press the right buttons.604 Ahead of his presidential showdown with Jimmy Carter, however, he needed black votes. He recognized it though he was unsure that he would get any support. “Despite my conviction that I had a commendable record publicly and privately on racial matters, most blacks were unlikely to vote for me no matter what I did. Southern blacks would turn to Carter because of regional pride and a common Baptist faith. And we’d be lucky to attract 10 percent to 15 percent of the black vote in the industrial Middle West.”605 Still, Ford was not going to go down without trying. He invited Willis Ward,
his ex-teammate to the White House for an interview that was shown as a part of a film at the Republican National Convention that preceded the President's acceptance speech. The two also took some photos in the Oval Office. The White House then released several statements ballyhooing the President for having allegedly stood up against Michigan racism on behalf of Ward, a black man. Ford also extended Negro History Week to Black History Month as part of the Bicentennial year celebration of the nation's Independence. He remarked, “We can review with admiration the impressive contributions of black Americans to our national life and culture…Freedom and recognition of individual rights are what our Revolution was all about.” He exhorted the Republican National Convention that preceded the President’s acceptance speech. The two also took some photos in the Oval Office. The White House then released several statements ballyhooing the President for having allegedly stood up against Michigan racism on behalf of Ward, a black man. Ford also extended Negro History Week to Black History Month as part of the Bicentennial year celebration of the nation’s Independence. He remarked, “We can review with admiration the impressive contributions of black Americans to our national life and culture…Freedom and recognition of individual rights are what our Revolution was all about.” He exhorted
Americans to “seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history.”607

Ford’s words mostly fell on deaf ears. African Americans were all too familiar with his acts of racial symbolism. In July 1974, he defended his civil rights record at the National Urban League Conference, which marked the first time the president or vice president in the Nixon administration addressed the nation’s largest forum on race relations. Ford drew a thunderous ovation for his obvious slap at Alabama Governor George Wallace. “It (his civil rights record) is a long, long way from standing in the doorway of a schoolhouse in defiance of a federal court in an attempt to deny black children a quality education.” Ford was interrupted by applause five times during his forty-five minute speech and many observers framed the moment as his major civil rights speech. Within days, Ford was singing a different tune. “I feel very strongly that to deal with integrated schools by busing is very superficial and very counterproductive…When individuals can move and live where they want to. That’s the basic way to deal with the problem.” By 1976, Ford’s routine of playing the racial fiddle to different crowds had worn thin and African Americans moved on to Jimmy Carter. Vernon Jordan summed up the feelings of the disenchanted. “We as black people had no other way to go but to take Carter. Think…of the lack understanding demonstrated by Gerald Ford to the problems of housing, nutrition, unemployment, and the plight of senior citizens.”608

The problem of unemployment was severe. Nearly eight million Americans were out of work, two-and-a-half million more than when Ford assumed office. Unemployment was especially acute in black communities and slumbered at thirteen-and-
a-half percent. A month before the presidential election, Bayard Rustin penned a column calling the difference between Ford and Carter “clear and unmistakable.” Rustin stated that Ford’s record deserved repudiation and argued that the President’s reelection “would mean the continuation of policies initiated under Richard Nixon that have been disastrous for all working Americans, and especially for blacks.” Ford’s policies in the past year were blamed for sending two million more African Americans into poverty and the gap between black and white income that narrowed in the sixties increased during the Nixon and Ford years. “It would be bad enough if Ford had simply followed the wrong course of economic action,” Rustin contended. “But what is worse is that he seems totally oblivious to the human and social cost of unemployment.” Ford lost the election to Carter and all but faded into political obscurity, sans the occasional references to the man who pardoned Nixon. Black America had lost leverage in the civil rights battle under Ford but they defeated him at the ballot.609

Twenty-three years later, Ford championed the cause of affirmative action in his defense of the University of Michigan’s admission policies. He, ironically, seized the moment to pinpoint the benefits of integration. “Doors…must be kept open. Tolerance, breadth of mind and appreciation for the world beyond our neighborhoods: these can be learned on the football field and in the science lab as well as in the lecture hall. But only if students are exposed to America in all her variety.” Yet, in his time as President, Ford’s vision of America was limited. The person he became away from the White House was conceivably the individual who stated that he so “naturally” came about his support of the Voting Rights Act and other civil rights measures thirty years before Selma, not in the
halls of Congress but on a weathered turf embellished with the Block ‘M.’ Or maybe, Ford in his elder years realized that the person he had been all along—a person willing to voice opposition to racism but not threaten the old order; a person swift to criticize his black teammate’s benching but also unite with a racist organization like Michigamua; a person in support of school desegregation but adamant in his antibusing stance; and a person given to political pandering even if it meant worsening the plight of the poor—put the country at risk to turn “back the clock to an era when the Willis Wards were isolated and penalized for the color of their skin.” 610

**Willis Ward’s Republicanism**

Willis Ward strayed away from criticizing Ford as the election neared. Whereas most African Americans grew weary with the President, Ward’s judgment of Ford’s performance improved. In a span of six months, he went from expressing concern to complimenting Ford for a job well done. “When I heard your acceptance message, I was thoroughly satisfied that you are ready to take on the opposition. I liked the positive, aggressive attitude in your manner and the positive tone of your message. There is no question in mind you stressed affirmatively your record since August, 1974. Certainly I am as proud of it as you are.” Unlike Vernon Jordan and Bayard Rustin, Ward placed blame on the unemployed for their predicament. “The employable are employed, and at some time, you may suggest to the American people that all great civilizations have agonized over the problem of the unemployable employable.” For Ward, taxes were more urgent a crisis for ‘people like him.’ “I, too, am in that class of Americans who are burdened by onerous taxation. I pay them as a duty. I dislike them as is my right. He
concluded his letter by informing Ford of how wonderful “the pleasure of having a personal friend elected President of the United States” would be.611

Ward’s outlook was grounded in rugged individualism. But his perspective was also formulated in racial bootstrapping and self-preservation. Within the contours of racial pioneering, Ward comprehended his success as unusual and characteristic of his own hard work and perseverance. The doors that were open to him were not unbolted by the travails of other African Americans who came before him. Instead, benevolent whites grasped his racial singularity and treated him with the respect his own talents warranted. Struggling African Americans suffered due to their own letdowns, not because of white racism. The way to achieve opportunity was not to push aggressively for it, but to await recognition from white America and to cooperate with them.

Ward articulated this message of bootstrap agency to a group of black teachers at a convention hosted by the Tuskegee Institute in 1938. Henry Ford dispatched Ward to the southern campus in Macon County, Alabama, to deliver a speech on his behalf. According to Ward, Ford had a strong relationship with George Washington Carver who had served on Tuskegee’s faculty after being heavily recruited there by the school’s founder, Booker T. Washington. “Mr. Ford didn’t speak to me of Doctor Carver as if he were a colored man,” Ward insisted. “He spoke of him as an unusual man with no implication or insinuation of a color status.” Ford asked Ward to pay respect to Carver during the trip to Tuskegee. But Willis’s central task was to tout the Ford Motor Company’s integration policy and to communicate a message of fair play. Ward obeyed Ford’s charge and spoke on the company’s efforts “to integrate the colored kids in the
training program…on the same basis as the white kids.” He told the audience that there was no discrimination at Ford and informed them of his and Donald Marshall’s leadership role, overseeing the employment, training, and welfare of 10,000 black employees.612

But then Ward deviated from his assigned task to convey his own moral of how black teachers could best prepare African-American students in a segregated system. He peddled a Whiggish understanding of the American past, asking the students seated before him to “hang onto America because there was hope in it.” Ward declared, “The history of America indicates that there has been a steady progress for everybody; there is no question about it. Regardless of how it happened or why it happened, the point is that within the framework of a government you have a valve that permits progress to come through.” Ward then admonished the audience to explain to black children the need to trust white racial goodwill and not to see the freedom struggle as an isolated quest. “I told these people in Dixie, ‘you must tell the Negro youth that he cannot play the role of his full emancipation alone. His friends, I mean real, genuine friends, are on his side during the fight for political emancipation. As in the past when Lovejoy, Garrison, and a host of others tried to give him political emancipation, so did his friends try to give him economic salvation.”613

Ward’s speech was ironic. The intransigence of southern racism did not deter him from promulgating a message of racial uplift. Middle-class black Americans, unable to attack segregation head-on, had long implemented a strategy of indirection that involved not only exhibiting respectability but also but also winning whites over with moral
suasion. Ward’s uplift message was not merely a tactic of avoidance more than it was an ideological approach based on his genuine beliefs that African Americans could not get along well without the aid of whites. He also trusted personal striving over collective politics as the best solution to the conditions that entombed the black community. “The problem of living is primarily answered by individual effort that he puts forth…He must have faith in his employer. The Negro youth like other youths must recognize that the employer’s problems are also his own, and the two must function as a team and not as enemies as some intellectuals would have us believe.”

Ward privileged individualism over communal struggle. Personal advancement, however, was not necessarily equivalent to having anti-black interests. Some middle-class African Americans developed a socially responsible individualism, linking their personal success to the betterment of the entire race. At times, it appeared that Ward embraced the idea of using his personal achievements to spur black progress. He advocated starting a Negro professional basketball team with Harlem Globetrotter legend Larry Bleach four years prior to the integration of the National Basketball Association in 1950. The team, financed by boxing star Joe Louis, was to be coached by Bleach and managed by Ward. During the early 1950s, Ward was a part of a labor group that supported rent control, attempting to insure that black tenants were provided with decent housing and were not subject to rent gouging. As a judge for the Wayne Probate Court, he was remembered as having created racial parity. Andrew Perdue recalled that most lawyers selected to conduct business with the court were white prior to Ward’s nomination. “He [Ward] made it fair,” Perdue noted. “He balanced it. He made sure his
staff was integrated, and all his appointments were balanced.” Perdue’s praise for Ward must have been a moment of redemption for Ward, who had not been content with his personal influence on integration during his days at Chairman of the Public Service Commission (PSC). Ward attested that his greatest failure had been “an inability to find enough blacks and other minorities to thoroughly integrate the commission’s professional staff.”

Unfortunately, these moments appeared more to be snapshots than sustained activism. Ward typically did as much as what was necessary for the moment. Even his disappointment with being unable to find enough African Americans to work for the Public Service Commission had a hidden transcript. In an interview with John Behee, Ward claimed that there were not any qualified black professionals out there to join his staff. “We have two-hundred people on staff: accountants, economists, engineers. Only one black economist and we are lucky to get that one.” His dismal outlook on the capability of African Americans was part of a larger dissent to 1960s radicalism and the 1970 Black Action Movement (BAM) strikes at the University of Michigan.

John Behee interviewed Ward in 1970 in preparation for his book, Hail to the Victors! Behee wanted Ward to elaborate on racist structures that needed to be eradicated. He asked frankly, “What are some of the things you would want to see done?” Ward quipped, “You can’t do that. Today is a summation of your yesterday.” When summoned by Behee to expound on his somewhat ambiguous answer, Ward fulminated. “Things have [changed]. The whole rotten mess was a long time in its creation, I think people being what they are, it’s going to take a long time correcting it. I see nothing yet to be
pessimistic.” Ward, however, identified the protest and violent acts of young people, black and white, as “destructive.” He briefly recognized the racism confronted by black youth. “The kid is not concerned about Vietnam so much as don’t come telling him about equality, don’t come telling me everything is rosy and beautiful because you got me out here in the suburbs and you don’t like colored people…you want me to go get shot over in that place [Vietnam]…so he is protesting. He comes back with his long hair and his bare feet.”

If Ward had paused there, he might have been on solid footing for analyzing black militancy. Instead, he blamed the Democratic Party for engendering the countercultural radicalism that emerged during the sixties. “The performance of the Democratic Party in Chicago when Sophie Williams came through there, they would not seat him. Various delegations from Dixie where the kids had grown up…the making of a radical begins there because they won’t go out and elect him…then they came back and did elect him…then they go over to the Boardwalk of Atlantic City and they come up with the same thing so those very kids who fought so hard under Adlai Stevenson to restructure the Democratic Party came out…they are the White Panthers and the Weatherman because they are MAD!” Ward pointed to Eldridge Cleaver and Malcolm X as the worse examples of this anger. “Cleaver was with those white kids to reform the Democratic Party in the South to get delegates in the South within the established order. So he comes out, “Burn, Baby, Burn! And you read the history of Malcolm X, that man there, he saw his father…die.” Ward closed out his editorial lamenting the youthful aggression as suggestive of a generation that “for some reason…talk about these things” in contrast to
his own upbringing where you just did not converse on these issues. “You see these things, you see the violence, you see the reason for it, but it is sat that it is there. But nonetheless you’re not going to change it overnight when there is still an emergence of hatred.”

Ward beckoned for the black community to exercise patience. He insisted to Behee that racial placidity was the key to progress. He offered the example of a business man he encountered while serving as the chair of the PSC. Ward, expressing his own disdain for social intellectuals, said that you could look at the gentleman and see that he was not interested in sociology or humanities. “The guy has got to be in his fifties, went to engineering school…But you heard him talk about our responsibility to the lower classes of blacks and whites, and he did not do it because he had a prepared speech and didn’t know I was coming. And you see these things coming about within the system, not necessarily because it is right, but because it is good business.” Ward declared that the white business man did not care the race of a patron if the person bought computers and that this was the best way to improve race relations.

Ward’s unsympathetic scrutiny of the BAM strikes was particularly distressing. Behee pressed him on the racial controversy, presupposing that Ward would be sympathetic to the movement given his own hurtful past at Michigan. The BAM strikes represented a series of protests against the University of Michigan for its admission policies and its slow pace toward integration. Black students pushed Michigan’s President Robben Fleming and the Board of Regents to increase African-American enrollment to ten percent by 1973. They further demanded that the university not offer a
general recommendation but that school officials make a real financial commitment to boosting the number of black students on the campus. In 1962, a federal investigation concluded that there was significant racial bias in hiring at Michigan and urged that steps be taken to enhance diversity at every level. Then President Harlan Hatcher established a committee that recommended that a special program be launched to provide additional recruiting of minority students as well as financial aid and support services. The Opportunity Awards Program was created in 1964, and by 1969 black enrollment rose from 2% to a little over 3%. But this modest increase was not nearly enough for African Americans who also desired a black studies program as well as additional black faculty and recruiters to be hired as a nod to the racial solidarity inherent in the Black Power politics that spawned the student movement.622

Black students used the evening of February 5 to make their case known to the school administration. They were invited to dine with President Fleming. When they arrived, they stormed the President’s lawn in a demonstration and presented a list of entreaties. “We do not expect the university to procrastinate and sub-committee these demands. They are for immediate and positive action,” the petition read. It was signed by the United Black Population at the University of Michigan. The campaign initiated by BAM was aided by a large coalition of white student activists, mainly from the Students for a Democratic Society. This interracial alliance plied a nonviolent strategy but triggered disruptions throughout the campus for close to two months with the university forced into a shutdown for eighteen days. On April 1, Michigan reached a settlement with BAM, though only accepting the ten percent enrollment figure as a goal. The school also
decided to increase funding to the Center for Afro-American Studies, to set up support services for minorities, and to design programs to recruit black faculty and students. U.S. Vice President Spiro Agnew, nevertheless, excoriated President Fleming for his “surrender” to BAM and labeled the resolution a “callow retreat from reality.” Agnew concluded his remarks at the Republican fundraiser by saying that “unqualified students were being swept into college on the wave of socialism: one is called a quota system, and the other is open admissions.”

Before the strikes were resolved, Ward had already taken the stance articulated later by his Republican colleague, Agnew. Behee expected Ward to greet the BAM strikes with great optimism seeing as “how alone” Ward was during his participation on the Wolverines and given “how limited” his boycott had been because of the scarcity of black students. Ward stated that it was impractical to accomplish the goal of increasing black enrollment to ten percent by 1973. “I don’t know if I can go along with that…I don’t think you can do it.” Ward initially argued that it was a mistake to assume that black students wanted to attend Michigan, suggesting that Michigan State, Western Michigan and schools like Harvard or those in California might be more attractive. Behee reminded Ward of the black population in Michigan—fourteen to fifteen percent—and countered that you could reasonably expect African Americans in high school to want to matriculate at the university. Ward dismissed Behee’s suggestion and asserted that it would be daunting for Michigan to locate enough qualified black students. “Where are you going to get them? We have looked at human values and social problems that haven’t been looked at since 1775. So you think in one generation you are going to undo
something that has persisted and endured up until the recent Brown v. Kansas…when the official law of the land was that ‘separate and equal’ was consistent with our precept?” Ward ended his tirade with a statement that encapsulated his vision of how America should handle its racial dilemmas. “So we are talking only about less than twenty-five years. I can’t say ’73. If you knock off ’73 and you say ‘deliberate speed.’” Ward’s view was indistinguishable from that of Gerald Ford and white liberals and conservatives who decried the corrosive effects of racial segregation on black children but also removed the force of the court’s decision to end “separate but equal” through the subterfuge of gradualism.624

It was a perplexing response for a man who spoke so glowingly of the efforts by Martin Luther King, Jr., to procure civil rights. Ward celebrated King as the one individual who had fundamentally changed the racial climate of America and emphasized that the civil rights leader “epitomized the hopes of the black man to achieve within the established order decency and dignity.” Further, Ward felt it right for King to violate the law, grasping that “morally” the clergyman “could not obey an unjust law.” Ward repudiated King’s critics who were in disagreement with his form of protest, even if it was a nonviolent strategy. Yet, Ward slammed black and white students at Michigan and panned the BAM strikes, which had, in many ways, resembled the tactics deployed by King. More to the point, the student movement of the 1960s that suffused Michigan’s campus hearkened back to the remonstrations that ensued in the wake of Ward’s benching. These socially-conscious protesters were the descendents of the 1930s American student movement. That Ward disregarded the correlation between the
unfinished student campaigns of the interwar period and the post-civil rights youth insurgency was tragic.  

Ward, in some ways, projected middle-class respectability on black youth and disparaged them for not living up these ideals. To Ward, their acts of civil disobedience were pathological and portended a coming age of nihilism. He glimpsed this incorrigibility in his own son, Franklyn. Just as Henry Ward saw his son’s generation as too willing to be content with the racial status quo, Willis perceived Franklyn and his peers as disreputable and excessive in their desire for change. Ward communicated this viewpoint in a commencement speech he delivered at Northern Michigan University in 1970. He told the graduates that the philosophy of adjusting to the segregated society without accepting it provided a major influence on his conduct. While calling segregation and discrimination repulsive, Ward stated that it was the “accepted way of life in 1935.” He stated that he did not visualize himself as a “handkerchief head” or an “Uncle Tom.” But he indicated that the increasing pressure by the younger generation for immediate change was destructive. “This active dissatisfaction with the status quo is a common denominator of the young, both black and white…Was yesterday so terrible that nothing but futility is derived from history?” Ward suggested that the past that young people express grievance over “justified my basic and abiding philosophy of optimism.” He maintained that he was not looking for young people to adopt his strategies but that “this continual urge for change in its present form seems a little more ominous to me because there appears to be in it an urge to destroy…Would a dictatorship or oligarchy really fit the American experience so to continue the steady march toward a more all inclusive
society?” The BAM strikes, according to Ward, were characteristic of this tyranny of inclusion and something that threatened the America he loved.²²⁶

In reality, Ward rarely championed black causes unless it served his benefit. In 1964, Ward spoke out against his party’s endorsement of Barry Goldwater and preferred Michigan Governor George Romney as a Presidential candidate. Ward asserted that the black community felt “a man like Goldwater could not have our support.” His criticisms of the GOP for sponsoring Goldwater echoed his previous thoughts about the Republican Party’s movement away from advocating on behalf of minorities. He chastised the GOP and cited several reasons why the GOP had lost the Negro vote, including its failure to back minority groups in their fight for civil rights. To bolster his allegation, Ward alluded to the four Michigan Republican representatives in Congress who voted against the 1964 Civil Rights bill. He contended that the GOP needed to galvanize support behind the NAACP’s ongoing battle for basic Constitutional rights. Ward, a lifetime member of the NAACP, gave the impression that he understood the degree to which the robust pursuit of Constitutional rights held a historical significance for a black community still in a search of true racial equality. Yet, Ward used both opportunities to curry favor with Governor Romney. He was rewarded with an appointment to the Board of Trustees for North Michigan University and, subsequently, landed the chairmanship at the PSC. Romney named Ward the head of the commission in 1966, eighteen months after he endorsed the governor. Two years later, Ward began writing Romney requesting to be assigned a judgeship.²²⁷
Governor William Milliken finally fulfilled Ward’s judicial yearning. On December 29, 1972, he appointed Ward Judge of Probate for Wayne County to succeed the Honorable George N. Bashara, Jr. Milliken assigned Ward to the judgeship despite the chairman’s controversial tenure at the PSC. Ward approved a steep $19 million rate increase for Detroit Edison (DTE) in 1970. The rate boost, totaling nearly four percent, was the second approved by the PSC during the year for the utility, which served 1.5 million customers in thirteen Michigan counties. In April, Ward authorized a 1.4 percent rate increase amounting to $6.5 million. This was first time DTE’s rate had been raised in twenty-one years, the commission admitted, but cited revenue costs as the reason. The utility sought a second rate increase in June given the “unprecedented” cost of labor, fuel, interest rates, and other expenses the company endured. DTE requested $30 million in higher rates while the PSC staff suggested $17 million annually. Attorney General Frank Kelley, however, asked Ward and the commission to reduce DTE’s rates by $28.3 million. Though the rate increase burdened low-income communities, Ward claimed that the difference in rate was one percent more than what customers paid in 1959. He said that the “dramatic increase” in Edison costs between 1968 and 1970 was a major factor to up the rate for the second time within the year.628

Apparently, costs ran amok at the company as Ward approved annual rate increases of $25 million and $20.2 million in 1971 and 1972, respectively, even after a fellow commissioner, William Ralls, demurred. Ralls objected specifically to including advertising, attorney, and consulting fees in the hike, calling the latter two charges “extravagant.” He insisted that “there is no justification for allowing as an operating
expense, to be borne by the consumer—the costs of unnecessary and excessive attorney and consultant fees to promote an increase in rates.” Ward disagreed and the charges were levied against DTE’s customers, many of them vulnerable black residents whose average bill increased by sixty-one cents with the last rate increase. The NAACP did not seem bothered by Ward’s insensitivity to the poor. At the end of the year, the group awarded him a certificate for “active support of the Association’s Fight for Freedom Campaign, aimed at eliminating all undemocratic racial practices in our national and local life.”

Ward was a master at selling convenience. He ran for office under the same party umbrella he was now attacking. In 1956, Ward won the Republican nomination in a four-man 13th district race and squared off against Democratic Representative Charles C. Diggs, Jr. Ward, along with his fellow Republicans, attempted to exploit Adam Clayton Powell’s unexpected endorsement of Dwight Eisenhower as President for political gain. Powell, a lifelong Democrat, was upset with Adlai Stevenson’s push to retain support from southern Democrats, many of them segregationists. He, like other African Americans, began to suspect that Stevenson might be hesitant in his commitment to enforcing the Brown ruling and turned to Eisenhower who promised “to prove [if reelected] that he is not a captive of the south.” C.L. Franklin, father of the legendary gospel and soul singer Aretha Franklin, organized the New Bethel’s Political Action Guild and united with the Progressive Civic League, a West Side group of black professionals, to cosponsor a talk by Powell. Powell agreed to deliver a nonpartisan address from Franklin’s pulpit on the evening of Sunday, October 21. Like Franklin’s
sermons, Powell’s message was to be carried live over WJLB. Given the fame of the Harlem Congressman and pastor of the influential Abyssinian Baptist Church, Republicans tried to capitalize off his public endorsement of Eisenhower. Though Powell had indicated he supported the rest of the Democratic ticket for all other offices, the local GOP purchased the opening fifteen minutes of the hour-long program for a paid political message.\textsuperscript{631}
By buying airtime, Republicans prevented the progressive Franklin from presenting Powell and selected Ward to deliver the speech that would lead into Powell’s introduction. They knew it was a move guaranteed to exasperate Franklin and members of his congregation, especially given their sensitivity to the political and social distinctions within black Detroit. Ward’s Republican standing, opposition to Diggs, and membership at the elite Second Baptist Church made the situation controversial. To vex matters, Ward’s pastor A.A. Banks, a Republican minister, looked down on Franklin “as crude and never accorded him any trace of public recognition.” Ward charged into a partisan rant that angered Franklin’s regular listeners. But the maneuver by Republicans ultimately backfired when Powell took to the pulpit and endorsed the entire Democratic ballot, including Diggs won his district in a landslide victory over Ward. For his part, Ward later conceded, “I ran against Diggs and got my butt beat.” Still, Franklin was dissatisfied by Ward’s tactics and was sharply critical of the former football star’s remarks. The fallout produced turmoil throughout Detroit as Franklin demanded the resignation of the New Bethel trustee who had backed Ward. Ward was repudiated throughout the black community and Franklin never let the situation pass.632

Ward was cognizant of the animosity he stirred amongst black middle-class and working-class Detroiters. Four years later, he sought redemption. Arthur Johnson, a noted civil rights pioneer and former classmate of Martin Luther King, Jr., at Morehouse College, testified before the Civil Rights Commission (CRC) on the relations between Detroit’s black community and the city’s police department. Johnson alluded to the persistent conflict and tension in the city and explained that Negroes did not generally
regard the police as being friendly and respectful. He pointed to the sensational police-ticketing strike in March in 1959 as being reflective of the attitudes of Detroit police toward the black community. Police Commission Hart blamed the slowdown on racial integration orders putting black and white officers in the same patrol cars. The strike served as a harbinger to the lawsuits filed by white officers in the *Baker v. City of Detroit* over the city’s affirmative action plan that was ruled in favor of the city by Judge Damon Keith in 1979. Johnson attacked this rising employment discrimination and framed “the police brutality problem as a direct of the anti-Negro attitudes and practices and their related conflicts and tensions that permeate relations between the police and the Negro community.”

Ward was stronger in his condemnations of the police brutality before the CRC. He shared Johnson’s concerns but also indicated that he and white citizens determined that Detroit police conduct was improper. Ward repeated these conclusions under oath:

1.) The police department seems to be working under a program of containment of the Negro by brute force, and the discouragement of lawful and moral communications and commingling of the white and colored citizens by hazing such groups;
2.) The police department considers the Negro citizen as a second class in status;
3.) Only a representative and token number of Negroes should be taken into the police department; and
4.) The Negro police officer is tolerated by his fellow officers, but not accepted as an officer of the law.

Ward’s testimony was vital though relations between the black community and the Detroit Police Department worsened into the late sixties. By the early 1970s, the police decoy unit STRESS (Stop the Robberies and Enjoy Safe Streets) were terrorizing African Americans. STRESS was alleged to have killed twenty-two black residents and arrested
hundreds more during its two-and-a-half year existence. Ward never spoke publicly on STRESS, however. Without addressing STRESS, Ward marred his own efforts to address black mistreatment through his own inaction to aid African Americans who experienced racial inequality and intimidation. In 1967, Roger Johnson accused Ward of collusion. Ward served as Johnson’s attorney for a murder trial in 1962. Johnson and one Clifton Downing were charged on August 10, 1962, with first-degree murder in the shooting death of Eugene Oliver. Johnson originally pled not guilty, but then on November 26, 1962, withdrew that plea and pled guilty to the included offense of second-degree murder. He was sentenced to a prison term of not less than 20 years, or more than 40 years. On September 8, 1967, Johnson filed a delayed motion for setting aside of his plea of guilty and for a new trial, arguing that a confession was beaten out of him. He filed an affidavit with the court in which he alleged police brutality and attorney misconduct. During Johnson’s interrogation, he claimed that he had been beaten for nine hours straight until he was unconscious. The officers told Johnson that if he did not cop out, they were going to batter him some more. Johnson provided gory details of being pounded by officers for refusing to confess guilt. More troubling, however, was his description of Ward’s involvement in the affair. He wrote,

Some time after arraignment, I was appointed an Attorney (name unknown). He came to visit me at the Wayne County Jail, first thing he told me was that he could not beat the charge and that the only and best thing to do was to enter a plea of second degree, I refused to enter a plea. He left, but every time I saw him, he would bring it up again until I ask him to please get off the case. Which he did and Willis Ward was appointed. He came to see me at Wayne County Jail. He said almost the same thing as the other Attorney, two day after he left my Mother came and said to me that she had talked to Mr. Ward and the Judge or Prosecutor,
and that they said if I cop out to second degree that would get no more than a ten year Max.

I told her that I would not cop out because I was not guilty of murder. She got mad and said that I was a God Damm Fool and left.

At the final examination or final arraignment, Mr. Ward, the Prosecutor and one of the officers who has interrogated and beaten me told me that they has talked to the Judge and that it was all arranged for me to enter a second degree plea. That I would receive no more than a Ten Year Max.

I said that I didn't want to cop out. The lawyer and the prosecutor left but the police officer stayed and when we was alone he told me that I ‘Better cop out if I knew what was good for me’ ‘Because if you don't I will beat the hell out of you.’

I knew that he was not joking because he had already prove that, so I told Mr. Ward when he came back that I had changed my mind and that I wanted to cop out. He instructed me that I must say that I wasn't threatened or promise that they would be lenient on me.

Because the Judge would not except the Plea if I did not answer the question right.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Roger Johnson

Johnson’s motion was denied on January 30, 1968, by Honorable Geraldine Bledsoe Ford, Judge of Recorder’s Court. Ford rejected Johnson’s request for a new trial on the basis that it attacked the integrity of the proceedings before Recorder’s Judge Arthur Koscinski had on November 26, 1962, at which the appellant’s plea of guilty was accepted. A remand for evidentiary hearing was supported but there was no indication that Ford conducted one. The accusations against Ward, nonetheless, were distressing given that he had been so fervid in his opposition to police brutality during his deposition before the CRC.⁶³⁵
Richard Senter, a grievance administrator for the state bar, charged Ward with misconduct for failing to follow through on Johnson’s appeals case. A three-team grievance committed cleared Ward of the allegations. Ward neither questioned the right of the bar association to check into the complaints nor did he feel the need to express any lament regarding the Johnson case. But he was worried about how the investigation might affect his odds of securing a position with the Federal Communications Commission. “I do not quarrel strongly with the way that the bar (grievance bar) handled this. I am concerned over the chances of what a thing like this might do to my chances with FCC.”

Figure 22: Judge Willis Ward poses for a picture in his chambers. Courtesy of Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.
Ward was forever an individual, endlessly privileging his own self-interests. In a sense, he never stopped being a racial pioneer who imagined his life as a solo performance. 636

Individualism was the fulcrum on which Ward’s vision of America swung. For him, it was nearly sacred. “I suggest that the individual personality is God’s greatest gift to man. It should be nourished and respected.” It is this incessant pursuit of personal happiness over the collective goals of the black community that occasioned Ward’s change of heart concerning Gerald Ford’s civil rights record. He spoke earnestly when first questioned about his former teammate shortly after Ford was sworn-in as the 38th President of the United States. “He’s a conservative: he had to be to be elected in Congress for 25 years in that Grand Rapids district. His voting record makes it appear—APPEAR—as not decent to the colored man but Jerry may be like Lyndon Johnson as a president who lets his basic decency come through. It will disappointment and surprise me if it doesn’t come through. I’m optimistic. It’s there in Jerry and I have great hopes as to his civil rights attitudes.” 637

Two years later, Ford had not done as much as his predecessor in ameliorating African-American life. But Ward had been invited into the White House by this time and got a chance to take pictures with the President. Notwithstanding the state of black America, Ward thought only of himself as he spoke proudly of Ford’s record after twice expressing fret. In his follow-up letter to Ford, Ward included a handwritten note after the salutation that captured fittingly the manner in which he went about his politics. “Thanks for your note on my selection to the Harlem Hall of Fame. Don’t forget to autograph the picture.” It did not matter that Ward had already started out his message to Ford
confessing that “the visit with you as a friend in the Oval Office of the President of the United States must be considered the highest point” before requesting his ex-teammate to “have your secretary send me copies [of the pictures] when convenient.” The reminder he appended to the end of the letter revealed a man whose own perception of himself as exceptional, coupled with white recognition, delayed the racial progress that the opportunities bestowed to him over the course of his life were partly intended to help achieve.638

Yet, Ward seemed contrite at times for his reluctance to challenge the racial status quo. “In 1935 and in 1939 I disagreed with and personally rejected the separate but equal doctrine of the Dred Scott Decision of the United States, but I did not have the zeal to demonstrate or otherwise protest that incongruous decision.” And though he considered young people to be extreme, growing estranged from his son in the process, he still admonished them not to embrace the piecemeal strategy he had regrettably adopted under the pretext of “all deliberate speed.” “I do not urge on the younger generation the gradualism I portrayed as the characteristic of my early years. I concede that there is a need for pressure for change.”639
Elsewhere in the North, Negroes met with little success in their efforts to breakdown segregation.⁶⁴⁰

Willis Ward wanted to be remembered. On the eve of John Behee’s conference presentation at the 1973 North American Society for Sports History (NASSH) annual meeting, Ward sent the young sports historian a letter to opine on the themes that were to be addressed in the paper, “Michigan’s Black Lettermen.” “I have read your manuscript…and I found it interesting as well as revealing…overall…I found your study well done.” Yet, Ward offered a contrasting view of Behee’s analysis of African-American athletes, those who were labeled as “superspades” because of the breathtaking skills they needed to display to overcome the hurdles of racial prejudice that otherwise barred black hopefuls from participation on the gridiron. Ward accused Behee of creating a “negative” depiction of black football players. “I think your basic thesis would be more clearly drawn if you were to give a more complete picture of what was accomplished by the so-called “superspade” from Jewett through the ‘50s…Were you to include the accomplishments of these men subsequent to graduation and in the face of adverse and almost impossible conditions you so adequately described, it would bring into better focus the point you have so well made.” Ward reminded Behee of the broader significance of black athletic achievement. “The black superstar you have described,
despite his small numbers, made a substantial and material contribution toward dispelling the stereotype extant prior to Jackie Robinson’s appearance in organized baseball.\textsuperscript{641}

Ward’s contention, at first glance, was right. Behee, in his efforts to frame the racial degradation that black athletes encountered, overlooked the agency by these young men to defy the Jim Crow system. Given that the sport of football calcified old and created new racial boundaries, integrated sporting contests were visible expressions of the racial changes that were afoot in the nation. For some African Americans, partaking in athletics was a way to express a physical and unequivocal dissent to white racial superiority. They imagined their performance on the field as evidence of their push for racial equality. But mere participation did not alone constitute an insurgency. Black athletes who elected to engage in athletics yet abandoned opportunities to exploit the sporting arena as a site where the freedom struggle could be advanced were often branded as “Uncle Toms.” Harry Edwards summed up the castigations of apathetic black athletes who were hesitant to join the athletic revolt. “Black men, engaged in violent, aggressive, competitive sports actually were regarded as…non-violent.” The narrowness of this criticism aside, African-American sportsmen who shunned boycotts and protests intended to collapse the old, racial order were particularly burdensome to the black athletic revolt and the budding civil rights movement.\textsuperscript{642}

For Ward, this was especially true. He tarnished his legacy through his unwavering endorsement of individualism. Ward declined to see himself as part of the larger black community at least not from the standpoint that he needed to be an ardent supporter of civil rights or an outspoken critic of racial intolerance. Occasionally, he
challenged gender and racial chauvinism. Ward, for example, backed women’s liberation. He stated an intrinsic belief in the intelligence and ability of women. “I learned early that, while there may be sexual differences, there is no difference in intelligence and mental capacity between men and women.” But these instances proved rare and were often intended as political capital for the opportunistic Ward. In most cases, he espoused respectability and uplift, and was persuaded that an aggressive battle against Jim Crow was not only redolent of a left-leaning radicalism but also that it was shameful and unnecessary. His benching, as hurt as he initially was by it, was eventually glimpsed as a part of playing the white man’s game as well as a crucial phase in the inevitable slope toward progress. “It was a bad experience [but] it was just a bullet you bite, you’re taught to. Most of the achieving blacks of 50 or older paid a hell of a price.”

Ward, therefore, concluded his letter to Behee by citing the personal achievements of Michigan’s black lettermen through 1964, ironically preceding the passage of the Civil Rights Act. All had earned bachelor degrees. “Specifically,” he noted, “one graduated from the University of Michigan Medical School and is a practicing physician (M.C. Burton), three are dentists (Gene Derricotte, Julian Franks and Frank Howell), one engineer-architect (Roderick Warren), six lawyers (Willis Ward, John Roxborough, II, Robert Mann, Charles Fonville, Lowell Perry, and Robert Evans), two of which are judges (Willis Ward and Robert Evans).” Ward, however, did not mention any of the contributions that any of these individuals, himself included, had made to fostering racial progress through communal efforts. This the record Ward desired
for Behee to share at the upcoming NAASH Conference. He yearned to be remembered as an individual, not for the doors he opened or the struggles he endured.645

**Sport and the Racial Etiquette**

Willis Ward was a racial pioneer. From 1920 to 1945, few African Americans attempted to participate in sports at major white universities, even as different schools and regions emerged with influential athletic programs. The numbers were more dismal prior to World War I. One scholar has claimed that only thirteen black players participated before 1900 and only twenty-seven more through 1914.646 Spectators, thus, regarded Ward’s breaking of Michigan’s racial barrier as a meaningful step toward equality. By challenging the color line, Ward shifted the discourse of American race relations to encompass athletics. His participation meant that African Americans had seized a moment of progress in a cultural institution that emphasized “true Americanism” as Protestants, Catholics, and Jews all suited up to compete on the gridiron. Now black men were joining them.647

In the ongoing battle for freedom rights, African Americans began to include social and cultural activities that went beyond the campaign for better educational, economic, and housing opportunities as well as the movement for full citizenship and political equality. In order to be true citizens, African Americans needed to have access to the same leisure activities that whites enjoyed.648 Since “segregation was the route adopted by America,” as Kenneth Shropshire has stated, “and this included sports,” athletics were also viewed by many as the primary path in America’s move toward desegregation. For a significant number of college athletes, athletic integration allowed
for a greater understanding of their black and white teammates. But athletics also possessed the power to educate the broader white community, specifically poor whites, who increasingly valued a winning player and a star performer no matter his skin color.\(^{649}\)

Thus, black athletes were able to prove their manhood and assert their equality with whites through outstanding performances and the physical punishment of white opponents. On the grid, within the confines of the rules, African Americans engaged in a subtle form of violent direct action. Their visibility in American mainstream culture functioned to promote athletics as an area of society with a prominent responsibility for the slow crumbling of the edifice of racial segregation. Racial pioneers, in this regard, were hailed for breaking new ground in America’s race relations and for serving as significant icons of the fight against white racial oppression. Yet, white gaze at African Americans’ athletic ascendancy was not enough to threaten the entire system of Jim Crow, nor did black sensational feats singlehandedly force racial change.\(^{650}\)

The role of the black athlete was symbolic and gave hope and pride to African-American communities. But there was a sense that black competitors needed to do more than just participate in a chosen activity. Student unrest was pivotal in shifting the discourse of athletics toward a critical analysis of race. Students protested racial injustices in sport through boycotts, rallies, and sit-ins and sometimes faced stiff penalties for their actions as was the case at NYU when seven undergraduates were suspended for defying Leonard Bates’ benching.\(^{651}\) Black athletes were expected to be just as confrontational in combating racial mistreatment. The majority of black athletes,
however, were traditionally conservative and resisted chances to involve themselves in the protest tactics that emerged during the 1930s and 1940s and crested during the late 1960s in the form of a radical black militancy.\textsuperscript{652}

The fear of violent reprisal, in fairness, cautioned some black athletes against engaging in a more outspoken protest. As Adam Fairclough stated, “Before the 1940s, when lynching was a fact of everyday life and the edifice of white supremacy impregnable, to protest meant risking life and limb…Accommodation—getting along with the white man—was an essential survival skill that parents drummed into their children at an early age.”\textsuperscript{653} But for a number of African-American athletes, the decision not to engage in protest had little to do with apprehension occasioned by the thought of terror. When John Behee questioned African Americans at Michigan who were well aware of the racial confrontations occurring on Big Ten campuses as to why there were no boycotts by black athletes at the university, one former player simply responded, “I don’t know.” Tokenism certainly played a role as African-American sportsmen celebrated the opportunities they were given. Dan Kean, a former Michigan tennis player, put it this way: “Even a ‘showcase’ black is better than none.” Some naively believed that Michigan was a bit ahead of other schools in race relations as Marshall Dickerson supposed it in 1958 despite the paucity of black students on campus and the fact that it took until 1968 for the school to select Ron Johnson as its first black football captain.\textsuperscript{654}

Ward trumpeted the views similar both to Dickerson and Kean. Tokenism, to him, was all about making the system work while there was a lasting belief that race relations were better at the University of Michigan than in other places. He described Michigan
officials at heartbroken by his benching as if to signal that the university was not
complicit in forcing his exclusion from the game. “It was a sad episode. I think Michigan
was embarrassed about the whole thing.” Ward also kept with his defense of Harry Kipke
and clung to his head coach’s efforts to include him as the ultimate sign of racial
progress. “Kipke did not want to bench me. He had broken some rules. He had me travel
with the team—eat in the same hotels, sleep in the same hotels—that was a first in many
places.” Ward excused Kipke’s racism, recycling the paternalistic view of segregation as
a reasonable response to white violent aggression. “But he [Kipke] was correct that I
might get hurt,” Ward said. “Situations like that were not unusual, where white players
would intentionally try to hurt black players. Ask any athlete of that period.”

Apart from his defense of Kipke and the University of Michigan, Ward’s
depressing commentary revealed a belief about the proper decorum that athletes, black or
white, were expected to exercise. When African Americans faced discrimination or were
shouted down with racial epithets, they were counted on to look the other way, ever
mindful of their place. “The unkind remarks and the hateful word were standard—‘get
him, get him,’ they’d say. We didn’t get too much of that up North, but we heard it in the
stands, right up in Ann Arbor. But that was the spirit of the times.” Grasping the bigotry
that black athletes experienced as “the spirit of the times” meant turning a deaf ear in the
name of respectability. Just as in the Victorian Age, the emphasis placed on manners
rather than communitarian values made it easier for persons like Ward to ignore racism
than to flout social etiquette, thus permitting racial inequality to persist.
Racial pioneering in athletics forged a new direction for the freedom struggle to travel. But it also compelled individuals like Ward to feel an occasional sense of noblesse oblige. Of paramount importance to Ward was maintaining a good public image that was attractive and non-threatening to all segments of society, namely whites, similar to his contemporaries Joe Louis and Jesse Owens. Like Louis and Owens, Ward was aware that openly negative reactions to racial discrimination were often observed by whites as unreasonable, excessive, oversensitive, and even “un-American.” As anticipated, he often couched his complaints of racial disparity in words acceptable to whites and went to tremendous lengths to avoid any interpretation by mainstream culture that the grievances he expressed in response to discrimination were manifestations of his being black or behaving “like a Nigger.”

A Credit to His Race, A Deficit to History

Racial pioneering and the fundamental belief in individualism muted Ward’s activism. In spite of his restraint, he was lauded as an exemplar on civil rights by whites who embraced his conservative approach. One journalist saw fit to compare Ward’s record on race relations to Martin Luther King’s, depicting the former Michigan man as a prototype for the slain civil rights leader. “As a matter of fact, the judge [Ward] was promoting opportunities for Blacks as far back as 1939, decades before civil rights became a household word, when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was still in short pants and affirmative action meant, well, nothing at all.”

Ward’s tenure at the Ford Motor Company was hardly as the writer embellished. He opened doors for African Americans, mainly to the foundry, and clashed with black
women who wanted to gain the same wartime employment opportunities that white women enjoyed at the company. When UAW officials built alliances with Ford’s black workers, lending support to the movement for equal opportunity, they did so with Ward was one of their chief targets. Further, the Ford Motor Company’s African-American personnel conveyed disdain for Ward who they saw as antiblack and the manager of the “Jim Crow” division. These actions, then again, were in tune with the “all deliberate speed” mantra that some whites peddled as the appropriate route to integration. The columnist commended Ward for his exercise in moderation, careful not to upset the racial order by employing too many black workers. “Ward’s job, back in those pre-equal rights, equal opportunity days,” the writer snidely remarked, “was to make sure that minorities were hired. Oh not too many, to be sure, but some.”

The reporter was not alone in his view of Ward as a paragon of black virtue. Lawrence T. Carter, an editorialist for the Detroit News, also extolled Ward as a man who “made the system work.” Even if Carter was not referring to the “Jim Crow system,” he implied that Ward had been cooperative with whites and comprehended the merits of individualism. “His success emphasizes the value of belief in oneself and the willingness to work hard to make the system work for all people. It can be done. And the rewards are often great.” Carter’s perspective paralleled Ward’s viewpoint that African Americans needed to grab themselves by the bootstraps if they were to improve the lot of the black community. But it also mirrored the underlying argument that Gerald Ford made against policing de facto racial practices, contending that the integration needed to work for everyone—civil rights supporters and whites wedded to the old, racial order, alike.
In recalling Ward’s career, Carter spoke not one word about the former Wolverine’s benching. It was trivial and only reflected Ward’s “good manners” and tenacity to solve the American racial dilemma through compliance rather than a civil rights crusade. Ward’s passivity earned him a description reserved for high-achieving African Americans like Joe Louis, Jesse Owens, Jackie Robinson, and Booker T. Washington whose racial docility was warmly accepted by whites. “This black man has traveled over a long road of creditable service to his race and his state.” The State of Michigan House of Representatives agreed. In 1976, they issued a resolution calling Ward “the kind of man one dreams will someday happen to America…a dignified man, yet one whose humility is all-encompassing.” Ward was saluted as a racial hero.

Eight years later, shortly after he lost a lengthy battle to cancer, the Detroit City Council published its own paid homage to Ward. In its testimonial, the Council remembered Ward as “a volunteer with the Capuchin Soup Kitchen and Co-Chair of their Fundraising Committee, a Biblical scholar, a Sunday School teacher at Second Baptist Church,” and a lifelong member of the NAACP. The Detroit City Council concluded their resolve, all but placing Ward into racial sainthood. “Willis Ward is now a part of the history of Detroit: he was a hero, an achiever, a leader, and a model to several generations of Detroiter. He proved that black Americans can succeed in athletics, the Armed Forces and the law as a profession.” Gerald Ford added to the tributes. “I lost one of my dearest friends with the passing of Willis Ward. He was a great American in every way he contributed so much to a better society in America.”
These plaudits celebrated Ward’s life as a racial pioneer. He was the first African American to play at Michigan in forty years, the first to chair the Public Service Commission, and the first black probate judge in Michigan. But, more significantly, the recognition legitimized his dedication to individualism and authenticated him as a civil rights icon. In spite of his conservative politics and his umbrage with black activists, Ward was now being positioned to be no less than an emblem of the local freedom struggle in Detroit. Whether calculated or not, such a framing of Ward as a person who contributed to a better America moderated an otherwise vigorous movement by more outspoken African Americans to eliminate racial inequality in the Motor City and throughout the Midwestern region. Just as the mass media selectively chose certain episodes of the civil rights movement to generate charismatic personalities, usually men, local white Detroiters, along with the former President, eulogized Ward as the next telegenic civil rights activist. The Old Right and the North that had been on the wrong side of the revolution, opposing the civil rights cause and berating its leaders, had chosen a leader of their own whose role in the freedom struggle narrative was one of colorblind advocacy and betrayal of the movement’s goals. More so than the bowdlerized heroes selected from out of the South during a single, halcyon decade, Ward represented the chosen face of the North’s “long” push for racial equality. The political use of racial narratives was not confined to the classic phase of the civil rights movement. The long freedom struggle was also exploited for political purposes before it even came into view.665
Yet, the patron saint of Detroit’s civil rights past, himself, grew a little more wary of the strategies he had praised and pursued during the majority of his adult life. Ward penned an op-editorial on birthday in 1980 where he outlined his lifelong, inevitable vision of racial progress. He wrote, “History tells us that the price of freedom has been to suffer first. This experience was endured not only by the pilgrims on the Mayflower but by every other group, be they slaves from Africa or peasants from Europe. At one time, Americans of Irish descent were discriminated against and abused by those who came first. I am certain that many older Americans of Italian, German, or Jewish descent can speak of similar harsh treatment during their first and second generations.” But on this occasion, there was a slight change in the tenor of his thoughts. Now seventy-eight, Ward began to recognize the permanence of American racism. He trusted that individual merit could topple racial injustice. African Americans, however, were still encountering racial insensitivity in the midst of significant personal gains made by members of the race. “The phenomenon of the black American is that so much of the harshness persists; while with the so-called ethnics, it seems to have faded away with time,” Ward said. “Perhaps by painting the picture as it is, we might all be able to better approach the problems we presently face. We must find a workable solution consistent with the dream of those few men who wrote, ‘All men are created equal.’” It was a rare moment for a man who championed the cause of self throughout his life and who was labeled as antiblack. Nonetheless, it was the one moment where his eagerness to stand alone permitted him to speak the truth without bargaining for his next pioneering opportunity.
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Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 200. In constructing notions of “whiteness” and white supremacy, Hale argues that white southerners established their hegemony through a cultural system based on both physical separation of the races and violence. She contends that this system, which took shape in the 1920s, spread to the rest of the nation. Public spaces became racialized and added new emphasis to the meaning of “whiteness.” Like Hale, I am using sport to demonstrate how football, free from any participation by African Americans, reinforced the meaning of “whiteness” during the era and aided the culture of segregating the races.

Ronald W. Walters, *White Nationalism, Black Interests: Conservative, Public Policy, and the Black Community* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2003), 247. Walters outlines six prominent features of the new Black Conservatism. They are: “acceptance of accommodation as the mode for achieving self-development and self-advancement; adoption of the White community’s values, goals, and leadership; negation and distortion of the validity of Black values, including the struggle against White racism, and acceptance of the view that Black themselves are the major cause of their arrested development; support for issues are often incompatible with the Black agenda as initiated by Black Leaders in Congress and in civil society; compatibility with established Conservative views on policy values, and operational issues; and a deep hostility toward traditional methods of achieving Black progress, such as those developed by the Civil rights movement, and toward the leadership that has attempted to actualize them.”


It is important to note that there were studies that preceded Hall’s descriptive “long history of civil rights” framework, which attempted to recast the civil rights movement. Harvard Sitkoff’s *A New Deal for Blacks* and William Chafe’s *Civilities and Civil Rights* are two examples. Moreover, the studies that are cited here ought not to be treated as merely belonging to a “long history of civil rights” collective. These monographs stand alone in their quest to unfurl histories of Black Power and civil rights outside the American South. Nevertheless, they present local struggles in the North and West that enable a fuller analysis of the civil rights movement in its longer phase to be grasped.
9 Martha Biondi, To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). My argument here is not that the South deserves to be extinguished from examinations of the civil rights movement. Instead, a distinction has to be made such that race relations outside the American South are distinguishable from those within it even as Jim Crow in the North, South, and West are placed into necessary conversation with one another.

10 Cha-Jua and Lang, for instance, have argued that the “regional differences” between the North and the South “are not normative and attitudinal, but rather historical, structural, and ideological.” Thus, they contend that it is delineating the history of the South is necessary not because the North “was more racially enlightened, but that the structural and ideological elements in the South necessitated a more violent, virulent, and impoverishing form of racial oppression.” See Cha-Jua and Lang, “The Long Movement,” 281-283; quote taken from p. 283.


12 Ohio Supreme Court reversed the precedent established by Van Camp v. Board of Education, etc., 9 O.S. 407 (1859) that had been the foundation to a series of laws providing for the separation of children on the basis of color in the common schools. On 21 February 1887, the legislature passed an act repealing the last such discriminatory school statutes (84 O. L. 34). A year later the Court unequivocally held in Board of Education etc. v. The State, Ex. Rel. Gibson, 45 O.S. 555 (1888) (affirming 1 C.D. 640) that separate schools for colored children were effectively abolished and that although the legislature still conferred power on the boards of education to make such assignments of youth as would, in their opinion, best promote the interest of education in their districts, such power could not be exercised with reference to race and color. See William W. Giffin, African Americans and the Color Line in Ohio, 1915-1930 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005), 40.


14 A recent study examining black-white residential segregation found that nine of the top ten most segregated cities are in the Midwest and the North and fifteen of the top twenty are outside the American South. Detroit, Michigan, tops the list. Though Detroit experienced a substantial twenty-five percent decline in segregation for the first time since 1980 due to the fallout from the recession and foreclosure crisis, it still ranked ahead of other U.S. cities for the third time since 1990. In the aftermath of Jim Crow’s demise, whites have maintained older racial practices of keeping unwanted black residents out, including the use of violence. As Jeannine Bell states, “Even today, minorities moving to, and in some cases living in, neighborhoods around the country have faced harassment, vandalism, and assault perpetrated by white neighbors who wished them to live elsewhere.” For more on the study of black-white segregation, see John R. Logan and Brian J. Stults, “The Persistence of Segregation in the Metropolis: New Findings from the 2010 Census,” Census Brief prepared for Project US2010, http://www.s4.brown.edu/US2010. For the quote by Bell, see Jeannine Bell, Hate Thy Neighbor: Move-in Violence and the Persistence of Racial Segregation in American Housing (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 4.

15 For quote, see Mark Brilliant, The Color of America has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 119.

16 Gustave de Beaumont, Marie, or Slavery in the United States, trans. Barbara Chapman (California: Stanford University Press, 1958), pp. 66, 75-76. Of note, while the quote taken from the character Marie is insightful, it is the assertion of another character—Nelson—that illuminates the endemic nature of racial prejudice in the United States. Nelson argues to another character—George seeks to find an escape from racial intolerance in the north—that racial prejudice is widespread and immutable: “Alas, my friend! Prejudice against the colored race is, to be sure, less powerful in Boston than in New Orleans, but nowhere is it dead” (65). While fictive, this declaration by Nelson has a practical authenticity to it. The North was not nearly as brutal as the South was in terms of racial intolerance. Nonetheless, the North was not a bastion for racial equality. Also see Leon F. Litwack, North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860 (Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 97.

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Ibid. By the 1930s, the increase in car ownership had begun to decrease passenger train travel. The Michigan Central Depot, however, continued to generate business, mainly from returning students as well as celebrities who commuted by train to perform at Michigan’s Hill Auditorium. Some of the many celebrities who passed through Ann Arbor’s train station included Victor Borge, Meredith Wilson, Gene Krupa, Benny Goodman, Pablo Casals, and Ignacy Paderewski. See Grace Shackman, Ann Arbor in the 20th Century: A Photographic History (Chicago, IL: Arcadia Publishing, 2002), 34-35.


Formerly the Western Conference and the Big Nine Conference, the Big Ten Conference was established in 1896. Michigan joined the conference in 1896, replacing Lake Forest College. Indiana did not join the Big Ten until 1899. Ohio State University entered the conference in 1912, in the middle of Michigan’s inactivity, which lasted from 1907-1916.

In 1910, Fred Patterson took over C.R. Patterson and Sons—the company founded by his father, Charles “Rich” Patterson who was born a slave in Virginia (later West Virginia). C.R. Patterson and Sons, which was founded in 1865, first prospered as a buggy repair shop. Later, the company started manufacturing both buggies and wagons becoming one of the most successful industries in Greenfield, Ohio. The company employed 15 men at the shop and produced about 500 vehicles a year at prices ranging from $120 to $150. Among the 28 different buggy models built by the firm was the doctor’s buggy, which was widely used throughout the South and Midwest. After the elder Patterson died in 1910, however, Fred Patterson realized the buggy building industry was failing and began focusing on manufacturing cars. From 1916 to 1919, Patterson built about 30 Patterson-Greenfield cars, competing against such makes as the Hupmobile, Hudson, Ford, Chevrolet, Packard, Nash, Essex, Henderson, Winton, and Enger. But a shortage of capital kept the company from adopting production line techniques and the fierce competition of budding auto giants such as Ford ruined the vehicle-assembly enterprise. See Fred Patterson: America’s First Black Auto Manufacturer, Dollars & Sense; also see William McNeil Bell, Biographical File, Ohio State University Archives (to be further abbreviated OSUA).

Willis Ward, interview by David Pollock, Ford Project, September 8, 1983, p. 2, GRFPL. Prior to Ward’s arrival, the Big Ten only produced a total of seven black lettermen, evincing just how shaky the situation became for African-American athletes in the Midwest. See Willis Ward, interview by the White House, August 9, 1976, Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor, MI.


Willis Ward, interview by David Pollock, Ford Project, September 8, 1983, p. 2, GRFPL. While the arrival of southern administrators and coaches to the North affected race relations, it is important to note that a greater number of northern-born athletic officials coached teams in the South, particularly in the first half of the Twentieth Century. For example, Dan McGugin, Fielding Yost’s brother-in-law and a former Michigan man, became the head coach at Vanderbilt while John Heisman left abolitionist-minded Oberlin to head up Georgia Tech. Despite coming from schools with a supposed egalitarian tradition, however, these did very little to dismantle the segregationist policies that prevailed at southern institutions.

Yost did not coach all twenty-five seasons consecutively. During the 1924-1925 season, George Little served as the team’s Head Football Coach. Little lasted only one season at Michigan before he left to take head coaching and athletic director positions at the University of Wisconsin—Madison.

Letter, W.J. Davis to Keene Fitzpatrick, August 17, 1904, Box 1, Board in Control of Intercollegiate Athletics, BHLUM. The “Heston” referenced here is Willie Heston, a star halfback and first Walter Camp...
All-American at the University of Michigan. During his four-year career at the University, 1901-1904, Yost’s record was 43-0-1 and Michigan was credited with four national championships. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that Yost, if given the chance to add a player of Heston’s abilities, would do so. But he did not in the case of Abner Powell, a talented athlete who only lacked Heston’s skin color.


31 Willis Ward, interview by David Pollock, Ford Project, September 8, 1983, p. 1, GRFPL.

32 Yost’s coaching tenure was not uninterrupted. During the 1924-1925 season, George Little, who had been an assistant under Yost for two years, took over as head football coach. Little lasted only one season, however, before he accepted the positions of head football coach and athletic director at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.


34 Willis Ward, interview by David Pollock, Ford Project, September 8, 1983, p. 3, GRFPL.


38 Behee, Hail to the Victors, 19; Burton W. Folson, “Governor Groesbeck: Road Builder and Defender of School Choice,” Mackinac Center for Public Policy, January 12, 1998; Willis Ward, interview by David Pollock, Ford Project, September 8, 1983, p. 2, GRFPL.

39 Willis Ward, interview by David Pollock, Ford Project, September 8, 1983, p. 2, GRFPL.

40 Ibid; also see Behee, Hail to the Victors, 19.


42 Willis Ward, interview by David Pollock, Ford Project, September 8, 1983, p. 2, GRFPL.


44 Black southern nonagricultural workers like Henry Ward were more common than the existing literature might have you to believe. Historian John Cell has chronicled this group of black proletariats for whom he believes Jim Crow was instituted to impair. Cell depicts these workers as “bankers, undertakers, insurance salesmen, teachers, barbers, carpenters, masons…often their own bosses, city blacks were better educated, better organized politically, and more ‘uppity’ than those in the country.” It is not clear what type of business Henry Ward owned or performed in the South though his work in the foundry upon his arrival in the North suggests that he might have been employed in masonry. Nevertheless, when it came time to depart the South, Henry Ward was fully equipped financially to make the journey. For Cell quote, see John Cell, The Highest Stage of White Supremacy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 320.


48 The Reminisces, p. 2, BFRC.
49 Willis Ward, interview by David Pollock, Ford Project, September 8, 1983, p. 9, GRFPL.
50 Alexandre Marshall, personal communication to author, June 26, 2012; also see Angela D. Dillard, Faith in the City: Preaching Radical Social Change in Detroit (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 40.
51 Steven Hahn, A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 468. The significance of this reconstitution of family would prove critical as these new institutions would enable blacks to confront racial oppression and, in the words of Hahn, “challenge the nation—as their slave and free forebears had done—to confront the meanings of its own democracy (476).
54 The Reminisces, p. 2, BFRC; Henry Ward was not the only black migrant who refused to go back to the South. As Kimberley Louise Phillips states, “Migrants left the South to escape segregation, and thus many were unwilling to return, even for short periods.” See Phillips, AlabamaNorth, 142.
55 Robert C. Twombly, Blacks in White America Since 1865: Issues and Interpretations (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1971), 172. Black southerners were not completely naïve in thinking that the North could provide them with better lives than they experience in the South. Thus, they migrated to escape the Jim Crow South where five decades after Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, African Americans, according to Isabel Wilkerson, “still had to step off the sidewalk when a white person approached, were banished to jobs nobody else wanted no matter their skill or ambition, couldn’t vote, but could be hanged on suspicion of the pettiest infraction.” For Wilkerson quote, see Isabel Wilkerson, The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration (New York: Random House, 2010), 43-44.
57 Bryant Simon, “Race Relations: African American Organizing, Liberalism, and White Working-Class Politics in Postwar South Carolina,” in Jumpin’ Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights, eds., Dailey, Jane, Glenda Gilmore and Bryant Simon (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 240. The rise in population among blacks in the North is in direct correlation with the rise in racial intolerance in the North. One observer, James G. Cummings, insists “there was no such thing as resistance to blacks until that surge of blacks coming during World War I. That’s when attitudes began to change and resistance set in” (33). For Cummings quote, see Elaine Latzman Moon, Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes: An Oral History of Detroit’s African American Community, 1918-1967 (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University, 1994), 33.
58 Black migrants were typically hired in the capacity of strikebreakers during intense northern labor disputes. Soaring prices during World War I reduced the value of wages, causing white workers to strike for higher pay. In their absence, colored recruits were lured to the North for employ. As Stephen H. Norwood notes, “Largely shunned by northern trade unions until the 1930s, African Americans constituted a logical source of strikebreakers during the early twentieth century.” For these black laborers, the decision to become strikebreakers, as Abram Harris has suggested, was an attempt to “find relief from economic slavery.” But for white job picketers, the strikebreaking Negro personnel triggered unwarranted economic competition and heightened northern white antagonism toward these black newcomers. For Norwood quote, see Stephen H. Norwood, Strikebreaking & Intimidation: Mercenaries and Masculinity in Twentieth-Century America (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 78; for Harris quote, see Abram L. Harris, “The Negro Worker” Labor Age 19 (February 1930): 5; also see Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 28; Richard Hudelson and Carl Ross, By the Ore
The premise expressed here by black migrants was merely the substance of things hoped for rather than the evidence of things seen. Jim Crow began in the North and was exercised through the use of black codes and other laws that prevented African Americans from occupying space with whites. Historian Stephen Middleton describes the racial climate in the North during the nineteenth century when Jim Crow-like laws were instituted as a response to an increase in black population: “As the African-American population swelled during the 1830s, Ohio whites became increasingly worried about the possible social integration of blacks with whites. The Black Laws established that the races could not work, be educated, or pursue justice under the same circumstances. The Black Laws fostered segregation in Ohio, even though the state did not officially use the term. To reinforce their assumed superiority, Ohio whites also portrayed blacks in negative ways.” It would seem that once the black codes were abolished and Lincoln’s emergence would have signaled a profound change in the North. C. Vann Woodward, however, points out that “railroads in Massachusetts and schools in Boston eliminated Jim Crow before the Civil War. But there and elsewhere Negroes were often segregated in public accommodations and severely segregated in housing.” For Middleton quote, see Stephen Middleton, The Black Laws: Race and the Legal Process in Early Ohio (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), 66. For Woodward’s quote, see C. Vann Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow, 3rd rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 19.

There is some uncertainty regarding Ward’s marital history. It is certain that Margaret McCall Thomas was Ward’s second wife as several of his personal papers have revealed. The confusion sets in when it comes to his first wife. In one document discussing Ward’s death, his first wife is listed as a woman named Charlotte who died in 1969. A second document says he was married to a woman named Alma who also died in 1969 (from a lingering illness), though it does not indicate her to be a third wife. The only conclusion to be drawn here is that Charlotte and Alma was the same person despite the fact that the two names “Charlotte” and “Alma,” never appear together.

Moon, Untold Tales, 168; also see Phillips, AlabamaNorth, 39. Rayford Logan summed up the feelings of many blacks regarding the Supreme Court’s endorsement of racial discrimination: “The national government has not greatly aided the Negro in his struggle for equality. The Supreme Court has authorized segregation if equal accommodations are provided, and it has permitted the Democratic Party to exclude Negroes from its membership (11). Rayford W. Logan, “The Negro Wants First-Class Citizenship” in What the Negro Wants, ed. Rayford W. Logan (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944).


As William Beverly Nash reasoned, “The white man has land, the black man has labor.” Nash’s analysis was central to analyzing the then-formative years of Reconstruction. But fifty years later, the South was still a place where whites owned the land and blacks worked it. Amy Dru Stanley summed up perfectly the isomorphic relationship between slavery and post-emancipation ideas on labor and economy. Stanley wrote, “And when Americans turned to the labor question in the first wake of abolition, they claimed that it followed inevitably from the slavery question” (60-61). For Nash quote, see Charleston Daily Courier, 21 March 1867, p. 2 col. 3. For Stanley quote, see Amy Dru Stanley, From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998). For another discussion of the relationship of black labor to larger views of the social order, see Julie
ic, opesated and their procurement of wealth, lived on. In fact, that is what Jim Crow was all about given public deference and titles of courtesy because they were white. Prejudice, even in the face of black received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psycholog supremacist attitudes and practices. W. E. B. Du Bois observed, “The white group of laborers, while they so contradictory to the tim contention on prejudice ‘vanishing when the almighty dollar is on the wrong side of the balance sheet’ was historically naïve. As Grace Hale has brilliantly s 73 Gunnar Myrdal refers to the economic and social conditions that contributed to the Great Migration as “accumulated migration potentialities.” As Allan H. Spear explains, “Although southern Negroes had ample reason to emigrate before World War I, relatively few did. Negroes had few opportunities outside the South before 1915.” Spear goes on to contend that “Northern industry found an ample labor supply in the hundreds of European immigrants who annually made their way across the Atlantic…during World War I, however, the North became more attractive and the South more intolerable; the new conditions transformed migration potentialities into mass exodus” (174). Essentially, economic and social opportunities became available to blacks, which allowed once-potential migration forces to finally pull a mass of blacks to the North. For Spear quote, see Spear, “From the South to the Southside.” For a full explanation of “migration potentialities,” see Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma (New York: Harper & Row, 1944), 193; see also Thomas J. Woofter, Jr., Negro Migration (New York: W.D. Gray, 1920), 14-15. 74 Marks, Farewell, 17. Some scholars have argued the point that economic gains were few and not any different from those in the South. Rayford Logan, for instance, says that “the economic status of many Negroes in the North was not appreciably higher than that of most Negroes in the South.” A reason for this is likely due to the exaggerations that labor recruiters made in order to convince black southerners to come northward to fulfill jobs that had become vacated do to the war. For Logan quote, see Logan, “The Negro Wants First-Class Citizenship,” 11. 75 Marks, Farewell, 16-17. Negative reports were sent back by some colored migrants. But most of these notes were often dismissed or not given as much regard as those letters that spoke of positive experiences in the North. As James Grossman states, “Few letters expressed great disappointment, and in some cases, recipients had other reports against which they could balance negative comments. Most correspondents informed friends and relatives that ‘Everything is just as they say, if not better.’” For Grossman quote, see Grossman, Land of Hope, 89. 76 George W. Groh, The Black Migration: The Journey to Urban America (New York: Weybright & Talley, 1972), 49; Twombly, Blacks in White America, 171. 77 Gregory, The Southern Diaspora, 24. 78 Groh, Black Migration, 49-50. Abbott’s statement on “prejudice vanishing when the almighty dollar is on the wrong side of the balance sheet” was historically naïve. As Grace Hale has brilliantly surmised, “The dynamic and changing nature of consumer culture in turn posed a protracted and never quite solvable problem for southern whites attempting to segregate their world. Few African-Americans may have retained the vote, but many had something whites wanted—at least a few dollars to spend” (163). The implication here is obvious—blacks’ accumulation of any wealth, significant or trivial, only exacerbated the anger of whites and, subsequently, enhanced their calculated campaign to curtail black economic, political, and social power. This contention is corroborated by Hale, who says that “white southerners in turn elaborated more intricate regulations and put up more segregation signs” (162). It is likely that white northerners, faced with the same predicaments, would operate similarly. Even more, working-class whites in the North were definitely likely to become more racially intolerant toward black success. To be certain, middle and upper-class whites had their racial scorn for African Americans too though it was not as pervasive given the context in which these relationships materialized. As George M. Fredrickson writes, “To acknowledge that working-and lower-class whites felt particularly threatened by blacks is not to exempt the middle and upper classes from racial prejudice. But a greater sense of status and security permitted privileged whites to be more relaxed and paternalistic in their relationship with blacks, whom they encountered mainly as servants or service workers.” Thus, whites had to be compensated and their control of the racial hierarchy had to be reinforced. This latest point denotes further why Abbott’s contention on prejudice ‘vanishing when the almighty dollar is on the wrong side of the balance sheet’ was so contradictory to the times. Even with a low wage, whiteness was constantly compensated by white supremacist attitudes and practices. W. E. B. Du Bois observed, “The white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage. They were given public deference and titles of courtesy because they were white.” Prejudice, even in the face of black procurement of wealth, lived on. In fact, that is what Jim Crow was all about—a symbolic appeal to

80 See previous footnote for my full definition and explanation of “representational incomparability.”

81 B.J. Widick, Detroit: City of Race and Class Violence (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University, 1989), 26. Henry Ford was a key figure in helping to ignite a northward migration of both white and Negro workers. As Widick notes, “On January 5, 1914, he [Ford] announced that he would pay wages of five dollars a day to all workers” (26). Joe Louis discusses Ford as the reason why his family moved from Alabama to Detroit, Michigan, after they had “heard about the money that Ford was paying.” Willis Ward’s father had apparently heard about the wages that Ford was paying too. After relocating to Detroit, he eventually found a job in the automobile factory at the Ford plant. For Louis quote, see “The Life of Joe Louis,” in New York Times, November 5-12, 1948.

82 Grossman, Land of Hope, 86-88; also see Gregory, The Southern Diaspora, 49-53.

83 The idea that southern migration nationalized Jim Crow was both true in theory and in fact. B.J. Widick, for example, writes, “The exodus to the North was not confined to Negroes. Poor whites in masses began moving to Detroit from Arkansas, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama...By 1948, almost half a million inhabitants of Detroit were Southerners who brought their prejudices, customs, and language with them. A black man was a ‘nigger.’ In a sense, the South was transplanted into the North.” Widick’s aim is to demonstrate how the South’s Jim Crow way of life was able to travel northward during the Great Migration and, as a result, change the racial landscape above the Mason-Dixon Line. For Widick quote, see B.J. Widick, Detroit, 27.

84 In truth, the “Promised Land” story had long lost its power since the days of Frederick Douglas and Abraham Lincoln. It was, however, revived by men like Chicago Defender’s Robert Abbott and his fellow editors who dressed up the story for the 20th Century by portraying the North as land of hope and deliverance. See Gregory, The Southern Diaspora, 52; also see Grossman, Land of Hope, 87.


A few years later, Wilson proclaimed his historic Fourteen Points, which, among other things, called for the self-determination of subjugated peoples throughout the world, except of course for Americans of African descent” (17). Under Wilson, Negroes were citizens in name only. Thus, at a time when black migrants were fleeing to the “land where Lincoln lived,” it was not unpredictable to imagine that the Jim Crow of the South would become a national phenomenon. For Jones quote, see Gilbert Jonas, Freedom’s Sword: The NAACP and the Struggle against Racism in America, 1909-1969 (New York: Routledge, 2005), 17.

89 Quoted in the Western Biographical Publishing Company, A History and Biographical Cyclopedia of Butler County, Ohio With Illustrations and Sketches of Its Representative Men and Pioneers (Cincinnati: Western Biographical Publishing, 1882), 326. This statement in the Painesville Telegraph was written in the years following Reconstruction. But it would also come to have resonance in the early twentieth century, as southern whites invaded the North and brought along every Jim Crow tactic they knew possible in order to stymie black economic, political, and social mobility.

90 The literature on these anti-black race riots is extensive. For examples, see B.J. Widick, Detroit: Tuttle, Jr., Race Riot; Elliott Rudwick, Race Riot at East St. Louis, July 12, 1917 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1964); Scott Ellsworth, Death in the Promised Land: The Tulsa Riot of 1921 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); Robert Shogan and Tom Craig, The Detroit Race Riot: A Study in Violence (Philadelphia, PA: Chilton Books, 1964); and Robert Senechal, The Sociogenesis of a Race Riot: Springfield, Illinois, in 1908 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990). The latter text does not fall within the same context as the riots that took place starting in 1917. Still it bears mentioning in order to understand the racial complexity of riots in general and the shift of racial prejudice to the North. As Michael Klarman intimates, “When whites rioted against blacks in Springfield, Illinois, in 1908, killing and wounding dozens, William English Walling, one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), warned that southern politicians such as ‘Vardaman and Tillman [were] transferring the race war to the North.’” For Klarman quote, see Klarman, From Jim Crow to Civil Rights, 12; for Walling quote and larger overview of the race riot in Springfield, Illinois, see Mary White Ovington, “How the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Began,” in Crisis (August 1914): 184; William Cohen, At Freedom’s Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest for Racial Control, 1861-1915 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1991), 92-93; Allan H. Spear, Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1800-1920 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967), 7-8.

91 Historian Nell Painter acknowledges that the year 1919 also produced an anti-socialist, anti-anarchist, anti-labor Red Scare. She contends that the ‘red’ in Red Scare referred to the color associated with socialism, not with the color of blood of the Red Summer. Painter is exact in her analysis. At the same time that anti-black race riots were occurring across the country, so, too, were events like the May Day Riots of 1919, where violent demonstrations were held in Cleveland, Ohio. Unionists, socialists, communists, and anarchists, led by Charles Ruthenberg, organized a May Day march in protest of the jailing of Eugene Debs. When these marchers were asked to lower their flags by Victory Loan workers, they refused and a mass fighting broke out immediately. For Painter analysis of socialism and its relationship to the Red Scare, see Nell Irvin Painter, Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1871-1919 (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987), 344-390.

92 Jesse Walter Dees, Jim Crow (Michigan: Ann Arbor Publishers, Inc., 1951), 128. While race riots were more frequent in the North and lynching recurrent in the South, there was some overlap and, thus, each should not be historically read as being unique to any particular region. Dees places the race riot in more lucid terms, capturing the significance of the race riot to the larger implication of racial prejudice. He writes, “‘A race riot is essentially the North’s version of the South’s lynching. The riot therefore is a different kind of Jim Crow explosion….Although both lynchings and riots do occur in both parts of the United States, we find lynchings mainly in the South and the race riot in the North…The race riot pattern or racial friction found in the North is produced by Jim Crow pressures of inequality, discrimination, and segregation, which are the identical forces producing lynching” (163, 165).

93 Illinois became a breeding ground for the riot. In 1917, whites feared losing both their job security and ability to maintain wages in light of the new competition they faced. A mob of white men gathered
downtown in East St. Louis to launch attacks on Afro-Americans. After a black man shot his white attacker and killed two other officers he thought to be a part of the mob, tensions grew worse. Whites went into the black section of town and began rioting. They burned this entire section of the city and shot blacks who attempted to escape burning buildings. There were reports that even guardsmen who were called in to stop the rioting joined in the fray, rioting rather than stopping the violence. Ida B. Wells would report in the Chicago Defender that one-hundred and fifty blacks were killed. For more on the East St. Louis riot, see Elliott Rudwick, Race Riot at East St. Louis. For an account of the blacks who died in the riot, see Ida B. Wells, Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells Rev. ed. (Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

94 Levine, African Americans and Civil Rights, 148.
95 Groh, Black Migration, 53. 60; David Levering Lewis, When Harlem was in Vogue (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), 24; Dillard, Faith in the City, 38.
96 Klarman, From Jim Crow to Civil Rights, 105; Davison Douglas, Jim Crow Moves North: The Battle for Northern School Segregation, 1865-1954 (New York Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3; Twombly, Blacks in White America, 172; Groh, Black Migration, 54; Gregory, The Southern Diaspora, 100. As the boundaries of black neighborhoods expanded in Detroit, so too did the rental fees that African Americans were compelled to pay. When Jewish families moved out of homes where the monthly rents had been increased to $38.00, black newcomers were asked to pay $50.00 for the same property. Forrester Washington found that the average rent for an unfurnished room in Detroit in 1917 was $4.60 per week, higher than the rent for a comparable room in New York. Even the most blighted areas, it was not unheard of for a black family to pay $50-a-month as one African-American household did for an apartment that was situated over a store on Hastings and Clinton streets. Sadly, as John Dancy recalled, the family had to climb a ladder and cross a roof to enter their home. For more on rent gouging and poor housing conditions, see Forrester B. Washington, The Negro in Detroit: A Survey of the Conditions of the Negro Group in a Northern Industrial Center during the War Prosperity Period (Detroit Research Bureau Associated Charities of Detroit 1920); see John C. Dancy, Sand Against the Wind: The Memoirs of John C. Dancy (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1966),56-57; also see Beth Tompkins Bates, The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).95-96.
97 Thomas Sugrue, The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit (Princeton University Press, 2005), 24; Klarman, From Jim Crow to Civil Rights, 104-05; Groh, Black Migration, 54; Cleveland Gazette (September 29, 1923): 2; Douglas, Jim Crow Moves North, 136-37. For a thorough and riveting history of the Ossian Sweet story and trial, see Boyle, Arc of Justice; also see Widick, Detroit, 5-22; Stovall, The Growth of Black Elected Officials, 43.
98 Klarman, From Jim Crow to Civil Rights, 104. It is very likely that Ossian Sweet had another prominent black—Dr. Arthur Turner, a physician and surgeon—on his mind throughout his ordeal with racist white northerners who sought to drive him from their neighborhood. In March of 1925, Dr. Turner and his wife were stoned by white attackers who had, amongst other things, defaced the interior of the Turner home and wrecked their belongings all in the name of forcing the Tuners out of this white community. For more discussion on Turner, see Dancy, Sand against the Wind, 29; also see Stovall, The Growth of Black Elected Officials, 43-44.
99 Darrow’s autobiography provides his personal account of his defense of Sweet. See Clarence Darrow, The Story of My Life (New York: C. Scribner’s 1932), 301-11; also see Jonas, Freedom’s Sword, 40.
100 Groh, Black Migration, 54; Douglas, Jim Crow Moves North, 134. My argument here is similar to an argument put forth by Historian Jane Dailey. Dailey asserts, “Legal barriers to African-American power and influence—the creation of Jim Crow South—grew out white southerners’ specific and concrete encounters with black social, economic, and political power” (2). My contention follows this same line of reasoning by Dailey, though the context shifts from the South to the North. I am arguing that black migration to the North allowed blacks to gain cachet in some economic and political arenas. In response, northern whites became increasingly disgruntled with the growing-yet-still-limited prestige of blacks. Jim Crow was, therefore, established, as Jesse Dees posits, “in our American language, mores, and law” as an
“accepted pattern of keeping the Negro ‘in his rightful place’” (1). For Dailey quote, see Dailey, Before Jim Crow, 2. For Cummings quote, see Moon, Untold Tales, 33.

Douglas, Jim Crow Moves North, 134.


I use the word “reemergence” here because I am contending that Jim Crow began in the North and took force in the South. It then became atavistic in the North, that is, it reoccurred in the North after being absent for several decades when the increase of black migrants into the North caused an escalation in white racial fear about a possible enlargement of black economic and political power. This contention is buttressed by Gunnar Myrdal who writes, “In most industrial and commercial centers of the North where there were any appreciable number of Negroes, the three decades prior to the Civil War saw recurrent race riots, growing out of this competition for jobs. In the few localities where Negroes actually had come to monopolize certain types of work, their exclusion had thus started much earlier” (291). Myrdal’s assertion here was partly based upon the testimony of Frederick Douglas, who stated, “Every hour sees the black [in the North] elbowed out of employment by some newly arrived immigrant whose hunger and whose color are thought to give him a better title to the place; and so we believe it will continue to be until the last prop is leveled beneath us—white men are becoming house servants, cooks, and stewards on vessels; at hotels, they are becoming porters..and barbers—a few years ago a white barber would have been a curiosity. Now their poles stand on every street” (122). Douglas reveals just how pervasive white racism became as blacks moved into positions of economic power. Whites were even willing to take “Negro jobs” in order to prevent blacks from generating a racial equilibrium that would obliterate any notion that whites were racially-superior to blacks. Edgar G. Murphy was another commentator who noticed the swing in menial jobs that were going to whites. He also spoke on the enormity of racial prejudice in the North. “The race prejudice is…as intense at the North as it is anywhere in the world…the Negro at the North can be a waiter in hotel and restaurant (in some); he can be a butler or footman in club or household (in some); or the haircutter or bootblack in the barber shop (in some); and I say ‘in some’ because even the more menial offices of industry are being slowly but gradually denied to him.” For Myrdal quote, see Myrdal, An American Dilemma. For Douglas quote, see Bertram Johannes Otto Schrieke, Alien Americans: A Study of Race Relations (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1936). For Murphy quote, see Edgar J. Murphy, Problems of the Present South: A Discussion of Certain Educational, Industrial, and Political Issues in the Southern States (New York: MacMillan, 1904), 186-7.

Klarman, From Jim Crow to Civil Rights, 104; “The South High Annual, 1919” in Grand Rapids Public Library, 103-4; Jelks, African-Americans in the Furniture City, 78.

Migration was not limited to African Americans. Whites also came to the North in pursuit of employment opportunities. When they came, they brought their racist traditions with them. The last thing they wanted to do was to be forced to compete with black workers who were thought to be both inferior and the descendants of slaves. As Widick states, “The exodus to the North was not confined to Negroes. Poor whites in masses began moving to Detroit from Arkansas, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Alabama. They too had heard the good news that one could make a decent living up north...by 1948, almost half a million inhabitants of Detroit were [white] southerners who brought their prejudices, customs, and language with them. A black man was a ‘nigger.’ In a sense, the South was transplanted into the North, its poor people placed in the new and turbulent context of the industrial city. The Ku Klux Klan was indeed ‘at home’ in that environment.” For Widick quote, see Widick, Detroit, 27.

Stovall, The Growth of Black Elected Officials, 31; James W. Loewen, Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism (New York: The New Press, 2005), 121. Andrew Hacker identified the “status” threat. He wrote, “If there is one sword which hangs over the heads of untold millions of whites—and Northern—Americans it is that they cannot afford to live in close proximity to Negroes. The single social fact which can destroy the whole image of middle-class respectability is to be known to reside in a neighborhood which has Negroes nearby.” Though Hacker’s commentary came in 1961, it could have very well reflected the mood of the early Twentieth Century when northern whites came to loathe the idea of African Americans living in their communities. For Hacker quote, see Andrew Hacker, Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), 289.
As Beth Bates states, “Black Detroiter did not live in Black Bottom and Paradise Valley solely by choice...nor did they think a ‘black metropolis’ should be the last stop on the road to full rights of citizenship.” Still, it is worth noting that there was a certain sense of community African Americans living in Detroit gained from being in close proximity. Confinement to Detroit’s ghettos provided black denizens with a racial hideaway and shelter from the storm of white racism they otherwise encountered. See Bates, The Making of Black Detroit, 112.

These late-night get-togethers were not simply couched in merrymaking. Instead, these social gatherings were the integral to black migrants’ sense of community and helped to form for African Americans what George Lipsitz has termed a “culture of opposition” by locating private social spaces that provided refuge from the tentacles of American racism. Men and women stood shoulder to shoulder not only reveling in good times but also getting to know one another and building a sense of civic engagement and trust. Inevitably, these individuals, as Earl Lewis elucidates, turned their alienation into agency so that “segregation became congregation.” For Lewis quote, see Earl Lewis, In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 90. For more on the “culture of opposition,” see George Lipsitz, A Life in the Struggle: Ivory Perry and the Culture of Opposition (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1988).


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As previously noted, both Ford and Ward were given jobs at the Michigan Union to help subsidize their education. Ward was also able to earn three meals a day by working three hours. Ward also worked at Van Boven Clothing three days a week to earn money to pay for his room and board. See Ibid, 3.


Douglas Owen Baldwin, ed., Sport in North America: A Documentary History: Volume 8: Sports in the Depression, 1930-1940 (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 1992), 163. “Superspade” was the description given to those black athletes who were exceptional enough to earn participation on an athletic team, usually in track and field, at major universities prior to World War II. Behee writes, “Superspade and supernigger were the terms used by Muhammad Ali to capture the essence of what was expected of blacks. They had to be sensational.” In time, the term was applied broadly to include any African American who was especially gifted in and who had to outperform whites in order to gain inclusion. For Behee quote, see Behee, Hail to the Victors, 12.

Ibid.

Ibid, 69. It should be noted that Graham eventually stayed with his teammates. After being unable to find lodging at the same hotel that DeHart Hubbard lodged at during the trips due to the hotel having no available vacancy, Graham went back to the hotel where the team was housed and slipped past the hotel clerk with the help of his teammate. The benevolence, however, falls short considering that Graham’s teammate was tolerable of Graham being told he could not stay at the hotel and was unwilling to advocate on Graham’s behalf against what he [the teammate] knew to be obvious racism. In this regard, the teammate was just as responsible for Graham’s degradation during that trip as was the hotel clerk who merely followed the de facto practice of the day.

W. E. B. Du Bois’ actual statement was that the “major problem of the twentieth century would be that of the color-line,” not merely of confronting the color question as it is posed here. Still, the underlying assertion in Du Bois’ prescient claim was a question of how to address the problem of the Negro or, more aptly put, the problem of color. After all, the Negro’s color is the thing that made him a Negro in the first
place. Whites who refused to address the problem of color, that is, challenge bigoted practices, were as guilty of proliferating racial segregation as the radical racists who shaped its contours.

139 Behee, *Hail to the Victors*, 68; Willis Ward, interview by David Pollock, Ford Project, September 8, 1983, p. 7, GRFPL.
140 Ibid, 7-8.
141 Ibid, 7.
142 Ibid, 7-8.
143 Kevin Gregg, “Tackling Jim Crow: Segregation on the College Gridiron, 1936-1941” (PhD diss., Boston College, 2005), 6. Gentlemen’s Agreements were not limited to college football. David K. Wiggins points out that these agreements were also employed in sports such as professional baseball and football—the latter of which, according to Wiggins, “allowed some black athletes to participate for a time, but by 1933 it had instituted a Jim Crow clause and become segregated.” Michael McCambridge corroborates Wiggins’s claim: “As with major league baseball, pro football was segregated at the time, not by rule or law, but by practice and custom. Numerous blacks had played with the town and factory teams of the league’s early years, but since the 1933 season—when the black running back Joe Lillard played for the Chicago Cardinals and a tackle named Ray Kemp saw action with Pittsburgh—not a single black player had received so much as an invitation to training camp, even during the desperate manpower shortages during the war.” As well, the gentlemen’s agreements took on other appellations besides “Jim Crow clauses.” For example, in professional golf, they were known as the “Caucasian clause.” In spite of the sobriquet given to these gentlemen’s agreements, they all had the same effect—they were responsible for keeping blacks from either participating in certain games or certain athletics in general. For Wiggins quote, see David K. Wiggins, *Glory Bound: Black Athletes in White America* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 68; for McCambridge quote, see Michael McCambridge, *America’s Game: The Epic Story of How Pro Football Captured a Nation* (New York: Random House, 2004), 17.

Kendall Wood, speech at Ward Rally, October 19, 1934, Box 20, Board in Control of Intercollegiate Athletics Papers (BCIA). (These papers are housed in the Bentley Historical Collection at the University of Michigan).

W.A. Alexander and Fielding Yost were considered to be friends. Records show that the two men often shared company with one another prior to Michigan’s game against Georgia Tech. For example, a letter sent to W.A. Alexander from Fielding Yost on February 14, 1934, confirms some degree of relationship between the two men. In the letter, Yost thanks Alexander “for the delightful chicken dinner Saturday and all the other favors extended…” For Yost quote, please see Letter, Fielding Yost to W.A. Alexander, February 14, 1934, Box 20, BCIA.

There is evidence to suggest that Yost accepted McGugin’s deductions. If Yost felt that the North’s practice of benching black players was an acceptable custom, he, logically, did not anticipate any condemnation for his decision. For Fisch quote, see

Letter, Dan McGugin to Fielding Yost, May 2, 1934, Box 19, BCIA.

Letter, Dan McGugin to Fielding Yost, December 12, 1933, Box 18, BCIA.

It is not a surprise that President Rightmire took the stance of supporting Bell’s benching. After a 1933 Ohio State Supreme Court decision upheld the University’s right to deny housing to a black co-ed, Doris Weaver, Rightmire rhetorically inquired, “Knowing the feeling in Ohio, can the administration take the burden of establishing this relationship—colored and white girls living in this more or less family way?” It was clear that Rightmire was sharing the sentiments of white Ohioans—a sentiment he shared. Rather than seeking to purge racism, Rightmire helped to perpetuate it. For Rightmire quote, see Arthur R. Ashe, Jr., *A Hard Road to Glory: A History of the African American Athlete, 1919-1945* (New York: Warner Books, 1988), 82.

Letter, L. W. St. John to Fielding Yost, October 4, 1934, Box 9, UMAP.

William Fisch, speech at Ward Rally, October 19, 1934, Box 20, BCIA; Poster, n.d., WWVF.

This egalitarian tradition is symbolized by the fact that Michigan first admitted an African-American student in 1853. That student was Samuel Codes Watson, who studied medicine. In 1876, only six years after Michigan admitted its first female student and just ten years after any woman had ever attended a class at the University, Michigan admitted Mary Henrietta Graham, the school’s first African-American woman. See Laura Caulkins, “Samuel Codes Watson” in *Michigan History* Vol. 86 No. 1 (January/February 2002), 48-52; also see University of Michigan Daybook: *A Book of Days: 150 Years of Student Life at Michigan.* [Researched and compiled by Nancy R. Bartlett, Kathleen A. Koehler ; edited by Noreen Ferris Wolcott; designed by Kathleen S. Horn], Ann Arbor, MI: Alumni Association of the University of Michigan, c1987, and The Proceedings of the Board of Regents.

Willis Ward, foreword to *Hail to the Victors!* by John Behee (Ann Arbor, MI: Ulrich’s Books, 1974).

Behee, *Hail to the Victors,* 68. The quote came from Dan Kean, who was speaking of his junior and senior years at Michigan (1933 and 1934). Behee followed Kean’s quote with a salient reminder of just how far racism and discrimination traveled at Michigan. Behee said of Kean, “He could just as well have been describing 1954 or 1964,” casting the vast number of years or, better said, decades black athletes would have to endure racial prejudice at the University.


Ibid. Behee’s argument neglects an important context for understanding the number of injuries inflicted by players on opposing players—football’s rugby origins. John Sayle Watterson gives an excellent history
of the injuries that took place in college football and discusses college football’s rugby origins. Watterson writes, “Teams normally consisted of eleven iron men, who played both offense and defense for the entire game, and an equal number of reserves in case of injuries. Once a player had left the game, he could not return. Hence, injured players often staggered around the field until they collapsed or asked to be taken out of the contest.” Injuries increased as athletes did whatever they could in order to prevent being removed from the game. If a team could injure enough players from the opposing team, the game could be called. Still, this strategy did not inhibit referees from punishing those players who broke the rules even at a time when the rules were either lax or comprised of a rugby style. Penalties and ejections were common. In one of the bloodiest games ever played—Harvard and Yale in an 1894 game now commonly referred to as ‘The Bloody Battle of Hampden Field’—the postgame reaction featured criticism and denunciations of game’s brutality from officials at both schools as well as clergy members across the country, which exemplified the public’s contempt for any intentional infliction of injury. Superintendent Byrnes of the New York Police Department announced that police would patrol the sidelines at the Yale-Princeton game as a precaution. Byrnes ordered his men to stop the game “if it proved to be anything else than a purely scientific game between two college teams.” Byrnes was determined not to see the game assume the character of a prizefight. In the case of George Jewett or any other black athlete injured during a game, no such provisions were ever reported to have been offered. As far as the condemnation for the rough treatment of Jewett, guilty players were never thrown out of a game and the postgame criticism was absent. For Watterson quote, see Watterson, College Football, 12; also see David Nelson, Anatomy of the Game: Football, the Rules, and the Men Who Made the Game ( Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994), 63-74. For a larger discussion of injuries and college football, see Watterson, College Football, 9-140.


Jack Trice, last letter, October, 5, 1923, Jack Trice Papers, Iowa State University Special Collections (to be further abbreviated, JTP, ISUSC). Robert Fisher, George Trice, Nelson Trice, interview by Donald Spivey. May 7, 1988; also see Gems, For Pride, Profit, and Patriarchy, 117; see accounts of the game in Chicago Defender, Baltimore Afro-American, and Pittsburgh Courier; also see Lou Ransom, “White University Rights 65-Year Wrong Done to Black Athlete,” in Jet Magazine (May 1988): 48-52.

Trice was alleged to have put himself back into the game, refusing to sit after being injured. But 53 years after the incident, a previously unpublished conversation between Trice and his head coach, Sam Willaman was made known. When Trice was asked by Willaman about his health status, he admitted he was in pain and pointed to a hurt shoulder that doctors later revealed was badly injured. Willaman, nonetheless, allowed Trice to reenter the game, forsaking his fiduciary duty as head coach to protect his players. See Iowa State Daily, “Memories of Trice Don’t Fade,” November 8, 1976.

Ashe, Jr., A Hard Road to Glory, 93. Ashe was convinced that Trice had been purposely injured by Minnesota players. John L. Griffith, the Big Ten Commissioner, initially thought that Trice was intentionally hurt based on the Associated Press reports that were dispatched after the game. S.W. Beyer, Iowa State’s dean, however, refuted those reports. He claimed that the school’s head coach Sam Willaman “did not discern any special massing on Trice.” Griffith, satisfied with Beyer’s take on the Trice death, responded that black athletes were never targeted by white players. “Inasmuch as Mr. Trice was a colored man it is easy for people to assume that his opponents must have deliberately attempted to injure him. In my experience where colored boys have participated in athletic contests I have seen very little to indicate that their white opponents had any disposition to foul them. In fact, that is one of the great glories of athletics as I see it—namely that every man, no matter who he is, is assured fair play in an athletic contest.” Yet, Iowa State decided not to renew its contract with Minnesota after the teams met in 1924. They did not play again until 1989. It is also worth noting that in 1931, Willaman, then the head coach at Ohio State University, benched his star tackle William Bell after Navy threatened violent reprise against him.
Willaman recalled Trice’s death and was unwilling to take any chances that white players on the opposing team were not intent in their plans to “kill the nigger.” Further, African Americans were barely accepted as teammates and the evidence of beleaguered black sportsmen contradicts Griffith’s insincere synopsis that colored athletes received equal treatment on the field. For Beyer quote, see Letter, S.W. Beyer to John L. Griffith, October 10, 1923; for Griffith quote, see Letter, John L. Griffith to S.W. Beyer, October 12, 1923. Both of these letters can be found in JTP, ISUSC.

164 Gems, For Pride, Profit, and Patriarchy, 155.

165 Iowa State Student, “Jack Trice Dies from Injuries; Hurt Saturday,” October 8, 1923. The Iowa State College Department of Hygiene issued a statement concerning Jack Trice’s official cause of death:

"Traumatic Peritonitis, following injury to abdomen in football game, October 6, 1923. (Autopsy showed severe contusion of intestines upper portion of abdomen. This causes stasis or paralysis of intestines followed by peritonitis)," October 16, 1923, JTP, ISUSC; also see Jamie Schultz, “The Legend of Jack Trice and the Campaign for Jack Trice Stadium, 1973-1984,” in Journal of Social History Vol. 41 No. 4 (Summer 2008): 997-1029.


167 Joel Williamson, The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation (NY: Oxford University Press, 1984), 254. Some conservative thinkers have neglected the ongoing impact that radical racism had in engendering segregation, arguing that segregation developed not as an expression of radical racism but as a response to it. They contend that segregation serve as a means to protect blacks. Further, they claim that some of the radical racists endorsed segregation in order to limit their interactions with a black populace that could only be tolerated in the slave condition, not as free persons. To these conservatives, only a small group of radical racists were responsible for instigating racial violence. As Dinesh D’Souza states, “Others simply preferred to terrorize and kill blacks; they sought to resolve their contemporary problems with medieval tortures and bonfires. To the radical racists, the concept of free blacks was a scandal, like beasts wandering about without owners. Most of the radical racists recognized that the African solution was implausible. So they adopted or supported measures to prevent blacks from opening businesses, to burn down their stores and homes, to terrorize them in nightly raids, to hunt them down in mobs, to pitchfork and hang and Lynch them in a virtual campaign of extermination. But this was not the majority position in the South. The ruling class in the South was patrician and conservative, a product of the Bourbon tradition.” These conservatives united with the radical racists during the Civil War.” To D’Souza, conservatives and radical racists only shared the position espoused by George Fitzhugh that “slavery begets friendly, kind and affectionate relations, just as equality engenders antagonism and hostility on all sides.” The position that segregation represented an attractive alternative to violence against African Americans and, thus, that southern conservative paternalism was grounded in racial benevolence is flawed and does little to resolve the inherent racism existing in the idea of segregation. In either case, African Americans were being punished for their “blackness”; either you endure violence or you stay within the boundaries to which you have been confined. Even more, the argument is deficient in that it justifies white racial hostility toward their black counterparts. By arguing that separation limits violence, white conservative southerners were suggesting that white bigoted antagonism toward African Americans was permissible on the sufficiency of white racial superiority. Paternalism, which D’Souza and others have defended as a being rooted in Christianity and patrician values, is a prejudiced approach to solving racial disharmony. This sort of thinking, nonetheless, governed the athletic world just as much as it did the social world as black football players encountered white racial belligerence with their only recourse for action being to not play alongside white players. For D’Souza quote, see Dinesh D’Souza, The End of Racism: Principles for a Multicultural Society (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 2, 177-178; for Fitzhugh quote, see George Fitzhugh, Sociology of the South: Or the Failure of Free Society (Richmond, VA: A. Morris, 1854), 96.

168 The violence that black athletes endured was, in many ways, suggestive of the belief of their inherent inferiority by whites and mirrored the violence that African Americans experienced in the Deep South. White radical racists were aggressive toward African Americans as a way of maintaining each group’s
respective positions in the social hierarchy. Black citizens were randomly exposed to violence as a gesture toward their alleged inferiority. The irony is that this violence was not the worst aspect of the harsh racial interactions between black and white Americans. The greatest impropriety existed in the fact that white bystanders disengaged from the violence still legitimized white racial aggression as a necessary evil to insire that African Americans never stepped out of line. George Groh describes the complicity of southern whites in the violence committed against blacks in the South. “Violence was not, of course, an all-pervasive aspect of race relations in the rural South. Most people, after all, do not go about assaulting each other with guns and whips. What was pervasive was the black knowledge that it could happen on the least provocation. That effect was intended. Whites of sensibility might deplore individual outrages, and they invariably looked down on the ‘rednecks’ who committed such acts, but there was a general agreement that force was necessary to keep blacks in line.” Groh very well could have been depicting the attitudes of white northerners, particularly in the context of sport. Even those individuals who decried the rough treatment black athletes received nonetheless supported it as a way of keeping athletic participation a fundamental right for which whites were the supposed beneficiaries. In many ways, this duplicity on the part of some whites—on the one hand condemning racism and on the other hand justifying its most cruel exchanges—reveals the warped nature of liberalism that some whites proclaimed to uphold. Though Gunnar Myrdal argued that “southern liberalism is not liberalism as it is found elsewhere in America or the world,” he clearly did not recognize the flaws of northern liberalism. As James T. Kloppenberg stresses, “There is no need to assume…that there is a stable taxonomy of liberalism against which the southern variant can be measured and found wanting.” For Kloppenberg, those who claimed themselves to be liberals and, simultaneously, defended Jim Crow were fundamentally the same. There was no remarkable variety of liberalism. Thus, liberal white northerners were just as unjust in their decision to permit violence against black athletes as white liberals in the South were in allowing the bloodshed of black southerners. For Groh quote, see George Groh, The Black Migration, 44; for Myrdal quote, see Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma, 466; for an extended discussion on liberalism and the Kloppenberg quote, see James T. Kloppenberg, The Virtues of Liberalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 6, 8; also, Jane Dailey, Before Jim Crow. 169 Michigan Daily, Editorial, October 31, 1892; Michigan Daily, Editorial, November 28, 1892; Behee, Hail to the Victors, 32. It is difficult to accept the premise that any coach, fan, player, or referee was unaware of the player or players who had sought to injure Jewett. Thus, asking him to name his offender was not meant to demonstrate impartiality. Instead, it was a collective signal from whites that the Negro was not their counterpart by the very fact that he could not provide an answer to the question of who wounded him. 170 Roy Wilkins, “The Negro Wants Full Equality,” 114. 171 The stance taken by the University of Michigan that Jewett could not play football and pursue medical studies was a widespread problem that affected players of all races. In fact, the Carnegie Foundation offered heavy criticism in this area in one of their most exhaustive reports on the perils of college football. The Carnegie Foundation found that “no college boy, training for a major team can have much time for thought or study”—an obvious problem for institutions that should have been, above all, committed to the fundamental ideas of knowledge and higher learning. It is no coincidence that one of the staunchest critics of the Foundation’s report was Georgia Tech football coach W. A. Alexander, who called the report “startling” and concluded that any student struggling with his studies suffered from “narrow-mindedness or a lack of brains.” Alexander wrote a four-page response in The Athletic Journal entitled “The Player’s Answer.” For more information on the Carnegie Foundation report and W.A. Alexander’s response, see W.A. Alexander, “The Player’s Answer,” in The Athletic Journal, September 1930, Georgia Tech Archives (GTA). 172 Interview, Coleman Jewett with author, July 18, 2007. Coleman Jewett is the grandson of George Jewett and verified that his grandfather left Michigan over a dispute as to whether he should be allowed to play football and enter medical school. The Northwestern Archives seem to support Coleman Jewett’s assertion, indicating that Jewett entered medical school in 1893 and played football both years. Jewett would go on to
practice medicine in Chicago; however, his practice was not very lucrative as very few patients were willing to consult with a black physician.


174 The argument here that football was white America’s game draws upon J. Douglas Toma’s observation of football. He writes, “Football is popular, in large part, because it both conforms with typical American values and satisfies the typical need of Americans to identify with something meaningful that is also local. Football is thought to reflect those who compete…all of these values and characteristics are linked with the American dream—the ‘promise that those who take advantage of opportunities and strive the hardest will be rewarded with the good life of material comfort…and perhaps social prominence and influence as well.’” If Toma’s observation is accurate and there is no reason to deny his analysis, then it is imprudent to also conclude that America’s race relations during the first half of the twentieth century had a significant impact on beliefs not only about American values but also about who possessed the right to the American dream. African Americans were thought of as inferior and, in many circles, were not deemed second-class citizens. The central meaning behind the use of “values” as being germane both to Americans and sports must also not be lost as a process for identifying why black athletes were not seen as deserving of the right to play football alongside whites. Harry Edwards terms the values associated with sports “the dominant American sports creed,” which include character building, discipline, competition, physical fitness, mental fitness, religiosity, and nationalism. At a time when African Americans were portrayed as daft and dumb, shiftless and stubborn, it is no surprise that the ideals enumerated in the American creed of values were not thought to be held by Negroes. Thus, football was not just tantamount to what it meant to be an American but it also epitomized what it meant to be white, and, therefore, superior. There was not any way, then, that Yost would approve of a black person competing in the white man’s game. For Toma quote, see J. Douglas Toma, *Football U: Spectator Sports in the Life of the American University* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 169; for a further discussion of football’s linkage to American values and the American dream, see Howard L. Nixon and James H. Frey, *A Sociology of Sport* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1995), 40; also see Wilbert Marcellus Leonard, *A Sociological Perspective of Sport* 4th edition (New York: Macmillan, 1993); for Edwards quote, see Howard L. Nixon, *Sport and the American Dream* (New York: Leisure Press, 1984).

175 Ashe, Jr., *A Hard Road to Glory*, 94. The sentiment expressed by African Americans that Yost held racist views was shared by some others. For instance, the Detroit Medical Society, whose membership comprised several loyal Michigan alumni, called Yost’s decision to bench Willis Ward “unfair” and “unsportsmanlike” and further charged Yost “as a prejudiced and ungrateful head of athletics.” For quote, see Letter, B.F.S. Seabrooks and Detroit Medical Society to Fielding Yost, October 20, 1934, WWVF.


177 *Chicago Tribune*, November 24, 1902, 6; December 7, 1902, 9.

178 Gems, *For Profit*, 115. Gems points out the fact that “both Michigan and Chicago coveted his [Eckersall’s] abilities. By that time alumni and some coaches already offered significant inducements and Stagg allegedly intercepted Eckersall before he could leave the city for Michigan” (92).

179 Ibid. Despite Stagg’s insistence on keeping Eckersall eligible for competition, it did not take long for Eckersall’s irresponsible behavior to grow old with the administration. According to Germs, “By 1907 then-President Harry Pratt Judson threatened to expel Eckersall” (92). Sadly, Stagg, Eckersall’s long ally, could no longer support him once his eligibility ran out. It was only fitting that Stagg later grasped the affect of not developing Eckersall’s character and turning him into a reliable and respectable gentleman. Still, Stagg and the University of Chicago remained effusive in their praise of the dissolute football star. “Eckersall left the school, less than halfway to a degree, when his football eligibility expired after the 1906 season. Nearly twenty years later he had not yet repaid a $20 loan from his mentor, Stagg, despite a substantial income as a national promoter for cigarettes and his dual roles as a famous sportswriter and highly paid football official. Both Stagg and the university had clearly failed to build character in Eckersall’s case…the university whitewashed the Eckersall affair amidst charges of their own wrongdoing in exploiting the three-time All-American for publicity purposes. Newspapers lionized his feats on the football field, and magazines, poems, and songs immortalized his stature as a national football hero. At the
end of his Chicago career a school rally acknowledged his uncommon distinction. Students cheered as the
dean praised Eckersall’s character and the faculty presented him with a gold watch.” The Stagg papers
contain much correspondence on Eckersall’s problems. See Record Herald, October 30, 1903 clipping in
Box 16, Folder 10; Letter, Palmer E. Pierce to Stagg, March 6, 1903; Letter, Stagg to Pierce, November 10,
1903; January 19, 1904, Box 42, Folder 15; Letter, Charles S. Stichter to Stagg, October 2, 1903; Letter,
Joseph Curtis Sloane to Stagg, November 9, 1903; Letter, F.L. Beebe to Whom It May Concern, March 22,
1905, Box 78, Folder 1; Chicago Tribune, November 21, 1903, 6, [details a meeting between Edwin G.
Cooley, Superintendent of Chicago’s Public Schools and the University of Chicago, Michigan, and
Northwestern over their efforts to induce high school athletes to enroll before graduation.]; Letter, A.A.
Stagg to Joseph E. Baycroft, June 12, 1905, Stagg Papers, Box 12., Folder 1; also see Robin Lester, Stagg’s
University: The Rise, Decline, and Fall of Big-Time Football at Chicago (Urbana: University of Illinois
Press, 1955), 55-64 [provides a succinct but thorough review of Eckersall’s career and problems at
Chicago].
180 Letter, George Buckley to President Judson, March 14, 1907, University of Chicago Presidential Papers,
Box 15, Folder 7. While the racial embargo placed on black players is troubling, the demasculization of
African-American men should not be overlooked. In ostensibly denying that black athletes possessed the
qualities to be considered four-sided men, Yost placed black manhood in a gendered context. Yost’s
treatment of black masculinity ran parallel to the view that whites held of black manhood starting in the
19th Century and extending into the 20th Century. Whites began to claim that black men were unworthy of
“manhood rights.” This claim, as Gail Bederman points out, was premised on the logic that manhood was
to be connected to civilization and only white men were capable of being civilized; black men, on the other
hand, were deemed incapable of possessing the capacity to be civilized. For a fuller analysis of correlation
drawn between civilization and manhood, see Gail Bederman, Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural
History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995),
especially Ch. 1; also see Koritha Mitchell, Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays,
181 Behee, Hail to the Victors, 33. Behee explains that [Clifford] Wilson “was already in the program but
was apparently having academic problems and would have to enroll for the summer session to become
eligible for the 1928 season.” Herbert Wilson became interested in assisting a young black student and
becoming an advocate on behalf of Clifford Wilson and his effort to play football at Michigan.
182 Letter, Wilson to Wieman, April 25, 1928, Box 5, University of Michigan Athletic Papers (UMAP); also
see Behee, Hail to the Victors, 33. Coach Tad Wieman had been an assistant under Fielding Yost and
became Head Coach after Yost coached his final season and assumed the full-time job of being the
University’s athletic director.
183 Letter, Wieman to Wilson, April 26, 1928, Box 5, UMAP.
184 Ibid.
185 My argument should not be read as an insinuation on my part that black participation on white teams did
not engender racial hurdles that were strenuous and difficult to overhaul. In fact, this is the reason that it is
so imperative to dissect Wieman’s rationale for preventing Clifford Wilson from joining the team. His
assessments relied on a racial narrow-mindedness masked by a feigned disquiet for the antagonisms and
conflicts that might arise from having a black player on the team. My contention, on the other hand,
supports Wieman’s assumption but differs on the racial assumption that underlies his conclusion. For me,
there is no doubt that racism performed a role in denying African Americans the opportunity to play and
that the potential fallout for having a black player on the team was already grasped by the intolerance of
Michigan officials who did not believe the school needed Negroes on any athletic team. Put in a different
way, the Jim Crow-premise of appealing to racial separation drove the conclusion that racial friction would
result if the races were not isolated; it was not the other way around as Wieman implies.
186 Behee, Hail to the Victors, 68.
188 Ibid, 39.
Ibid, 36. Behee claims that the reason for the quotas was due to the fact that “Michigan football was still big business…it had to be very sensitive to its paying customers, and the customers were certainly not ready for a large influx of black athletes in the 1940s. Neither were the white coaches.”

190 The entire Big Ten Conference excluded black athletes from playing basketball until 1948. As Behee, notes, “The curious observation to be made is that while the Big Ten clearly excluded black basketball players until 1948, it was, for all practical purposes, in step with the nation. Even a cursory glance at the all-America selections of Look magazine shows almost no black athletes named until 1952.” For Behee quote, see Behee, Hail to the Victors, 70.

191 Ibid, 40. Gentlemen’s Agreements refer to the unwritten agreements between athletic officials in the Big Ten to deny blacks the opportunity to play on the basketball team.

192 Letter, Leon Wheeler to Franklin Cappon, January 9, 1934, Box 9, UMAP.

193 Frank Robbins also gave a similar response to Richard Dent. He sent a letter to Dent explaining the school’s position on playing a freshman on the varsity team and informing Dent of his inaccuracy in reporting that Lett was withheld from participation due to race. Robbins wrote, “Dr. Ruthven asks me to call your attention to your inaccuracy in your letter which states that Mr. Lett was not allowed to play on the basketball team because of his color. Mr. Let is registered in the University as a member of the class of 1937. In other words, he was last year a freshman in the University. No freshman is allowed to play on any of the Varsity teams. It is incorrect, therefore, to state that any discrimination was made against this student.” Robbins may have been correct about the rule but he was wrong about the discrimination that took place. Coach Cappon clearly did not want to have anything to do with having a Negro on his team—freshman or not—and made this fact known to others, particularly Willis Ward. For Robbins quote, see Letter, Frank Robbins to Richard Dent, October 13, 1934, WWVF.

194 Behee, Hail to the Victors, 39.

195 Ibid, 41.

196 The contention that the University of Michigan was a Jim Crow school is not in line with the prevailing opinions at the time. For emphasis, in a letter to the editor of the Michigan Daily, L. Smullin contended that “Georgia Tech is a southern school” and, thus, “by the same token…is a Jim Crow school, that is, Negroes are not allowed to attend the school.” Smullin and other individuals who articulated a Jim Crow school to be merely one that restricted admission to African Americans, however, failed to grasp the fact that Jim Crow practices consisted of any racist tactic to segregate the races. Thus, a Jim Crow school was not simply one that did not allow African Americans to attend but also one that prevented them from playing. In this context, Michigan was a Jim Crow school. For Smullin quote, see Michigan Daily, October 30, 1934.

197 Behee, Hail to the Victors, 41, 54.

198 Ibid, 79, 84. The absence of African Americans on campus also impeded the opportunity for black athletes and non-athletes to forge racial solidarity with one another around the similar cause pursuing racial inclusion. Black athletes and non-athletes supported each other and took pride in any accomplishment that might distinguish them as a race. John Codwell remembered the racial togetherness African Americans at Michigan demonstrated toward each other. “Black students depended on black students, and for the most part, all of us, athlete and non-athlete” (84).

199 Peggy Pascoe, What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 169. I cite the years that Michigan’s decree against interracial marriage was established and repealed to indicate that miscegenation laws had been disfavored by the state. In spite of this abolishment, the opposition to interracial relationships, specifically interracial sex, continued and practices proved harder to break than the statutes that gave anti-miscegenation its legal teeth. Pascoe notes that by the early 20th Century, state legislators in places like Illinois, Michigan, and New York sought to propose new bans on “marriages between ‘Whites or Caucasians,’ and any ‘African, Chinese, or Japanese’” (p. 163).

200 Behee, Hail to the Victors, 89.

201 Willis Ward Report Card, WWVF; also see Time Magazine, October 29, 1934. Willis Ward’s scholastic performance helped earned “the distinction of being the first Negro to be initiated into an honor society at
the University of Michigan when he was made a member of Sphinx, junior class society.” Such
distinguished academic success, however, did not alter the view by some white professors of black students
as dense and unrefined. For quote on Ward’s honor society induction, see Chicago Daily Tribune, “Willis
Ward is Admitted to Honor Society,” May 18, 1933, p. 27.
202 Ibid, 92.
203 DePauw’s early flirtation with segregation has a bit of irony. Despite being located in a town that
seemed to embrace Jim Crow and having only a few African-Americans attend the institution, DePauw is
famous for opening its doors to Percy Julian, the famed chemist, who graduated in 1920 with Phi Beta
Kappa honors and as the school’s Valedictorian. This came at a time when Julian was unable to conduct his
studies at other more elite institutions due to his race.
205 John Sayle Watterson, College Football, 308-9.
206 David K. Wiggins, “Critical Events Affecting Racism in Athletics,” in Racism in College Athletics: The
African-American Athlete’s Experience, eds., Dana D. Brooks and Ronald C. Althouse (Morgantown, WV:
Fitness Information Technology, Inc., 1993), 29; also see George Fisherman, “Paul Robeson’s Student
Days and the Fight Against Racism at Rutgers” in Freedom Doorways 9 (Summer 1969):221-229; also see
Dorothy Butler Gilliam, Paul Robeson: All American (Washington, D.C.: New Republic Book Company,
1976).
207 It is hardly astounding that Robeson did not receive any backing from one single administrator, coach,
or player from Rutgers. Robeson’s experiences prior to the game against Washington and Lee forecasted
the lack of support he would later receive from officials at Rutgers. “On the first day of practice, I was
attacked by twenty-one guys. All the guys on defense, and all the guys on my team. They put me in the
hospital for two weeks. And you know, they did me a favor. From then on, nobody was ever going to
match me again.” For Robeson quote, see Ira Berkow, “A Black Star Long, Long Ago,” in New York
Times, November 24, 1990, 39.
208 Sheila Tully Boyle and Andrew Bunie, Paul Robeson: The Years of Promise and Achievement
(Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 59.
209 Alan H. Levy, Tackling Jim Crow: Racial Segregation in Professional Football (Jefferson, NC:
210 Ashe, A Hard Road to Glory, 93.
211 To be certain, other northern universities were just as brazen in excluding black players. Catholic
schools like Notre Dame and Ivy League schools like Princeton and Yale all shunned African-American
athletes, if not African-Americans altogether. In fact, Princeton did not allow any black athletes to join any
of its athletic teams until 1944. These institutions, unlike NYU however, did not acquiesce to southern
demands for gentlemen’s agreements to be honored once they made a commitment to permitting black men
on their various sports teams. NYU, in contrast, repeatedly acquiesced to the Jim Crowism of the South
during the first half of the twentieth century.
212 Given the exorbitant—even obscene—amount of capital schools are able to generate in college athletics
today, it is sometimes erroneously assumed that these institutions were not earning large scale profits in
previous eras. College sports in general and football in particular, however, have always generated huge
profits. For instance, in the week leading up to the game between Michigan and Georgia Tech, there was an
extensive three-day series in the newspaper that dealt with the $1,000,000 gates that colleges were realizing
at these amateur games. The 1929 game between Stanford and California produced $394,783.50. Notre
Dame and Troy drew over $389,000. The gross gate for the University of Southern California one year
totaled $1,600,000, which was, in nine games, equaled to what the New York Yankees professional
baseball team made in one-hundred and sixty-one regular season and post-season games the same year. An
article written just a day before the Michigan-Georgia Tech game covered the record-breaking intake of
$840,000 in a game between Army and Navy. In a year before the actual game against Georgia Tech,
Fielding Yost guaranteed five thousand dollars to W.A. Alexander and Georgia Tech with the option of
forty percent of the gross receipts from the game. Further, Michigan’s gross gate receipts for the 1933
season were $389,691.75. Against their chief rival, Ohio State, the receipts alone totaled $139,229.00. With
these sorts of profits, schools were able to pay coaches high salaries that often surpassed the wages earned by faculty and staff at these institutions. A survey of salaries of eight of the ten coaches in the Big Ten revealed that coaches accounted for a total of $58,773.00 in salary or an average of $7346.63 per coach. The salary for athletic directors was nearly the same. A 1933 income tax for Fielding Yost, the highest paid official at Michigan, showed a total income of $12,258.97, $8000.00 of which came from Michigan. Yost apparently did not see any problem with the salaries athletic officials were making. In a letter to Charles Young, Director Physical Education at Cornell University, Yost stated that “there is no Conference rule which limits the salaries of the athletic and physical education personnel.” In a letter sent to A. H. Armstrong, Faculty Manager at Georgia Tech, Yost spoke of how students paid the same prices as alumni and the general public, all but insuring that coaches could maintain the top salaries at these institutions. “Our students,” Yost stated, “must pay the same price for tickets as the alumni and general public. In other words, our students are not admitted to the games…at reduced rates.” With his income, Yost invested in companies located in the South like the Tennessee Power Company where he owned as much as 200 shares of preferred stock. It is no wonder that Yost was so committed to building the biggest stadium that could be constructed as more seats meant more revenue. Intersectional games generated even larger sums. Giving these profits, there was little resolve for northern coaches to cancel games against southern schools in favor of preventing Jim Crow policies from overruling the alleged democratic practices of the North. For more information on the cover stories done on the money being made in college football, see Newspaper articles, October 15-19, 1934, Box 20, BCIA; for more information on Yost’s guarantee to Alexander, see Letter, Fielding Yost to W.A. Alexander, November 9, 1933, Box 20, BCIA; for more information on gate receipts at Michigan, see Letter, Harry Tilloston to Braven Dyer, May 9, 1934, Box 19, BCIA; for information on salaries for athletic officials and Yost quote, see Letter, Fielding Yost to Charles Young, February 14, 1934, Box 19, BCIA; for Yost quote on student ticket prices, see Letter, Fielding Yost to A.H. Armstrong, October 10, 1934, Box 20, BCIA; for Yost’s 1933 income tax return, see Fielding Yost Income Tax Return, February 1, 1934, Box 19, BCIA; for more on Yost business ventures, see Fielding Yost Papers, Box 4 (These papers are housed in the Bentley Historical Collection at the University of Michigan. Subsequent references to these papers will be abbreviated as FYP).

214 Ocania Chalk, Black College Sport (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1976), 186.
215 Rollo Wilson, “Downed by His Own Team,” Pittsburgh Courier, November 2, 1929, p. 6 and November 16, 1929, p. 6; Baltimore Afro-American, November 2, 1929.
217 Pittsburgh Courier, November 16, 1929, 6; Baltimore Afro-American, November 9, 1929, 15; November 16, 1929, 15.
218 Watterson, College Football, 310. Harold Chase was a southerner through and through, which seems to be a common theme for the officials at these northern institutions whose decision it was to accept the segregationist practices of the South. Chase, President of NYU, had once served as president of the University of North Carolina. Thus, it would make sense that he upheld, in the words of John Watterson, “the values of moderate southerners on racial matters.” Watterson further states, “Chase…insisted that not to respect deeply held beliefs of southerners would injure what was, he believed, slow but steady progress in race relations…Chase believed that the South was making slow progress in working out its racial problems, but he also joined with southerners who insisted that if northerners tried to impose their policies the South would slide backward, as it has after Reconstruction. One might have wondered if the number of lynchings in the South truly represented racial progress, but moderate southerners pointed to the decline of race-baiting politicians and violent race riots as signs of progress” (311). Watterson could have very well between giving an account of Fielding Yost who viewed the benching black athletes and other opportunities denied them in football as progress.

219 “Bates Must Play Group Adopts Four Resolutions,” Education Sun, October 23, 1940, 1; Heights Daily News, October 23, 1940, 1, New York University Archives. Given the robust protest by faculty and students at NYU, it is no wonder they were also among the most forceful in condemning the Jim Crow
tactics being used to prevent Willis Ward from playing against Georgia Tech. Groups like the Evening Social Problems Club, National Student League, and the Football Squad of NYU, all sent protest letters to the University of Michigan. In one letter, Albert Mamo, President of the Evening Social Problems Club, wrote, “We protest the discrimination against the colored race, in your laying a negro member off your team for the game taking place with Georgia Tech…we demand that you either reinstate this member or cancel the entire engagement.” Another letter read, “We protest this discrimination against the negro member, and demand that you either have him play in the game, or cancel the engagement.” For more on the letters sent to the University of Michigan’s Department of Athletics by protestors from NYU, WWVF. Spivey, “End Jim Crow in Sports,” 149-156, 160-162. According to Donald Spivey, several other schools had acknowledged Missouri as a “Jim Crow School.” Spivey writes, “In April of 1939, the University of Wisconsin, Notre Dame, and the University of Missouri scheduled a triangular track meet. Missouri asked Wisconsin to withdraw its Negro athletes from the meet. When Notre Dame heard of Missouri’s request, it joined with Wisconsin in severing relations with the University of Missouri.” NYU would explain that they scheduled their game with Missouri prior to the track meet although this explanation did not prove to be acceptable for NYU students who felt that such a game with a school like Missouri not only risked NYU’s prestige given the ethics and political wisdom of having such a game but also that it provided clarity on the university’s true position on race.


221 Spivey, “End Jim Crow in Sports,” 162. According to Donald Spivey, several other schools had acknowledged Missouri as a “Jim Crow School.” Spivey writes, “In April of 1939, the University of Wisconsin, Notre Dame, and the University of Missouri scheduled a triangular track meet. Missouri asked Wisconsin to withdraw its Negro athletes from the meet. When Notre Dame heard of Missouri’s request, it joined with Wisconsin in severing relations with the University of Missouri.” NYU would explain that they scheduled their game with Missouri prior to the track meet although this explanation did not prove to be acceptable for NYU students who felt that such a game with a school like Missouri not only risked NYU’s prestige given the ethics and political wisdom of having such a game but also that it provided clarity on the university’s true position on race.


223 Edward Wong, “College Football: N.Y.U Honors Protestors It Punished in ’41,” New York Times, May 4, 2001; Spivey, “End Jim Crow in Sports,” 162. On May 4, 2001, NYU formally honored the “Bates Seven” as they came to be known. These were the seven students who had been suspended sixty years earlier for their protest activities. They students were Evelyn Maisel Witkin, Anita Krieger Appleby, Jean Borstein Azulay, Mervyn Jones, Naomi Bloom Rothschild, Robert Schoenfeld, and Argyle Stout. Leonard Bates, who graduated from NYU’s School of Education in 1943, was listed as deceased in the university’s alumni database.


226 Shropshire, In Black and White, 25.

227 “Wrong Color,” The Crisis (January 1940): 17; Oriard, King Football, 305-306; Gerald R. Gems, For Pride, 112.


233 Feldman, Michigan Daily, October 20, 1974. Feldman’s accusation that Yost held a “do nothing” policy hinges on his belief that the athletic director was the only official with the authority to cancel the game or insist Ward play. Feldman, instead, argues that Yost chose an uncommunicative approach that kept many concerned parties on both sides wondering Ward’s status for the game.

234 Willis Ward, interview by David Pollack, Ford Project, September 8, 1983, p. 11, GRFPL.
Behee, *Hail to the Victors*, 23. For Behee, it seems that Ward’s accomplishments on the field merited the opportunity to play. Behee’s assessment is not completely in error but fails to acknowledge the larger issue of racial prejudice that should not have been tolerated at a northern school where state laws outlawed such forms of discrimination.

In a letter to the editor of the *Michigan Daily*, H.A. Smith asked, “Are we as a University of supposedly intelligent, broad-minded students, going to permit a team who is evidently not sufficiently liberal-thinking to dictate to us?” Smith was not alone in asking this question as students across the campus and alumni nationwide protested the Michigan’s capitulation to the racist laws of the South that called for a separation of the races. For Smith quote, see *Michigan Daily*, Letter to the Editor, October 9, 1934.

Don Deskins, interview with author, June 20, 2007; Letter, Glenn R. Peterson to Harry Kipke, October 8, 1934, WWVF; *Michigan Daily*, Letter to the Editor, October 9, 1934.

Hasan Jeffries defines “freedom rights” as “the assortment of civil and human rights that emancipated African Americans identified as the crux of freedom.” I examine the burgeoning civil rights movement this way to acknowledge, as Jeffries points out, “the centrality of slavery and emancipation to conceptualizations of freedom” and to incorporate “the long history of black protest dating back to the daybreak of freedom and extending beyond the Black Power era.” At the same time, I am making the claim here that the local remonstrations involving Willis Ward expanded this “long history of black protest” by shifting the campaign to the arena of leisure activities. Whereas previous battles were fought to secure political rights or educational, employment, and housing opportunities, the Ward incident saw the struggle for cultural and social inclusion emerge as a central aspect of the freedom fight. For Jeffries’ quote, see Hasan Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama’s Black Belt* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 4.

Paul J. Elliott, “Willis Ward Summary,” *Michigan Daily*, October 21, 1934. This egalitarian tradition is symbolized by the fact that Michigan first admitted an African-American student in 1853. That student was Samuel Codes Watson, who studied medicine. In 1876, only six years after Michigan admitted its first female student and just ten years after any woman had ever attended a class at the University, Michigan admitted Mary Henrietta Graham, the school’s first African-American woman.

Sports editor to Director of Athletics, telegraph, 25 September 1934, WWVF; Bulletin, National Student League, Box 20, BCIA. A second letter was also sent to Kipke. Neither Yost nor Kipke ever responded to the inquiries.

Joseph Feldman, telephone message to Fielding Yost, October 10, 1934, Box 20, BCIA.

Letter, Norm H. Butler to Harry Kipke, September 29, 1934, Box 20, BCIA; Bulletin, National Student League, Box 20, BCIA. White northerners’ reluctance to tackle racism head on was not couched in the same fear that propelled so-called benevolent white southerners to refuse speaking out. Black athletes upset the existing racial hierarchy and challenged the myth of white supremacy. White northerners, then, acted in a manner similar to what David Goldfield has called the “better white families” who “taught their children to never say ‘nigger’ and to treat blacks with respect, albeit within the boundaries of prevailing racial etiquette.” Butler was keen on Michigan respecting Ward and was willing to challenge Kipke to pay deference to the school’s egalitarian tradition; he, however, resisted any temptation to take his complaints a step further by calling the university out for its Jim Crowism. For Goldfield quote, see David R. Goldfield, *Still Fighting the Civil War: The American South and Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 219.

Letter, Roy Wilkins to Harry Kipke, September 20, 1934, Box 20, BCIA.

Letter, Robert M. Evans to Harry Kipke, September 25, 1934, Box 20, BCIA.

Magazine was jumping with issues.” For Miller quote, see Arthur Miller, “The University of Michigan,” Holiday Magazine, December 1953, p. 70.
The rising student activism of the 1930s was driven by communists and other leftist groups who engaged alongside African Americans in the freedom struggle. As Mark Naison states, “Not only did Communists participate centrally in a nationwide upsurge of black protest, but they helped contribute to a new appreciation by blacks of the power of organized labor and prodded liberals and radicals to emphasize civil rights issues more than they had in the past.” Harvard Sitkoff corroborates this view, adding that “the Left publicized the evils of racism and the benefits of integration to a far greater extent than any other white organization. It sparked and financed civil rights groups whose radicalism made the established Negro organizations more militant in their tactics and yet more respectable to the American mainstream.” For Naison quote, see Mark Naison, Communists in Harlem during the Depression (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), xvi; for Sitkoff quote, see Harvard Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue: The Depression Decade (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 106.

Letter, Albert Ammo to Michigan Department of Athletics, October 11, 1934, Box 20, BCIA; Letter, Irving Pohin to Michigan Department of Athletics, October 11, 1934, Box 20, BCIA.


Letter, W. Fisch to F. A. Rowe, October 13, 1934, Box 20, BCIA.

“Exclusion of Willis Ward is Protested,” in the Michigan Daily, October 13, 1934.

Letter, William Friedman to Fielding Yost, October 19, 1934, Box 20, BCIA.


Yost was such an important member of Michigamua that the tribe continued to visit his widow for tea every spring on his birthday, until her death. Douglas M. Smith, “Michigamua/Order of Angell: The Controversial History of Michigan’s Skull and Bones Society,” (working paper, Faculty of Pathology, University of Michigan, 2012), 44.

Michigan Daily, “Hecklers Turn Meeting into Tumultuous Verbal Controversy, October 20, 1934.

Letter, Also a Frat Man to the Editor, Michigan Daily, October 21, 1934.

Smith, “Michigamua/Order of Angell,” 43.


Campus Organizations Notes, Box 20, BCIA.

Smith, “Michigamua/Order of Angell,” 44.
implying that the home team and institution are in a very real sense the hosts of the meeting held the night before the game. The decision to refuse to bow to the demands of racial prejudice and bigotry was made by the University of Michigan.

Willis Ward should be worth a dozen games with the esteem and gratitude with which Michigan should hold the records of DeHart Hubbard, Eddie Tolan and other athletes. It ill becomes their alma mater to offer them this stinging insult. The University of Michigan has the traditions which it has upheld thus far and that it will continue to uphold. The possibility of his being injured in the game against Georgia Tech was applied for reasons other than the risk of injury. They want him at top condition for the coming indoor and outdoor track seasons. For quote, see Ludington Daily News, “Willis Ward Will Not Play,” October 15, 1934.

Jane Dailey elucidates the nature of this situation. She writes, “Legal segregation of the races, through demarcation of the public space allotted to each race was meant to provide a clear answer to the question of who owned the streets in the New South and, in the process, end extralegal violence in southern cities… In the absence of a common urban identity—as reflected in the inability of city dwellers to recognize one another as a part of a collective and conform to uniform tacit-standards of acceptable public behavior—the urban white leaders of the region looked for an alternative way to end urban violence and forge a race-based civility. They found it in Jim Crow. Around the turn of the century, what had been an open and public conflict—white-black altercation on the streets hammered out in an agonistic political climate—was forced underground by segregation and became the ‘hidden transcript’ of position to Jim Crow. Yet, despite the Jim Crow laws, the sidewalks remained a juncture between overt and covert resistance, and encounters between the races on the public streets revealed the incomplete dominance of white supremacy.” For Dailey quote, see Dailey, Before Jim Crow, 128-129.

Groh, The Black Migration, 44.

Letter, John H. Shilling and the Ann Arbor Ministerial Association to Fielding Yost, October 9, 1934, WWVF.

Letter, Charles Cole to Board in Control of Athletics, October 11, 1934, Box 20, BCIA. Cole’s reasoning came into direct conflict not only with the interpretations by the Ann Arbor Ministerial Association but also the elucidations of Roy Wilkins. Wilkins contended that there was the question of race. But he argued that there was a “moral question involved. Negro athletes have carried the name and fame of the University of Michigan to the ends of the earth by means of their record breaking performances in the Olympic games and on other fields of competition. It ill becomes their alma mater to offer them this stinging insult. The esteem and gratitude with which Michigan should hold the records of DeHart Hubbard, Eddie Tolan and Willis Ward should be worth a dozen games with such teams as Georgia Tech. This association…urges earnestly that the University of Michigan not abandon the traditions which it has upheld thus far and that it refuse to bow to the demands of racial prejudice and bigotry.” However, the University did bow and Cole felt strongly that Yost and other officials at Michigan acted with the finer religious principles of an institution committed to the highest moral resolve. For Wilkins quote, see Letter, Roy Wilkins to Harry Kipke, October 11, 1934, WWVF.

Stephen Steinberg, “The Liberal Retreat from Race during the Post-Civil Rights Era,” New Politics Vol. 5 No. 1 (Summer 1994): 36. Though Steinberg applies the “liberal retreat from race” to the post-civil rights era, the disinclination to engage race by otherwise liberal-minded whites was present in other decades.

Letter, L. E. T. to Editor, Michigan Daily, October 12, 1934

Ibid. An anonymous letter reinforced the argument by L. E. T. Appearing in the official record on the meeting held the night before the game to discuss the Ward situation, the letter, in part, read, “Emphasis must be given [to] the fact that the home team and institution are in a very real sense the hosts of the visiting team and supporters. Every well-bred host instinctively observes the wishes, of his guests and

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conducts himself accordingly. Such observance in no sense depends upon agreement by the host with the guest’s views.” Though the contention was offered time and time again as a rationale for allowing the Jim Crow policies of Georgia Tech to take precedence over Michigan’s own traditions, there was a failure to address in an authentic sense two critical issues: first, would Georgia Tech have been so accommodating of Michigan’s equalitarian policies had the game been played in Atlanta? This question had to have been on the mind of Reverend Marley, a member of the Ward United Committee against Racial Discrimination. Notes taken from the Ward rally revealed that Marley “wondered what Michigan would do when she played the return game at Atlanta, as it was usually the custom to pay games on home and home basis. Would Ward have to ride in the rear of cars, stop at another hotel from where the rest of the team stayed, etc.” Second, in keeping with hospitality and good will to visitors, where was the racial benevolence for Willis Ward? For anonymous letter and quote on Marley, see Campus Organizations Notes, Box 20, BCIA.

293 Letter, Reverend H.P. Marley to the Editor, Michigan Daily, October 13, 1934.
294 Ibid.
295 Letter, Ralph Aigler to Joseph H. B. Evans, October 11, 1934, WWVF.
296 Letter, Joseph H. B. Evans to Ralph Aigler, October 17, 1934, WWVF
297 Letter, Francis Dent M. Dent to Ralph Aigler, October 11, 1934, WWVF.
298 Edward Lawson, “No Segregation Bar, Says Mich. Dean of Women,” Plaindealer, October 19, 1934; Associated Negro Press, “Girl Snubs U. of Michigan for Jim Crow,” Negro Star, October 5, 1934. Despite the racism she encountered at Michigan, Jean Blackwell (later Hutson) by her second marriage) finished her BA at Barnard College before earning a M.L.S. and a Teacher’s Certificate from Columbia in 1935 and 1941, respectively. She went on to work at the New York Public Library and later became the curator of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, where she served from 1948-1972. During her tenure, she built the collection into the most comprehensive repository on black life in the world. From 1992 to 2007, the University of Buffalo maintained an initiative in her honor, the Jean Blackwell Hutson Library Residency Program, which was aimed at increasing diversity amongst academic librarians. Graduates of the nationally-recognized program went on to serve at such prominent institutions as Columbia University, Cornell University, Tulane University, and the University of California, Los Angeles.
299 Letter, L. Smullin to the Editor, Michigan Daily, October 10, 1934.
300 Ibid.
301 Campus Organizations Notes, Box 20, BCIA.
303 Letter, L. Smullin to the Editor, Michigan Daily, October 10, 1934.
304 “1,500 Fans Want Ward to Play,” Ann Arbor News, October 17, 1934.
305 Campus Organization Notes, Box 20, BCIA.
306 Feldman, “A blot on the Michigan past.” Feldman quotes Hayes from an interview he conducted with the former sports writer of the Detroit Times. Feldman asserts that a Detroit Free Press advance on the game illustrates the lack of interest Hayes recalled. It read, “Add to the trio of injured players the name of Willis Ward, who almost certainly will not play against the Yellow Jackets, and it is easy to see that the Wolverines are far from ready to match strategy with a first class football team.” See article for quote.
307 Ibid.
308 The “foreignization” of Ward’s supporters was not merely a process of treating them as the Other. It was, instead, a deliberate attempt to delineate a sense of belonging in the context of who possessed the right to be included and who was to be excluded. Anti-communism and anti-socialism, for example, was grounded in a belief that both ideologies represented a foreign peril seeking to infiltrate and corrupt America. Further by identifying some Ward advocates as “Orientals,” Healey and other Michigan officials placed the few Asian students on campus inside the long history of exclusion that so-called “Orientals” encountered at America’s borders. Inevitably, the inclusionary and exclusionary activities that occurred at America’s periphery was transferred away from the hinterland to the country’s inland where it was then codified to determine who was worthy of citizenship. Those on the outside were glimpsed as foreign threats but those racialized by nativists as dangers to the American order on the inside were cast as unworthy.
Many Americans, further, were convinced that Asians represented a “yellow peril” and a threat to the United States and scientists believed “Oriental” carried more serious and unsafe strains of diseases that would cause harm to white Americans. Thus, nearly all Asians were excluded from immigrating, either by Chinese Exclusion laws or by the “Barred Asiatic Zone” that Congress created in 1912 encompassing every area from Afghanistan to the Pacific, save Japan and the Philippines. By 1924, passage of the Johnson-Reed Act completed the embargo on Asian immigration as the Japanese was added to the list of those statutorily excluded. Worse, the United States framed some of its exclusionary policies as efforts to curb degeneracy. In this context, the 1875 Page Law was enacted to prohibit Chinese women suspected of prostitution from immigrating to America. Likewise, the Asiatic Exclusion League declared that Asian Indians were “effeminate, caste-ridden, and degraded.” By attaching Ward’s followers, in part, to this history, Michigan made it clear that efforts to have him compete in the game against Georgia Tech were part and parcel of the anti-American menace the country had long tried to thwart rather than a legitimate cause for which the institution needed to esteem. For more on Asian exclusion and the degenerate and despised “Oriental,” see Mae M. Ngai, Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 37, 203-204; Erika Lee and Judy Yung, Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 39,149; Margot Canaday, The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 28-29.

309 Most historians have cited the Cold War as the watershed of anti-communist disintegration of interracial social movements. But scholars tend to focus their analysis solely in the context of labor-civil rights unionism, and ignore other broad based coalitions that were engendered between communists and African Americans. I contend, however, that anti-communist rhetoric crippled earlier campaigns for racial equality, particularly on American campuses far earlier than it affected alliances shaped around labor struggle. Thus, the key institutions of the civil rights movement lurched between student movements during the early 1930s, trade unions during the latter stages of the 1930s and well into the late 1940s, and the black church during the 1950s and 1960s. Yet, whereas the character of the movement was fundamentally transformed during this latter adaptation with the disappearance of a trade union-inspired political agenda and the emergence of the black church as its most crucial organizational arm, student activism regained its steam during the 1960s. The seeds of this student activism, which energized the civil rights movement, lay in the groundwork of the American student campaigns of the early 1930s.

310 Behee, Hail to the Victors, 26-27.

311 Letter, National Student League, Committee on Discrimination to Editor, Michigan Daily, October 21, 1934.

312 Letter, National Student League, Committee on Discrimination to Editor, Michigan Daily, October 7, 1934.

313 The Michigan Daily published articles suggesting that the NSL and other support organizations working on behalf of Ward were uncouth and extremist both in their actions and views. For example, an article published in the Daily chronicling the Ward Rally meeting described the Ward United Front as a group that heckled speakers and failed to accord the courtesy that decency requires to other individuals who did not agree with Ward being allowed to play in the game. One editor at the Daily writing on the situation stated, “The group of the Ward protest meeting Friday night, led by almost all the prominent extra-curricular men on campus, did not convince one single person despite the soundness of its arguments, because the group insisted upon an appalling exhibition of bad manners, bad taste, and bad sense.” Yet a letter to the Editor written in regard to the Ward meeting intimated that it was the supporters of Ward who were not given any deference. The letter written by an individual who would only describe himself as “Also a Frat Man,” contended the following: “MAY A DISGUSTED graduate student express his thoughts on the conduct of certain groups at the Ward fiasco of Friday night? After four years at a provincial college, I came to Michigan for the express purpose of exposing myself to the broadening ‘cultural influence’ of this great University. For many years I had heard of the spirited discussion prevalent upon this campus, and on Friday night I attended the Ward meeting as a disinterested non-participant, hoping to witness a refined and scholarly debate. What did I find? … Evidences of gentlemanliness, culture, decency, fairness, and

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scholarliness were totally absent. Prejudice ruled that meeting even more than it rules a mob-gathering in Times Square at London, or in the fantastic states of the continent. The furtherance of real education (that which broadens and refines) is obviously not being carried on here. What matter all your lordly ‘atmosphere,’ if the mental structure is rotting away? A State University, functioning in a nominal democracy…and it has produced a man who was ignorant enough to shout, ‘And next time you start any crusade, be sure to get the consent of the majority!’ Oh Democracy! Oh Freedom! Oh Decency! Oh Education! Where has thou flown?” Where was the Daily’s account of this story? Kept off its pages in favor of a story that benefitted Yost and the University of Michigan’s decision to withhold Ward from the game against Georgia Tech. For note from Michigan Daily editor, see Paul J. Elliott, “Willis Ward Summary,” Michigan Daily, October 21, 1934; for quote, see Letter, Also a Frat Man to the Editor, Michigan Daily, October 21, 1934.

315 Letter, J. S. R. to the Editor, Michigan Daily, October 13, 1934.
316 It should be noted that the Michigan Daily was not alone in its bias toward the University of Michigan or its lack of news stories dedicated to the Ward matter. Other newspapers such as the Detroit News and Detroit Free Press were equally neglectful. In fact, in the days leading up to the game, barely any articles addressing the Ward issue were published and not a single article could be located in either newspaper on October 16, 1934, and October 18, 1934.
317 Ibid.
318 Ibid.
320 Ibid.
321 On the same day that Elliot wrote the editorial on behalf of the Michigan Daily decrying the University’s acts, supporters of Ward also wrote a letter that took the Daily to task: “We had hoped that The Daily this year would climb out of the rut of illusioned and hackneyed mediocrity, and stand like Arrowsmith firmly on the ground. We had hoped that it would abandon a smug complacency masquerading under the title of Journalism and counting for its support of groups as smugly complacent as their prejudices. We had hoped that it would adopt a policy of adequate and unbiased presentation of all news, and an editorial policy thinking through the premises of the unthinking and an attitude of courage, not of evasion. We cannot think that the omission of pertinent news is due to inadequate facilities, for we are delighted daily by editorial excursions into realms far removed from the campus where the questions, if not moot, necessarily involve a broader outlook than can be commanded. WE must conclude that the colored sneers of red and black are painted by a biased mind. We cannot think that the mirror of the editorial mind could fail to focus upon controversies which are echoed by the very trees and charge evasion. We do not charge that The Daily has murdered our citizens and destroyed our towns. We do charge that in the Ward affair may be seen the efforts of The Daily to avoid discontent by a masterly side-stepping of the real issue editorially and by a suppression of the real facts or deliberate failure to obtain credible information in the face of rumors that were rife. We ask why not attempt was made to discover whether or not the Board in Control of Athletics scheduled the Georgia Tech game oblivious to Ward. We ask why no thought was given to the reasonable inference that the game was accepted on the express condition that Ward would not play. We ask why no effort was made to ascertain at what time Ward had been informed of this matter. We do not regard as a satisfactory answer derogatory remarks assailing dissenters merely because they were dissatisfied with what appeared to be an inevitable probability. Nor as satisfactory the doing of nothing to substantiate or refute the stories. We do not consider ourselves answered with cries of ‘reds’ and ‘racial discrimination’ together with quips on the doubtful analogy existing between short skirts and petitions, and allusions to hospitality. The daily could have attempted a publication at news of what actually transpired even if it did not have the courage to condemn the treatment of Ward as a Negro rather than a Michigan man in its editorials.” For quote, see Letter, Ward Supporters to Editor, Michigan Daily, October 21, 1934.
322 Letter, Floyd A. Rowe to William Fisch, October 15, 1934, WWVF.
323 Letter, A. Richard Frank to University of Michigan Athletic Department, October 30, 1934, WWVF.
324 Letter, Alexander Ruthven to A.R. Franks, October 31, 1934, WWVF.
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President Ruthven’s disinclination toward addressing Yost’s racism, in some ways, was due to the letters he received blasting interracial competition. One alumnus, Woolsey Hunt, laid bare his feelings about integrated sport in a memo sent to Ruthven. After observing a picture of his son finishing third behind two African Americans, Hunt spoke of his “extreme repugnance in seeing black competing with white.” Though Ruthven would reply that he did not find such competition objectionable because, “after all, there will have to be a certain amount of association between the races when the boys are through with college,” he did not actively seek to admonish Yost for what was obvious racism in the Ward matter. For Hunt and Ruthven quotes, see Behee, *Hail to the Victors*, 27.

If there are any questions as to whether or not Michigan’s actions in benching Ward further established a precedent in the North of teams withholding black players in the name of Jim Crow justice, consider the exchange that shortly took place after the game between Fielding Yost and John L. Griffith, the Commissioner of the Big Ten who sympathized with Yost: “You were telling me up at Minneapolis about the radical students organization that stirred up the rumpus about Ward in the Georgia Tech game. Can you without too much trouble advise me whether or not there are any other liberal clubs in Michigan?” According to John Behee, Griffith “apparently wanted to be forewarned in order to stifle any similar actions on Big Ten campuses.” For Griffith quote, see Letter, John L. Griffith to Fielding Yost, November 27, 1934, Box 4, FYP. For Behee quote, see Behee, *Hail to the Victors*, 27.

Letter, Fielding Yost to Dan McGugin, October 23, 1934, FYP. For Behee quote, see Behee, *Hail to the Victors*, 27.

Letter, W. H. Shoemack to Fielding Yost, October 19, 1934, Box 20, BCIA.

Letter, W. H. Shoemack to Fielding Yost, October 27, 1934, Box 20, BCIA.


My wish here is not to depict Ford as an unprofessed racist. I am arguing, instead, that Ford’s whiteness made him impervious to detecting the racial degradation Grand Rapids’ black community confronted. It is very difficult to notice or, as C.S. Lewis states, “Take a firm line about pains, dangers, and expenses from which I am protected.” Non-racist whites were not inclined, therefore, to take inventory of the racial abuses African Americans suffered and often assumed that most of the day-to-day acts of intimidation were non-existent in their communities. For C.S. Lewis quote, please see C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), xii.

Zeman, “Affirmative Action at U-M.”


Ibid, 10.
344 Ford, A Time to Heal, 47.

The “good Negro” label described the racial deportment that black pioneering athletes had to maintain in order to be accepted. Charles Martin defines the “good Negro” as a person who was “quiet, hardworking, and noncomplaining.” In this case, black athletes who endured racial slurs hurled at them from teammates or opposing teams were expected to refrain from making any public comments this treatment. For Martin quote and more details on the “good Negro” code, see Martin, Benching Jim Crow, 43, 48, 56, 263, 295; quote taken from p. 263.

348 Ibid, 295. Black athletes were in the peculiar position of trying to reclaim African-American manhood through their performances on the court and field. As Martin Summers argues, “Black men often expressed their alienation from the dominant culture through gendered terms.” But their notions of masculinity were not shaped merely by inclusion. When these athletes failed to live up to the expectations of the black community by capitulating to white racism in order to maintain inclusion, their masculinity was also articulated in a gendered context that was intended to challenge if not marginalize their sense of manhood. As Summers adds, black men engaged in their own “gender identity formation through quotidian practice: work, leisure, organizational life, interaction with families and communities, and so forth.” Inevitably, black manhood was constructed and performed, at times, outside the auspices of white institutions and African-American males who functioned as “good Negroes” were subjected to having their masculinity scrutinized. For Summers quotes, see Martin Summers, Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 11, 13.

349 Behee, Hail to the Victors, 26. There are conflicting reports concerning Ward’s whereabouts during the game. John Behee contends that he was at a frat house after not being allowed to be in the press box or sit on the bench. Phyllis Manson, in her letter to the Michigan Daily, suggested that Ward was sent out of town to scout a future team. Other accounts state that he was on the bench as the Ann Arbor News reported in their late edition on October 20, 1934. Still, other versions of the story claimed Ward was present in the press box. Time Magazine stated that Ward “sat calmly in a radio booth.” There was even an account that Ward, according to John H. O’Brien, “had the flu or something and was a patient in the health service.” Ward, himself, however confirmed Behee’s story. It was suggested that he go out and scout Ohio State but he spent the game at a local fraternity house. For quote from Time Magazine, see Time Magazine, October 29, 1934. For O’Brien quote, see, John H. O’Brien, “A black mark in the Big Blue’s past,” Michigan Chronicle, April 17, 1974.

351 Willis Ward, interview by David Pollock, Ford Project, September 8, 1983, p. 10, GRFPL.
352 Ibid, 9; Letter, W. Rankin Lewis to Harry Kipke, September 24, 1934, WWVF.
353 Arthur Carstens, “Jennings Scores on Long Run.”
354 Letter, D. Kitzinger to Michigan Football Squad, October 20, 1934, Box 20, BCIA.
357 Letter, Roy Wilkins to Harry Kipke, October 11, 1934, WWVF.
358 Editorial, Michigan Daily, October 21, 1934.
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wanted the game changed in such a way to integrate blacks in
related to his construction of the “four
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1907 in which he said: ‘We cannot afford to turn out of college men who
shrink from physical effort or from a little physical pain. In any republic courage is a prime necessity for
the average citizen if he is to be a good citizen and he needs physical courage no less than moral
courage.….Athletics are good, especially in their rougher form and because they tend to develop such
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exercise in judgment that football should remain brutal as a way of teaching courage appears to be
grounded in the same Anglo-Saxon, patriarchal idealism that funded the beliefs of Fielding Yost as it

40; Wilbert Marcellus Leonard, A Sociological Perspective of Sport. If football is thought to represent those
who compete, then identity becomes crucial to determining who will be sanctioned to participate. Football,
therefore, could not include the thought-to-be inferior and, in some instances, subhuman black body.

John Underwood, The Death of An American Game: The Crisis in Football (Boston: Little, Brown and
Company, 1979), 185. Not surprisingly, football received some of its greatest support from former U.S.
Presidents and Supreme Court Justices, particularly when it involved countering the criticism the game
received for its alleged threat to amateurism and its rampant perils with injuries. As A. M. Weyand states,
‘The great Theodore Roosevelt silenced one such attack in 1895 with a noteworthy speech at the Harvard
Club in New York in which he gave utterance to the decisive statement: ‘I believe in athletics and I believe
in football.’ In 1900, he advised young men that ‘in life as in a football game the principle to follow is this:
hit the line hard; don’t foul and don’t shrink but hit the line hard.’ He frequently repeated this principle. In
its more concise form, ‘don’t flinch, don’t foul, but hit the line hard,’ has been wrought in bronze to adorn
the walls of many of our schools. The Great American summed up his doctrine of physical preparedness in
a speech at the Harvard Union in 1907 in which he said: ‘We cannot afford to turn out of college men who

Franklin Roosevelt's letter to the Editor, Michigan Daily, June 1995. Both Georgia Tech and the University
of Michigan confronted similar situation some twenty years later. Georgia Tech was preparing to meet the
University of Pittsburgh in New Orleans for the 1956 Sugar Bowl. Pittsburgh was adamant that its Negro
player, Bobby Grier, participate despite Georgia Governor Marvin Griffin’s efforts to prevent the
appearance. In a departure from the 1930s, Georgia Tech students strongly opposed the governor’s
discrimination and the game was played, making it the first integrated Bowl Game in the Deep South. In
1953, the University of Michigan played against Tulane, another team from the “Deep South” and this
time, Michigan’s Negro player and all-American tackle, Art Walker, played in the game. As far as it was
known, there was no effort on Tulane’s part to have him kept out of the game or even any reference to him
in pre-game negotiations. For reference to two games played by Georgia Tech and the University of
Michigan, see “Georgia’s Governor’s Action Recalls U-M Case In 1934,” January 1954.


J. Douglas Toma, Football U, 169; also see Howard L. Nixon and James H. Frey, A Sociology of Sport,
40; Wilbert Marcellus Leonard, A Sociological Perspective of Sport. If football is thought to represent those
who compete, then identity becomes crucial to determining who will be sanctioned to participate. Football,
therefore, could not include the thought-to-be inferior and, in some instances, subhuman black body.

Michael Mandelbaum, The Meaning of Sports: Why Americans Watch Baseball, Football, and
Basketball and What They See When They Do (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 158.

The tragedy here is that exceptional black players—both along academic and athletic lines—were
rebuffed when it came to opportunities to gain admission into schools and, subsequently, play football
while mediocre whites were given every opportunity to gain admission into schools and find their way unto
football teams. Examples of this phenomenon has been discussed in earlier chapters. Alonzo Stagg and the
University of Chicago gave Walter Eckersall every opportunity to play despite his not being academically-
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Cliff Wilson and Joseph Hayden, Jr., conversely, reveal the all-but-impossible chances that the most
talented black players had of ever playing football. Wilson, as noted earlier, was informed that he was
unable to play since he was not good enough to start. For Hayden, Jr., he was not even given a tryout
because the team already had enough African Americans on the squad and did not have a need for another

[359] Zemke, “Black Athlete not allowed to compete against Georgia Tech, Michigan Daily; Ted Talbert,
“Moments they’d like to forget,” Detroit Free Press, September 11, 1983.

[360] Letter, Phyllis Manson to the Editor, Michigan Daily, June 1995. Both Georgia Tech and the University
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Basketball and What They See When They Do (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 158.

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unable to play since he was not good enough to start. For Hayden, Jr., he was not even given a tryout
because the team already had enough African Americans on the squad and did not have a need for another

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regardless of his athletic prowess. It is in this context that John Underwood observed, “College football is a game for towns like Boulder, Colorado; Austin, Texas; Fayetteville, Arkansas—far away from the blackened cities and skinned infields of baseball parks.” For Underwood quote, see John Underwood, *The Death of an American Game*, 187.

Watterson, *College Football*, 309.


When I speak of “identity” in terms of whiteness, I am speaking of the manifested beliefs, social practices, and values that help to construct whiteness in correlation to blackness and in context to a more enlarged understanding of race within America. When I speak of “ideology,” in terms of whiteness, I am speaking of the degree to which whiteness becomes a systematic construction for political and social hegemony as well as racial dominance. I do not discuss explicitly whiteness in the context “institution” though I do demonstrate how whiteness through identity and ideology are formulated inside of the institution of football. Football, then, becomes a conduit for the identity formation and the sanctioning of ideological supremacy. In this regard, whiteness is not merely seen as pigment, but placement. Thus, color and skin tone only then become metaphorical yet perceptible symbols of political hegemony or its lack as well as the hierarchal determination of social privilege and status.

J. Fred Lawton, “Hurry Up” Yost (Ann Arbor, MI: Edward Brothers, Inc., 1947), 51. Lawton’s admiration of Yost seems to pardon the athletic director’s unseemly behavior before ever giving it any scrutiny. By arguing that he was such a fine human being, as exemplified through his refusal to accept liquor, Lawton dismisses the possibility that Yost could be anything but upright. Lawton implies Yost could not have been guilty of any wrong since a person who repudiates the use of alcohol as a beverage is blameless. America’s interest in accepting racism could allow for an individual like Yost to obscure his commitment to Jim Crow acts of racial discrimination and segregation and, thus, be considered as incorruptible. Lawton’s indirect defense of Yost’s allegiance to Jim Crowism is, in many ways, similar to Edward Said’s account of the friend of his who attempts to argue on behalf of the Secretary of Defense by painting the Secretary as a man who reads classy fiction. Said recalled his friend’s vindication of the Secretary, “You know, the Secretary is a complex human being: he doesn’t fit the picture of the cold-blooded imperialist murderer. The last time I was in his office I noticed Durrell’s *Alexandria Quartet* on his desk.” Said reflects on the moment, suggesting that his friend intended to shape a powerful moment around Durrell’s presence on the Secretary’s desk and to evince that “no one who read and presumably appreciated a novel could be the cold-blooded butcher one might suppose him to have been.” Said related his friend’s story to that of the Nazi who read Rilke (the great German language poet) and then wrote out genocidal orders to his concentration-camp underlings as a suggestion that the Durrell-Secretary of Defense anecdote was not very useful. Said concluded, “Humanists and intellectuals accept the idea that you can read classy fiction as well as kill and maim because the cultural world is available for that particular sort of camouflaging, and because cultural types are not supposed to interfere in matters for which the social system has not certified them.” Said assesses critically the gap that can exist between the core beliefs and principles that an individual may engage and his or her subsequent behavior. For Said, reading Rilke or Durrell does not remove the possibility of being a cold-blooded killer. Likewise, Lawton’s acknowledgement that Yost did not drink alcohol does not devastate any claims about Yost being characterized as a racist loyal to Jim Crowism. The cultural world that Yost lived in—one that camouflaged the injurious impairments of racial discrimination and normalized race relations—could allow for Yost to be seen as a morally upright while ignoring his unsavory acts. For Said quote, see Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 2-3.


Letter, Fielding Yost to Evelyn Gallant, October 13, 1933, Box 4, FYP, BHLUM. Allison Danzig verifies Yost’s loathing for alcohol but reveals that the athletic director was far different when it came to tobacco. Danzig writes, “He never took a drink, and in place of smoking, he chewed up countless stogies, without ever using a match.” It appears that Yost’s aversion to alcohol was not matched by his acknowledged hatred of tobacco. He indulged in tobacco, according to Danzig, despite making the case that
it prevented men from growing both morally and physically. For Danzig quote, see Danzig, *The History of American Football*, 168.

Ibid, 159. For Yost, “brains, heart, courage, and character composed the makeup of the best athletes and, in mature years, the most useful citizens.” As discussed in chapter 2, Yost did not always uphold his commitment to the four-sided man ideal. He did not believe that a black man was capable of possessing the necessary characteristics to become a four-sided man.

Behee, *Fielding Yost’s Legacy to the University of Michigan*, 17. When he was not reading the Bible, Yost was reading books like *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Of course, this spiritual undertaking, which surely should have taught Yost what Michael Dyson calls “performative epistemology,” that is, “the intimate relationship between religious knowledge and social practice,” was unconstructively balanced by his readings of *The History of the Civil War* with its tendentiousness toward the customs and points of view of the South. For Dyson reference and a larger discussion of Dyson’s notion of “performative epistemology,” please see Michael Eric Dyson, *Open Mike: Reflections on Philosophy, Race, Sex, Culture, and Religion* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2003), 43.

Fielding Yost Tax Return, 1933, Box 19, BCIA. Yost had a particular interest in the lives of young people and wanted to insure that they had the proper tools needed to succeed; thus, most of his donations went to organizations that supported youth causes. His generosity earned him not only admiration but also several invitations to sit on a number of boards. One organization, Volunteer for Youth Service (V. Y. S.), sent Yost several letters requesting that he join the committee as one of the original members of the organization. The irony here is that it appears Yost’s membership was not only sought because of his interest in youth but also to help deal with the organization’s concerns about the changing social landscape in Michigan and throughout America. The letter, sent to Yost by Dr. Rachel Stutsman of the *Michigan Congress of Parent and Teachers*, indicated that he was needed to provide guidance and input at a time when the “youth in Michigan, as elsewhere” were facing “problems during this period of social adjustment.” Given black migration to the North, coupled with the push for egalitarian laws, it is likely that the “period of social adjustment” had a lot to do with the increased presence of African Americans no longer willing to accept second-class citizenship or to submit to the segregationist practices that had defined their lives in the South. Thus, Yost was called on both for his philanthropy and for his predisposition toward maintaining the stark racial boundaries that legitimized notions of white racial superiority. For Stutsman quote, see Letter, Rachel Stutsman to Fielding Yost, July 27, 1933, Box 4, FYP.


Lawton, “Hurry Up” Yost, 49.

W. A. Alexander Biography, 2, 6, Georgia Tech Archives (GTA).

For Wood quote, see Campus Organizations Minutes, October 1, 1934, Box 20, BCIA; for Yost-Alexander exchanges, see Western Union telegrams, Fielding Yost and W. A. Alexander, November 8-11, 1933, WWVF.

Feldman, “A Blot on Michigan’s Past.” John Behee, author of *Hail to the Victors*, writes, “Yost had become a good friend of W. A. Alexander, the football coach at Georgia Tech. Potential racial complications had been discussed well in advance of the playing date” (22).

Letter, Armstrong to Yost, March 17, 1934, WWVF; BCIA, Box 19.

Letter, Armstrong to Kikpe, April 20, 1934, BCIA, Box 20.

Letter, McGugin to Yost, May 1, 1934, BCIA, Box 19. As evidence of McGugin’s willingness to aid Georgia Tech in securing an agreement with Michigan concerning benching Willis Ward, he [McGugin] enclosed with his letter to Yost a copy of the letter that had been sent to him by Armstrong. The closing of that letter by Armstrong read as follows: “By the way, I have not been able to get a reply from Mr. Yost in the matter of the use of negro players in the game with Michigan. I am wondering whether or not you know whether Mr. Yost has been able to return to Ann Arbor and that your opinion is on our chances of being able to secure the agreement? Any help you might be able to give would be appreciated.”

Letter, McGugin to Yost, December 12, 1933, BCIA, Box 18; Behee, *Hail to the Victors*, 22.
Campus Organizations Notes, Box 20, BCIA; Behee, *Hail to the Victors*, 22. McGugin was an expert on the subject of Northern teams curtsying to the Jim Crow practices and prejudices of southern teams. His Vanderbilt Commodores benefitted from Ohio State’s agreement to sit William Bell in the game between the two squads. Ohio State also benched Bell when they scheduled a game with Navy that was played in Annapolis, Maryland, though the same agreement was not sought when the two teams met in Columbus. Michigan’s willingness to sideline Ward on the school’s own home turf, thus, would set a dangerous precedent.

Letter, W. A. Alexander to Fielding Yost, January 3, 1934, WWVF. The letter is mistakenly dated by Alexander, January 3, 1933. He did, however, write in the correct year of the letter on the correspondence.

A letter from Harold Geiken sent to Fielding Yost approximately a week before the game against Georgia Tech reveals just how important fans and supporters of Michigan football believed Ward was to the team. Geiken stated, “I am writing you to ask ‘What is wrong’ with the 1934 Michigan football team...of course, I realize many stars are gone, but there remains Regczi, Renner, Ward, Austin plus such seasoned boys as Triplehorn, Remias, Jacobson, and others.” As one of the top players on the team, and the lone black superstar, there is little chance that Yost could have forgotten about Ward when he chose to schedule the game with Georgia Tech. For Geiken quote, see Letter, Harold Geiken to Fielding Yost, October 14, 1934, Box 20, BCIA.


Letter, Ann Arbor Ministerial Association to Fielding Yost, October 9, 1934, WWVF. There are several letters from Armstrong sent to Yost inquiring to know his decision on playing Ward. Armstrong also sent a letter to Kipke in which he emphatically stated that Yost had to “advise us on the status of this question” as Georgia Tech’s “athletic board is rather insistent that I secure some definite assurances on the matter.” Even Dan McGugin was still reminding Yost as late as May it would not be possible for Michigan to play Ward. “I am enclosing a note from Mr. Armstrong of Georgia Tech. I don’t believe you can afford to use colored players as it has never been done in the case of games with teams from this section.” For Armstrong quote, see Letter, A. H. Armstrong to Harry Kipke, April 20, 1934, WWVF; for McGugin quote, see Letter, Dan McGugin to Fielding Yost, May 2, 1934, WWVF.

Letter, Ann Arbor Ministerial Association to Fielding Yost, October 9, 1934, WWVF.

Letter, Joseph H. B. Evans to Ralph Aigler, October 17, 1934. Aigler was the Chairman of the Board in Control Intercollegiate Athletics though it is widely known that Yost ran the board.

Letter, Anonymous to Fielding Yost, October 29, 1934, WWVF.


Yost regularly kept in contact with Dan McGugin regarding his businesses and stock interests in the South. In one particular letter, Yost casually refers to the difficult economic conditions that characterized America during 1933. In this period that is contemporaneous to the Great Depression, Yost expresses his frustration with the volatile market as well as his consternation with Franklin Roosevelt’s burgeoning administration and the potentiality of shifting to a more socialist form of government. Yost wrote, “Since the receipt of your letter, things have been so upset in the market that one cannot come to any definition conclusion. I believe there will be additional inflation ‘in spite of Hell and high water,’ but I cannot see any possibility of success in the final outcome. I note the appointment of a Mr. McNesch as Chairman of the Government Interstate Power Regulation Commission. He said, in effect, he would bleed the utilities dry wherever possible. In my judgment this administration is headed directly toward Socialism. Socialism may be a better state but I would not want to live under it.” Yost’s disinclination to accept a shift toward Socialism despite his belief that it could be a better state under which to live elucidates the rugged individualistic and traditionalist philosophies that he held. Yost was opposed to change and repeatedly stated this fact. He was a purist who felt that America was at its best when it remained true to the customs that have long been the index to American culture. Capitalism was one of those traditions. So, too, had
slavery and racial degradation been a part of those traditions Yost was keen on protecting. And in its microcosm, football was an Anglo-Saxon sport and was to remain that way. For Yost quote, see Letter, Fielding Yost to Dan McGugin, July 21, 1933, FYP. 


395 Ibid; Fielding Yost, Football for Players and Spectators (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1905), 7, 14. 

396 Lawton, “Hurry Up” Yost, 31. McGugin was accustomed to using the “Yankees killed your grandfathers” speech to rile up his football team. As Danzig writes, “There was the time back in 1910 when he [McGugin] made his inspired talk to a Vanderbilt team just before the meeting with Yale. It was South against North, Confederate against Yankee. ‘Remember the campfires of your fathers and forefathers,’ etc. A light Vanderbilt team tied Yale that day, 0-0, with the brilliant Kittime playing for the Blue. And it wasn’t until sometime after that this inspired team discovered Dan’s father had marched with Sherman to the sea.’” McGugin’s uncovers a major reason African Americans were not able to secure rights or to see a redress of Jim Crow customs in the North. McGugin was from the North. Yet, he behaved as a gentleman of the South. So true was his capitulation to southern ideals that in 1934, Ralph McGill extolled him in the Atlanta Constitution on the day of the Vanderbilt-Georgia Tech game. “For thirty years, Dan McGugin has coached at Vanderbilt. This is his last year…and today the last McGugin-coached team will start against Georgia Tech. The Georgia Tech team is coached by a man who is a great like Dan McGugin in temperament, in manner, and in achievement. They are by way of being the two Grand Old men of Southern football…the tide of victory has been with each.” This was the same Dan McGugin who once had to prove his allegiance to the South. Shortly after arriving in Tennessee, McGugin started to court Virginia Fite whose sister Eunice Fite had married Fielding Yost. According to J. Fred Lawton, “Dan was from the North, and the staunch Southern Fites did not look kindly upon Dan as a suitor. So Dan went north to obtain all sorts of documents and letters of recommendation from prominent persons to prove his worth.” It is clear Dan wanted to prove he did not share the equalitarian views of other northerners who did not object to the rights increasingly being afforded to African Americans. “Trembling and perspiring, he presented these papers to Mr. Fite, who eventually consented to the young couple becoming engaged” (37). Dan McGugin was becoming a southerner. He “had found the South an alluring land, rich in sentiment, great in possibilities, and filled with friendly, hospitable people.” Never mind the racism and Jim Crow ethics that permeated the South. The tragedy in all this is that McGugin was a trustee of Fisk University, a historically black university. In other words, while McGugin was ceding to southern traditions and upholding the virtues of Jim Crow by calling on schools like Ohio State to bench its black players in games against Vanderbilt, he was sitting on the board of an institution committed to carving out opportunities for Negroes. That McGugin cajoled his team into playing harder against Michigan and Yale by decrying the Yankees was only a slap in the face of African Americans who sought progress. The fact that McGugin was from the North only made this reality more troubling since a northerner was accepting the ways of life in the South rather than seeking to eradicate the racial intolerance that marked football competition in the region. McGugin was certainly not alone in this regard. It does not appear that John Heisman, who coached at Georgia Tech prior to W. A. Alexander taking the reign, did anything to eliminate Georgia Tech’s Jim Crow clause forbidding competition against black athletes. The irony is that Heisman was another northerner who had attended and played for Oberlin—the great abolitionist institution. He had played against George Jewett of Michigan and later Northwestern in what they each described as storied battles. Yet, he did not curtail the racist practices of Georgia Tech. These examples of northerners acquiescing to the Jim Crow laws of the South illuminate the reason Jim Crowism flourished in the North. Northerners perpetuated an atmosphere where segregation, even without the force of law, thrived. For Danzig and McGill quotes, see Danzig, The History of American Football, 169; For McGugin quote, see Dan McGugin, “Reminiscences of a Philosopher-Coach: Personal Experiences of a Quarter Century, as Related by Vanderbilt University’s Football Coach, Who is Also a Lawyer, Business Man and Philosopher,” in The Athletic Journal, September 1930, GTA. 

397 Letter, Ralph McGill to Fielding Yost, October 1, 1934, Box 20, BCIA. Stark Young’s So Red the Rose was a bestseller in the thirties. It depicted a family from Mississippi and how they came to be affected by
the war. Its popularity was later eclipsed by that of Gone with the Wind. MacKinlay Kantor’s Long Remember is set in Gettysburg during the height of the Civil War. The story is told through the life of Daniel Bale, a pacifist who struggles to cling to his antiviolence principles as his hometown becomes the milieu for the three-day battle of Gettysburg between the Union and the Confederate.

College football morphed, as per John Underwood, into “an engrossing, all-encompassing thing.” For Underwood, this observation was captured in his account of a trip he took to Dartmouth College. “I once walked across the snowbound campus of Dartmouth College with the president of the great school, and when we reached the football stadium, he said, ‘It is no accident that it is here, in the middle. Everybody identifies with the football team.’” For Underwood quote, see Underwood, The Death of An American Game, 185.

Charles S. Prebish, Religion and Sport: The Meeting of the Sacred and the Profane (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 1993). Even if Prebish’s assertion is too ambitious, his characterization of sport as religion is true in its most basic forms. Just as religion has commandments, sports offer rules that must be strictly adhered to by all its participants. Sports also tend to draw enormous crowds that come to the football stadiums each week in religiously zealous displays of faith and fanaticism. In this manner, fans express excitement and good spirits as well as melancholy and woe based upon the success of the team. Even more, fans are often moved to tears in the same manner that an individual might be moved to incontinentable sobs in a religious service—sometimes as an expression of joy, other times due to more lugubrious reasons. This line of argument can be glimpsed in an account given by John Underwood of an incident he witnessed at the University of Michigan. Underwood states, “Once I heard a gray-haired old lady, a professor of astronomy at the University of Michigan, give a rousing speech to a pep rally on the quadrangle in front of the university library. She was no bigger than an ice bucket. She had a soft, saintly voice. The snow was coming down on her gray head. ‘Go Blue!’ she cried. It sent shivers up my spine.” For Underwood quote, see John Underwood, The Death of An American Game, 186.


Michael Mandelbaum, The Meaning of Sports, 11-12. Mandelbaum explains the history behind the sports and religion as objects of both admiration and emulation. He writes, “The two purposes originated in different eras of the long history of Western civilization. From the classical period, the time of ancient Greece and Rome, comes the exceptional figure, the individual who towers above all others. He is the man who changes the course of history, such as the Macedonian conqueror Alexander the Great, or who accomplishes what many have tried to do but no one else has done, such as the most successful competitors in ancient Greek Olympic games. From the post-classical, Christian era comes the exemplary figure who embodies the virtues to which everyone can aspire and that everyone can practice.” (Hollywood has offered the public both types: Charlton Heston as Moses in The Ten Commandments, James Stewart as the bank clerk George Bailey in It’s a Wonderful Life).

Fielding H. Yost, Football for Player and Spectator (Ann Arbor: University Publishing Company, 1905), 10-11. Yost was not alone in his descriptions of the values that were inherent in football just as they had been inbuilt within American life. For example, A. M. Weyand writes, “Many distinguished men have unqualifiedly recognized the great value of football. The great French warrior, Marshall Foch, after attending the Yale-Princeton game in 1921, stated that in his opinion, football was an ideal game for young men, because it required excellent discipline, quick-thinking and physical strength. Doctor John Grier Hibben, President of Princeton, in a speech to Princeton mothers in 1926, called athletics ‘moral safeguards’…William W. Rope, listed the great football virtues as loyalty, unselfishness, courage and intelligence.” These virtues continue to have resonance in sport and American life today. For instance, Audwin Anderson and Donald South have postulated a similar premise of the values reflected both in American culture and in sports: “As a conduit into mainstream American life, sport has been viewed as teaching the values of hard work, teamwork, and discipline.” For Weyand quote, see Weyand, American Football, ix; for Anderson and South quote, see Audwin Anderson and Donald South, “Racial Differences in Collegiate Recruiting, Retention, and Graduation Rates,” in Racism in College Athletics: The African
This American dream, according to Nixon and Frey, is the “promise that those who take advantage of opportunities and strive the hardest will be rewarded with the good life of material conform…and perhaps social prominence and influence as well.” Nixon and Frey’s characterization of the American dream, however, did not correspond to every single individual who chose to take advantage of opportunities that came available to them. African Americans were not considered worthy of aspiring to the American dream. In spite of their greatest efforts and hard work, black Americans were often left outside the category of those who would be furnished with opportunity. For white Americans who thought Negroes to be inferior, providing African Americans with opportunities ran the risk of invalidating their own claim of racial superiority. Thus, to avoid this dilemma, it was best to keep the American dream a colorless ambition.

Edwards’ description of the values found in sports as “the dominant American sports creed” has a bit of philosophical irony. His assertion seems contrary to Myrdal’s hypothesis of the “American Creed.” The presumption here is not that Edwards is counteracting Myrdal. Edwards, whether conscious of it or not, is highlighting America’s own digression from the values inbuilt in the basic American Creed versus the values that are articulated as being fundamentally indispensable to both sport and American culture. Myrdal argued that the American Creed emphasizes the ideals of liberty, equality, justice, and fair treatment. None of these virtues as articulated by Myrdal, however, are to be found within the ideals thought to be emblematic of American self-identity since it would likely have made black participation in sports compulsory. Instead, values that are said to be exclusive to the white race become indispensable to gaining full participation both in American life and in football. This approach allowed belief and behavior to be isolated so much so that whites did not feel the need to grant to African Americans inclusion in the American Creed of equality, liberty, justice, and fair treatment. Black athletes, likewise, were denied opportunities in sport because they lacked the basic American values that comprised the dominant American sports creed even if these standards departed away from the principal ideals that shaped the foundations of American democracy.

Willis Ward Obituary, WWVF.

Letter, William Friedman to Fielding Yost, October 19, 1934, WWVF.
Letter, Roy Wilkins to Harry Kipke, October 11, 1934, WWVF; Behee, Hail to the Victors, 24.
Letter, Francis M. Dent to Ralph Aigler, October 11, 1934, WWVF.
Letter, Ralph Aigler to Joseph H. B. Evans, October 11, 1934, WWVF.
Letter, Joseph H. B. Evans to Ralph Aigler, October 17, 1934, WWVF.
Letter, Alexander Ruthven to Shirley Smith, October 12, 1934, Box 16, Alexander Ruthven Papers, BHLUM (Alexander Ruthven Papers to be abbreviated ARP).
Letter, Alexander Ruthven to A. Richard Frank, October 31, 1934, Box 14, ARP. One of the individuals Ruthven allowed to handle the matter was Ralph Stone, one of the Regents of the University of Michigan. Stone’s treatment of the issue illuminates the degree of unconcern Ruthven and other officials had for the Ward situation. After receiving a resolution signed by thirteen people living in Detroit—former alums of Michigan—Stone referred the matter back to Ruthven but informed Ruthven that his response on the issue was not necessary. As to be even more apathetic, Stone exhibited a cheerful nonchalance for Ward as his attempt as jocularity disregarded the fact that Ward was being forced to countenance harsh racial discrimination. Stone wrote, “I do not know what else to do with the resolution than to send it to you. I used to play football and have drop-kicked as many as three goals in a game. I wonder if I would be satisfactory in Mr. Ward’s place.” It is then no wonder Ward was Jim Crowed at a northern institution supposedly committed to egalitarian principles. With apathetic officials leading the University of Michigan, there was not any chance that Yost’s racism and denial of Ward would be vigorously challenged and fought. For Stone quote, see Letter, Ralph Stone to A. G. Ruthven, October 18, 1934, WWVF.
Letter, Detroit Medical Society to Fielding Yost, October 20, 1934, WWVF.
Pollack, “The Benching of Willis Ward,” Ann Arbor Observer, October 1996, p. 31; for meeting minutes, see Ward Rally, WWVF; Ann Arbor News, October 10, 1934; Behee, Hail to the Victors, 23.
White paternalism during the 1930s closely resembled the slaveholding paternalism of the antebellum period even as it took on new forms. Just as slaveholders envisioned a relationship between themselves and slaves as opportunities to guide and maintain disciplinary jurisdiction over their otherwise wayward children [the slaves], whites during the 1930s also saw the need to have control over the decisions and lives of African Americans. Often masked as benevolence, as Eugene Genovese writes, “it grew out of the necessity to discipline and morally justify a system of exploitation. It did encourage kindness and affection but it simultaneously encouraged cruelty and hatred.” Unlike white paternalism in the antebellum period, however, paternalism in the 1930s was not strictly a southern phenomenon and often emerged in the relationship between white employers and black migrants in the North. For Genovese quote, see Eugene Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World that Slaves Made (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 3; also see Richard Follett, The Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves in Louisiana’s Cane World, 1820-1860 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 153.

For quote of AAU official, see Chicago Defender, September 6, 1930; also see Ashe, A Hard Road to Glory, 81; Willis Ward, interview by John Behee, September 19, 1970, BHLUM.

November 9, 1983, p. 9, GRFPL: Willis Ward, interview by David Pollock, Ford Project, September 8, 1983, p. 6, 9, GRFPL.

Arnold Miller’s managerial appointment was made by Henry Ford who sought to counter claims that he was anti-Catholic. As Ward states, “Because Mr. Ford was accused of anti-Catholicism, a Catholic, Mr. Arnold Miller, was placed in charge of the Employment Department.” Yet, Ford was never comfortable with the hiring of Miller and dispatched a secret agent to keep watch over him. “In an effort to be sure to check and balance any tendency to overprotect the Catholic with a Catholic running the Department,” Ward admitted, “Robert Taylor was sent down as a Protestant. He was an Episcopalian.” For Ward quote, see The Reminisces, p. 31, BFRC.

Ibid, 7.


The Reminisces, p. 6-7, BFRC.

Ibid, 7.

Willis Ward, interview by David Pollock, Ford Project, September 8, 1983, p. 10, GRFPL. Henry Ford was particularly fond of shaping a paternalistic relationship with his workers. His hiring of black workers, like Ward, is known as having reflected the same subordinate albeit benevolent mindset that prompted him to hire cripples, ex-convicts, and the blind. As Meier and Rudwick assert, “In Ford’s view Negroes, like
these other disadvantaged groups, were social outcasts who needed and would appreciate his help. See Meier and Rudwick, Black Detroit, 11.

426 A select group of black leaders regularly traded their loyalty to whites to gain meaningful opportunities, especially economic prospects. Initially, these efforts were aimed at leveraging resources on behalf of the larger black community. But as was the case with Willis Ward, some African Americans utilized their ties to powerful white entities such as the Ford Motor Company for self-aggrandizement and personal profit. Thus, corporate paternalism was widespread and uncontrolled. For a comprehensive discussion of corporate paternalism, see Thomas, Life for Us is What We Make It, 271-312.


428 Dees, Jim Crow, 128.

429 For Chicago Defender quote and more on the black press, see Ashe, Jr., A Hard Road to Glory, 83-85; also see “Member of the Craft,” Cleveland Gazette, June 1, 1935. For more on the case of Doris Weaver and Ohio State University’s discriminatory home economics department, see Tyran K. Steward, “Time Not Ripe: Black Women’s Quest for Citizenship and the Battle for Full Inclusion at Ohio State University,” Ohio History 121 (March 2014).

430 Ashe, Jr., A Hard Road to Glory, 83-85.

431 Patrick B. Miller, “The Anatomy of Scientific Racism: Racist Responses to Black Athletic Achievement,” in Sport and Color Line: Black Athletes and Race Relations in Twentieth-Century America, eds., Patrick B. Miller and David K. Wiggins (New York: Routledge, 2004), 332. While the emergence of scientific racism initially involved the construction of racial typologies to justify slavery and later studies of so-called measureable differences between the races conducted by scholars who feigned scientific objectivity, Miller notes that around the turn-of-the-century a new-fangled dimension of scientific racism was distinguished. “Rather than simply reinforce prevailing notions of Negro inferiority,” Miller explains, “experts felt compelled to account for the extraordinary achievements of some black athletes. In the face of an increasing number of victories posted by African Americans, the mainstream culture began to qualify the meanings of excellence in sport.” The Encyclopedia Britannica depicted “the abnormal length of the arm, which in the erect position sometimes reaches the kneepan, and which on an average exceeds that of the Caucasian by about two inches,” and “the low instep, divergent and somewhat prehensile great toe, and heel projection backwards (‘lark heel’).” These specifications increasingly were advanced as reasons for black athletic success. For Miller quote, see p. 331.

432 Michael Oriard has asserted that prior the 1930s, “African Americans were stereotyped as physically inferior to whites. That changed in the 1930s, not gradually but suddenly, out of a need to account for Jesse Owens and his fellow African American sprinters.” In truth, black athletic dominance had always intensified speculation about the “Negro” anatomy and compelled tests to be performed to explain and excuse those achievements. The boxer Jack Johnson and the cyclist Marshall “Major” Taylor were easy black targets at the start of the century. In 1901, for instance, Taylor “was X-rayed, as well as measured up and down by a number of French medical anthropologists, in an effort to reveal the source of his triumphs.” But in the 1930s, the explosion of exceptional black athletic performances not only in track and field but also in boxing with Henry Armstrong and Joe Louis and in college football in the North with Willis Ward and others propelled a new science linking athleticism to the mark of an entire race. The irony of this artificial “racial science” is that it did not intend to suggest that the darker races were more manly or masculine by their so-called physiological supremacy; instead, “manliness” and “masculinity” were cast around notions of civility and self-government. African Americans were seen as primitive and savage, and lacking in the racial genius indispensable to self-governing themselves or to exercising “manhood rights.” As Gail Bederman states, “In a variety of venues and contexts, white Americans contrasted civilized white men with savage dark-skinned men, depicting the former as paragons of manly superiority.” For Oriard quote, see Michael Oriard, Brand NFL: Making and Selling America’s Favorite Sport (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 221; for quote on the examination of Marshall, see Miller, “The Anatomy of Scientific Racism,” 331. For Bederman quote, see Bederman, “Manliness and Civilization,” 22; for a detailed historical treatment of “manliness,” “masculinity,” and the linking of manhood to whiteness, especially see 1-44.
David K. Wiggins, “Edwin Bancroft Henderson, African-American Athletes, and the Writing of Sport History,” in *Sport and Color Line: Black Athletes and Race Relations in Twentieth-Century America*, eds., Patrick B. Miller and David K. Wiggins (New York: Routledge, 2004), 275. Though the black press, led by Henderson, was primarily the most outspoken voices against scientific racism in sport, it should not be assumed that they acted alone. W. E. B. Du Bois and Franz Boas were vigorous in refuting the tenets of scientific racism and were popular speakers on the campuses of historically black colleges regarding the topic. “Few if any offered findings more emphatic or timely,” as Patrick Miller points out, “than African-American scholar W. Montague Cobb.” Cobb utilized his experiments in physiology and anatomy, specifically his biopsies of the muscle tissue of Jesse Owens during the late 1930s, to assail the claims of white scientists that exclusive biological determinants accounted for black athletic achievement. The eminent Howard University professor declared without hedging that the “Negroid type of calf, foot, and heel bone” was not found in the Olympic champion. Further, he concluded that the diameter of Owens’s gastrocnemius muscle conformed to “the caucasoid type rather than the negroid [sic].” For more on Cobb and the response to scientific racism, see Miller, “The Anatomy of Scientific Racism,” 335-338; also see W. Montague Cobb, “Race and Runners,” *Journal of Health and Physical Education* 7 (January 1936): 3-7, 52-56.


Randall, “Willis Ward Coward or Hero.”

The phrase “burden of representation” was popularized—perhaps even coined by—James Baldwin. Baldwin employed the term in a press article about black Hollywood Actor Sidney Poitier, whose “ebony prince” roles typified a straw target for “positive-image” illustrations. For more on Baldwin’s use of “burden of representation,” see James Baldwin, “Sidney Poitier,” in *Look*, July 1968, 56.

Letter, W. Rankin Lewis to Harry Kipke, September 24, 1935, WWVF. To be certain, I am not advocating that the ‘burden of representation’ should fall squarely on one individual’s shoulders. On the contrary, I am merely contextualizing the degree to which black America, as a whole, counted on black athletes to deliver the race into a dynamic period of realizable freedom and progress. The pressure put on these black athletes was insurmountable and did little to relieve these players from having to suture the gaping political and social wounds that had been caused by slavery, Jim Crow, and other expressions of racial discrimination.


Arthur Howe, “Two Racers and What They Symbolize,” in *The Southern Workman* (October 1932): 375. For an extensive discussion of “muscular assimilationism,” see Patrick B. Miller, “To ‘Bring the Race along Rapidly’: Sport, Student Culture, and Educational Mission at Historically Black Colleges during the Interwar Years,” in *History of Education Quarterly* Vol. 35 No. 2 (Summer 1995):111-133. Scholastic achievements were critical to the efforts by black leaders to improve the lots of African Americans. But sport was judged to embody a collective brotherhood that could remedy racial separation and the belief in black inferiority. One Howard University student characterized athletics as “universal language” and through sport saw the opportunity “to foster a better and more fraternal spirit between the races in America…so to destroy prejudices.” Further, as Miller points out, black leaders were convinced that “the football gridiron and baseball diamond, the track oval, and even the boxing ring offered significant platforms for proving equality.” For Miller quote, see p. 111. For Howard University student quote see Howard University Hilltop, April 29, 1924; also see p. 111.

David K. Wiggins, “Edwin Bancroft Henderson, African-American Athletes,” 277. David Wiggins provides a useful interpretation of Henderson’s reason for contending that black athletes made greater contributions to racial discourse and social relations between African Americans and whites. He writes, “The reasons were clear to Henderson. It was African-American athletes, rather than black musicians, artists, and writers, who were able to instill pride among members of their own community and bring the
race greater respect because ‘the main springs of action are still located in the glands’ and the ‘keenest pleasures and most poignant pains’ for human beings ‘are born of feelings rather than of intellect…The transformational power of sport helped explain why Joe Louis ‘captivated the fancy of millions’; why Jesse Owens, Ralph Metcalfe, Eddie Tolan, and a host of others have likewise provided a feeling of pride and joyful relationship for many; why African-American athletes ‘are emulated by thousands of growing youth of all races’; and why ‘above all they gain for themselves and the Negro the respect of millions whose superiority feelings have sprung solely from identity with the white race (277-8).’ Also see Edwin B. Henderson, “The Negro Athlete and Race Prejudice,” in Opportunity 14 (March 1936): 79.

W. E. B. Du Bois articulated the notion of “double consciousness” or the divided self and intended it to be a socially and spiritually evolving experience—one that would define itself through resistance and realize “self-conscious manhood” through great toil. In Du Bois’ view, as David Levering Lewis reveals, “The divided self would not remain flawed, compromised, unstable, or tragic. It would become in time and struggle stronger for being doubled, not undermined—the sum of its parts, not the dividend.” For black athletes like Ward, however, their existence was often miserable and unsteady though Du Bois’ central line of reasoning should not be disqualifed. Black players could neither escape the tragedy of racial discrimination nor the burden of overcoming it. But that does not mean that all these black athletes should be perceived as uncomplicated figures whose negotiation of both worlds was marked with little appreciation for the role they performed. It should be noted, as Lewis further points out, that “the divided self was, of course, not original with Du Bois. The construct was central to the fiction of Goethe and Chesnutt…Emerson, another favorite, had used the term ‘double consciousness’ in ‘Transcendentalist,’ the 1843 published lectures in which he even characterized the dilemma as one in which the ‘two lives, of the understanding and of the soul…really show very little relation to each other.’ It is in this latter context that black athletes found themselves as they traveled in two divided worlds with antithetical points of view on how black athletes should function. For more Lewis’ quote and more on Du Bois’ notion of double consciousness, see, David Levering Lewis, W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1869-1919 (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1993), 281-84.

Wiggins, Glory Bound, 201. Harmonizing self-interests with those of the entire black community proved challenging for African-American athletes. As Wiggins states, “The balancing of individual ambitions and more collective action…was tied to the black athlete’s quest to realize a sense of identity amid the constraints of organized sport” (200).

Randall, “Willis Ward, Coward or Hero.” For a discussion of double consciousness and sport, see Wiggins, Glory Bound, 200-220.

Behee, Hail to the Victors, 29.

Du Bois, Black Reconstruction, 702-3.

Willis Ward, interview by David Pollock, Ford Project, September 8, 1983, p. 9, GRFPL; Willis Ward, interview by John Behee, September 19, 1970, BHLUM.


David Zeman, “Affirmative Action at U-M: Politics and principles collide: Republicans Cox and Ford have stark differences,” Detroit Free Press, March 19, 2003; Mabe Kountze, “Race Youths May Be Barred from Olympics,” Plaindealer, August 9, 1935. Ward’s sense of trepidation concerning the major role Hitler occupied in the 1936 Olympics appears to have been exaggerated. While Jewish athletes were not allowed to run, African Americans were given the okay to compete the 1936 Olympics.


451 Willis Ward, interview by David Pollock, Ford Project, September 8, 1983, p. 10, GRFPL.


456 Youngstown Vindicator, “Willis Ward Will Not Run,” February 9, 1936; also see Spokane Daily Chronicle, “Ward Prefers law to Olympic laurel,” February 24, 1936. Ward’s worries about his legs were embellished. After the suffering minor injury, he had an outstanding performance at the National Decathlon Championships held in San Diego, California. Ward had no trouble dominating the competition on the first day. For the story of his successes on the first day of the competition, see The New York Times, Ward of Michigan Decathlon Leader, June 27, 1935, 25.


459 Wiggins, Glory Bound, 67. The black press’s endorsement of the 1936 Olympics was not a sign of disregard for the Jewish community besieged by Hitler’s reign; in fact, it was the opposite. As Glenda Gilmore states, “Since Hitler was hosting the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, sports provided a logical testing ground to measure the respective treatments of German Jews and African Americans.” African Americans could then point to black Olympic athletes’ performance in Berlin as an alternative to Fascism and, at the same time, hold the United States accountable for its own racial discrimination. For Gilmore quote, see Gilmore, Defying Dixie, 189.

460 Wiggins, Glory Bound, 67-8; also see Robert H. Zieger, The CIO: 1935-1955 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 14, 88; also see Walter Weare, “Middle-Class Leadership in the Age of Segregation,” in Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century, eds., John Hope Franklin and August Meier (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 183; also see Cheryl Greenberg, To Ask for an Equal Chance: African Americans in the Great Depression (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000),56. For a discussion of the increase of black military during the 1940s, see Klarrman, From Jim Crow to Civil Rights, 176-79. The Social Security Act of 1935 is one instance of the New Deal’s inconsistency in providing relief to African Americans. As Greenberg argues, “States received funds to disburse on the assumption that local officials understood local needs best. This policy, of course, eased the way for racist administrators to shortchange black applicants or deny their requests...Worse, Congress acquiesced to demands that domestic and agricultural workers be excluded from receiving Social Security benefits—two
employment fields in which African Americans remained overrepresented. These two exclusions alone denied coverage to 65 percent of African Americans.” These patterns of racial disproportion frustrated the black press who, in turn, sustained their critique of America as racially unjust. For Greenberg quote, see p. 56-57.


461 Behee, Hail to the Victors, 30; Youngstown Vindicator, “Ward Will Not Run”; Willis Ward, interview by David Pollock, Ford Project, September 8, 1983, p. 10, GRFPL. Ward contended that his lack of regret was due to the fact that Jewish athletes who had qualified were not permitted to run in Berlin.

462 James Tobin, “The Mystery of Belford Lawson, Ann Arbor Observer, October 30, 2009, 27-30; André McKenzie, “Those Who Carried the Torch: The General Presidents of Alpha Phi Alpha,” in Alpha Phi Alpha: A Legacy of Greatness, the Demands of Transcendence, eds., Gregory S. Park and Stefan M. Bradley (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 2012), 124; Rawn James, Jr., Roots and Branch: Charles Hamilton Houston, Thurgood Marshall, and the Struggle to End Segregation (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010), 67-68. Lawson initially served as the lead counsel for the Murray case but allowed Charles Houston and Thurgood Marshall to take over as he was outmatched in resources. During this era, most of the cases brought on behalf of African Americans were under the legal umbrella of the NAACP, so it only made sense that Houston and Marshall became the main litigants. For an analysis of the Talented Tenth assembled at Howard University, see Zachery R. Williams, In Search of the Talented Tenth: Howard University Public Intellectuals and the Dilemmas of Race, 1926-1970 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009); for a breakdown of the Murray case, see Genna Rae McNeil, Groundwork: Charles Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 138-140.


464 Willis Ward, interview by John Behee, September 19, 1970, BHLUM.

465 Ibid.

466 Ibid. The notion of “Negro exceptionalism” has a long history dating back to the age of slavery. In its most basic meaning, the status of being an exceptional Negro was reserved for African Americans who desired to be viewed by whites as unlike other Negroes. The term has often been utilized to refer to African-American elites, especially those who have sought distance from the black lower-class in their aim for bourgeois respectability. Typically cast as a negative connotation, the phrase, however, has its greatest currency with any black person (regardless of class standing) whose efforts have been to prove they do not fit into the stereotypical notions of blackness in order to curry favor with whites. As Jerry Watts states, “The “exceptional Negro” is a parasitic status because it is formed by appearing to be distant and different from other blacks, blacks who may be justly penalized for being the way they are. The status of the
“exceptional” black is a status rooted in the most explicit desire for white acceptance and hatred one’s own affinities with other blacks.” If gaining white acceptance was not Ward’s original intention, he eventually sought after their approval and favorable recognition. He habituated quickly to those whites who glimpsed him with distinction and exploited their fairer treatment of him as a symbol of his uniqueness from other black Americans. For Watts quote, see Jerry Watts, *Amirí Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 57-58.

468 Willis Ward, interview by John Behee, September 19, 1970, BHLUM.


470 Ford’s hostility toward Willis becoming a lawyer was typical of his anti-intellectual viewpoints. His animus concerning education was so extreme that it was believed to have affected job promotions at his company. “As I understand it, one of the best ways not to get anywhere in the Ford Motor Company at the time, was to have a college degree,” Ward confessed. For Ward quote, see The Reminisces, p. 13, BFRC.

471 Willis Ward, interview by John Behee, September 19, 1970, BHLUM.

472 Prior to being the employment division for African Americans, the Sociological Department was a branch created by Henry Ford to shape company relations. In his own system of social engineering, Ford desired his workers not only to be married and family providers but also to be sober and engaged to clean living. “To enforce or at least guide his employees,” according to Quentin Skrabec, Ford “established the ‘sociological department.’ The sociological department started with employee publications on types of clean living and personal habits expected from being a Ford employee.” How important was cleanliness to Ford? British historian Robert Lacey contends that “Cleanliness was next to Fordliness” and explains that half of the wage Ford paid his workers was contingent on living a properly moral domestic life. For quote and more details on the establishment of the Sociological Department, see Quentin R. Skrabec, Jr., *The Green Division of Henry Ford and George Washington Carver: Two Collaborators in the Cause of Clean Industry* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2013), 84-85. For Lacey quote and an extensive discussion of Ford’s social engineering, see Robert Lacey, *Ford: The Men and the Machine* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1986), 122-125 (quote p. 124); also see Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism*, 12.

473 Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit*, 10. The Service Department was merely a policing arm of the Ford Motor Company, and was organized by Henry Ford with the purpose “to suppress unionization and other sources of ‘trouble’ through espionage, intimidation, and force.” Bennett’s Service Department was also responsible for policing black workers, though this task was later delegated to Don Marshall and Willis Ward. In its heyday, Ford’s Service Department was glimpsed as “a private army” comprised of “ex-convicts, ex-boxers, gangsters, and sociopaths.” Marshall, while none of these things, was a rogue cop who was deeply influenced by Bennett’s branch and became more capricious and scornful as his power grew. For quote on Ford’s Service Department, see Dillard, *Faith in the City*, 67. For more details on Ford’s Service Department, see Stephan H. Norwood, *Strikebreaking and Intimidation*, chap. 5.

474 Donald Marshall’s fidelity to defending the Ford Motor Company’s interests prompted his promotion to an executive-level position in the company. One incident encapsulates his rise. There were allegations that “a colored fellow had shot two white policemen” to death. As Ward remembers, “Word came out that he was a Ford employee and he was going out to Ford’s and draw his pay and he was going to leave town. A chap by the name of Morris Taylor was the janitor down at Gate 4 in the offices and he saw this fellow and suspected him as being the guy that police were looking for…So he told a couple of Service men and they were scared, so he went down and saw Don Marshall. Don Marshall got a gun and went down, and this Taylor pointed out this fellow [who] was sitting down waiting to his pay. Marshall went to him without pulling his gun and squatted down beside him. He found out who he was and grabbed him and put a lock on his arm. He captured the guy that killed two policemen. As a result, he won the admiration of not only Mr. Bennett but Mr. Ford too.” See The Reminisces, p. 7-9, BFRC; the above-referenced quote is taken from p. 8-9.

475 Dillard, *Faith in the City*, 67; also see Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit*, 10. For quote, see The Reminisces, p. 13, BFRC.
Initially Charles Sorenson and the Ford Motor Company enlisted the help of Reverend Robert L. Bradby, pastor of Second Baptist Church (Detroit’s oldest and largest black congregation) to deal with the concerns of worker inefficiency and the frequency of bloody clashes within the plant between black and white workers as well as quarrels among African Americans themselves. In 1919, Bradby met with Henry Ford and other key executives to outline a strategy for the Ford Motor Company “to recruit carefully selected Negro workmen.” This plan and the subsequent role it created for Bradby permitted him the opportunity both to recommend “very high type fellows” for jobs at the Ford Motor Company and to assist the company in settling its internal personnel dilemmas. In effect, the roots of the church-company alliance that allowed prominent black clergymen to endorse creditable colored congregants for work at Ford in exchange for financial hand-outs and nonmonetary gifts (i.e. concert tickets, coal, and building materials) had begun. As Meier and Rudwick state, “For the next half-dozen years, [Bradby] roamed the Highland Park and Rouge plants at will, resolving interracial conflicts and tensions, and instilling among the Negro workers behavior patterns conforming to the model desired by Henry Ford. For above quotes and more analysis of the church-company alliance at Ford, see Meier and Rudwick, Black Detroit, 9-10; also see Dillard, Faith in the City, 64-68.

One of the overlooked aspects of the migration northward by black and white southerners is the social changes the resettlement compelled. As Roger Guy contends, “In the South, racial norms and etiquette shaped interactions between whites and non-whites. In the North these racial lines were blurred and contact was often not as clearly defined as in the Jim Crow South.” Even as neighborhoods in the North begin to segregate, the possibility of having employment at the same company or having the similar access to public transportation placed black and white northerners in closer proximity. To be certain, there were white northerners who shared the prejudices of white southerners; the racial landscape in the North, however, occasioned greater opportunities for the races to intermingle, leading to what James Gregory called a “rapid process of social integration.” For Guy quote, see Roger Guy, From Diversity to Unity: Southern and Appalachian Migrants in Uptown Chicago, 1950-1970 (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 3. For Gregory quote, see Gregory, The Southern Diaspora, 119. For a brief analysis of the North’s racial heterogeneity, specifically in public arenas like streetcars, see Grossman, Land of Hope, 167.

The Reminisces, p. 13-14, BFRC.

In justifying Marshall’s handling of colored employees, Ward overlooked the disparate treatment black workers received for the conflicts that arose with white staff. African Americans who bickered with white staff were singled-out and reprimanded harshly when interracial battles erupted despite the fact that many of these confrontations were instigated by white men. “In fact,” as Patrick Jones writes, “the era’s dotted with examples of white union violence against black workers.” Jones’s assertion that whites precipitated violence against African Americans was not just in the case of northern whites hostile to black union membership or to sharing the shop floor with their black counterparts; anti-black aggression occurred throughout the country. In some instances, white vigilante groups, such as the Black Shirts, mushroomed with the intent to intimidate black workers from pursuing industrial employment opportunities, especially those pertaining to skilled trades. Southern whites, in particular, developed a reputation for being “hillbillies,” degenerate and dangerous, and predisposed to fueling hatred and violence against African Americans. For Jones quote, see Patrick D. Jones, The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 23. For more information on the Black Shirts and white resentment of African-American workers, see Karen Ferguson, Black Politics in the New Deal (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003). For the more details on the image of southern whites as hillbillies, see Gregory, The Southern Diaspora, chap. 4, especially 76-77; also see Anthony Harkins, Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), chap. 2 and also 174-177.

The Reminisces, p. 12, BFRC.

The relegation of black personnel at Ford to the dirtiest, most hazardous jobs aggravated African Americans. Though the company’s entire black staff was under the jurisdiction of Marshall and Ward, the majority saw very little progress. Marshall had long been viewed as an enemy to black progress. Eventually, Ward was also seen as an adversary rather than an ally who was more willing to be a stooge of Ford than an advocate for black workers.

482 Christopher Alston, *Henry Ford and the Negro People* (Washington, DC: National Negro Congress and Michigan’s Negro Congress, 1940), 5-6; also see Dillard, *Faith in the City*, 66. African Americans were so entrenched into work in the foundry, that by the 1937 it was seen as the “black job.” This was quite the shift from the early 1930s when black workers were outnumbered two to one. See Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit*, 214.

483 The relegation of black personnel at Ford to the dirtiest, most hazardous jobs aggravated African Americans. Though the company’s entire black staff was under the jurisdiction of Marshall and Ward, the majority saw very little progress. Marshall had long been viewed as an enemy to black progress. Eventually, Ward was also seen as an adversary rather than an ally who was more willing to be a stooge of Ford than an advocate for black workers.

484 The Reminiscences, p. 11, BFRC.

485 Ibid, 13, 33.


488 The Reminiscences, p. 9, 22, BFRC. Ward was so confident in his beliefs that the Ford Motor Company practiced discrimination of no kind that he claimed the company’s approaches to racial integration became an example to other companies. “Some of the Telephone Company people and some of the outfits in Chicago,” he stated, “came over and studied our system and took it back…I know from what I have seen you won’t find a better example of integration than you’ve got at the Ford plant” (13).

489 Ibid, 9.

490 Ibid, 33-34. While Ward’s pursuit of a racial pioneer clouded his judgments on hiring black workers into certain skilled trades, and is lamentable, the underlying stance that it may have taken “special” African Americans to break the color barrier ought not to be so readily dismissed. Racial pioneers were not permitted simply to think of their participation alone but also had to unite their involvement in these once segregated activities to the reality that they were opening doors that had been previously closed. In other words, a black football player could not think of “football” only but had to think of the fact that he was a racial pioneer. As Sharon O’Brien states, “In the 1940s, you couldn’t ‘just think baseball’ without also thinking ‘racial pioneering’—because to ‘just think baseball’ as major league club owners had done for decades was to think white baseball, without ever acknowledging that was what you were doing.” Though the context O’Brien notes here concerns sport, the idea that African Americans seeking to cross the color line within any endeavor needed to think “big picture” remains. Ward’s posture toward black workers at Ford who sought to be pioneers was informed by his grasp of the uniqueness of what such an opportunity entailed. He believed it took an exceptional black figure—one prepared to confront the dilemmas of being the “first” to integrate. Certainly, it does not excuse his refusal to promote African Americans and to some degree Ward’s views differed from O’Brien as he was not merely concerned with the larger consequences.

491 The Reminisces, p. 34-35, BFRC.
493 Ibid.
494 Ibid, 31-32. The blame assigned to African Americans for violent encounters with white workers was well-worn and part of a long history of framing race relations as the “Negro problem.” In adding his own take on the interracial clashes, Henry Ford referred to the constant altercations as the “Negro problem.” Ford was so obsessed with this “Negro problem” that he once posed, “What is the best way to handle the negro [sic]?” His response, “Colonelize [sic] the Negro.” It was not until 1965 that the idea of a “white problem,” inchoate at the time, became an emerging part of the race relations dialogue. Ebony Magazine dedicated their August issue that year to studying race relations through the lens of whiteness. Over the past twenty-five years, a collection of scholars across varying fields, including Grace Elizabeth Hale, Noel Ignatiev, Matthew Frye Jacobson, George Lipsitz, Peggy McIntosh, David Roediger, and Matthew Wray, amongst others, have given greater attention to studying whiteness as a racialized category and as a fundament to grasping socially-constructed notions of identity. See Bates, The Making of Black Detroit, 55; Ford quote taken from p.57; also see Henry Ford’s Personal Notes, BFRC. See “The White Problem in America,” Ebony Magazine, August 1965. For a terse sampling of whiteness studies, see Grace Elizabeth Hale, Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940 (New York: Vintage Books, 1998); also see Matthew Frye Jacobson, Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and Alchemy of Race (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); also see George Lipsitz, The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006); and see Roediger, The Wages of Whiteness.
495 Ward’s explanations for segregated interviews gave legitimacy to the widely-accepted notion that neither whites nor their property were safe from the predatory black male. As Stewart Tolnay and E.M. Beck state, “The dominance and popularity of theories of scientific racism legitimized the image of blacks as an inherently defective race, prone to violence and criminal activity.” Ward’s justifications fortified this outlook for executives at Ford. For Tolnay and Beck quote, see Stewart E. Tolnay and E.M. Beck, A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930 (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1995), 60. For a brief discussion of black internalization of white views and its consequence for prolonging inequality, see Sugrue, Sweet Land of Liberty, 214. Sugrue argues that for African Americans to liberate themselves from the “inferiority complex” caused by racism, they needed to eradicate prejudice and the destructive depictions whites held of them.
496 Meier and Rudwick, Black Detroit, 12-13; also see, Lester Veile, “Housing: Detroit’s Time Bomb,” Colliers Weekly, November 23, 1946, pp.75-76.
497 The Reminisces, p. 96-99, BFRC.
498 Ibid, 99-100.
499 Victoria de Grazia defines Fordism as “the eponymous manufacturing system designed to spew out standardized, low-costs goods and affords workers decent enough wages to buy them.” See Victoria de Grazia, Irresistible Empire: America’s Advance through 20th Century Europe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 4.
500 The Reminisces, p. 15-16, BFRC. Ward described the system of selling jobs: “What would happen is, if a salesman didn’t have a car he would take a deposit from the guy and give the pass to get the guy a job. The guy might never come back again for the car, but he has bought a job. So the guys come up and say, ‘I can give you $100 deposit if you can get me the job, and when I get my job I’ll buy the car.’ The salesman makes $100 if the guy never comes back for the car. That is how the iniquity arose” (17-18).
501 The problem of selling jobs was so severe, and went beyond Marshall’s dishonest practices. In Dearborn, and other nearby municipalities, it was not unusual to encounter people in small bars and
restaurants selling jobs for the Ford Motor Company. Stanley Nowak, a Polish immigrant and vital labor organizer, recalled meeting an elderly woman who told him “that she had sold probably five hundred jobs.” For Nowak quote, see Moon, *Untold Tales*, 128.

502 Though Ward never sold a job himself, his unwillingness to address the issue with Marshall caused him to appear just as guilty as those who engaged in the practice. To lessen the criticism he received, Ward described himself as a victim and reiterated that his tolerance of Marshall and others who sold jobs did not amount to any wrongdoing on his part. “The fact that people took advantage…doesn’t necessarily imply that I sold a job. I was victimized by the people who started it.’ For quote, see The Reminiscences, p. 19.

503 Ibid, 18. Ward prided himself on not being by black workers as having sold jobs. “The Negroes…never claimed discrimination on my part…I know that they knew that Marshall was selling cars because they were glad that I didn’t.” Ward’s reluctance to address Marshall’s role in the situation, however, was just as “cancerous” as he reckoned Marshall’s “evidence of exploitation” to be. In time, Ford’s black workforce branded him a company stooge. Quote taken from p. 17.


505 Ibid, 16-19.

506 Black ministers and churches functioned as agents of the Ford employment office but some of Detroit’s black clergymen rejected the chance to develop relationships with the company. As Dillard writes, “For ministers such as Father [Malcolm] Dade, Reverend [Horace] White, and Reverend [Charles] Hill, resistance to the company’s allure allowed them to ensure their own personal and political independence.” See Dillard, *Faith in the City*, 6-7.

507 Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit*, 56-57; also see Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit*, 11. According to Meier and Rudwick, the UAW charged “that the roots of Ford’s employment policy lay in a calculated attempt to discourage unionism by exploiting racial hostility in his work force.” Though the authors disagree with this analysis, they acknowledge that Ford’s tactics did involve the use of African Americans as strikebreakers to preserve the open shop floor. A. Philip Randolph, President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, also saw Ford’s policy as a way to “fight to prevent unionization of his plant.” To Randolph’s contention, it is worth noting that the church-company affiliation lasted until Ford was successfully unionized in 1941. See Dillard, *Faith in the City*, 6. For Randolph quote, see Cleveland Gazette, August 21, 1937. Despite Randolph’s criticism of Ford, some African Americans stood by Ford, including the Cleveland Gazette who accused Randolph of “stirring up racial hatred.”


509 Dillard, *Faith in the City*, 64.

510 For a discussion of the conflicts of Ford’s corporate paternalism, see Thomas, *Life for Us*, chap. 8. One of the central problems in the ties created between Ford and the African-American community is the challenges it placed on black Detroit’s ability to shape their own paths toward progress away from the ideas and ideologies that called them into action. By uniting with Ford, African Americans and any social movements they sought to erect were devoid of the ability to carve out what Sara Evans and Harry Boyte described as “free spaces”—“public places in the community…in which people are able to learn a new self-respect, a deeper and more assertive group identity, public skills and values of cooperation and civic virtue…settings between private lives and large-scale institutions…with a relatively open and participatory character.” Angela Dillard simplifies this definition of “free spaces,” characterizing them as “communally grounded and autonomous associations that permit people to work out alternative visions of society and to organize collectively.” For Evans and Boyte quote and a broader discussion of free spaces, see Sara M. Evans and Harry C. Boyte, *Free Spaces: The Sources of Democratic Change in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992), introduction and chap. 1; quote taken from p. ix. For Dillard quote, see Dillard, *Faith in the City*, 7.

511 Thomas, *Life for Us*, 272-274. In the battle for prestige and power, it is worth mentioning that a bit of a schism developed between Reverend Bradby and Father Daniel—the two foremost beneficiaries of the church-company alliance. As Thomas notes, “Although Bradby remained influential with the Ford establishment until his death in 1941, during the middle 1920s, Father Daniel surged ahead in the race for
Ford’s power.” Unfortunately, both men became “oblivious to the extent to which Ford’s paternalism and their own dependency had eroded their mutual effectiveness in promoting the well-being of the black community.” Quotes are taken from p. 274; also see David L. Lewis, “History of Negro Employment in Detroit Area Plants of Ford Motor Company, 1914-1941,” seminar paper, University of Detroit, 1954, p. 20.

512 The Reminisces, p. 52, BFRC.

513 Bates, The Making of Black Detroit, 56-57, 173-174, 212-13. Henry Ford’s anxiousness over the possibility of losing the open shop floor to increased unionization stretched beyond his black personnel, especially in the wake of the Battle of the Overpass. Ford amplified his use of surveillance at every level and unleashed a reign of terror that prompted the great American social critic, Edmund Wilson, to dub him as “the despot of Dearborn.” Benjamin Stolberg, a journalist in the field of American labor, compared Ford’s autocratic ethos to that of Nazi Germany. He alleged that Bennett, obviously working on behalf of Ford, managed a gang of 800 ruffians whose main duty was to “keep order” within the “plant community through terror.” Further, Stolberg indicated that another 8,000 to 9,000 workers functioned as “spies and stool-pigeons” for Ford’s “industrial mafia.” See Edmund Wilson, “The Despot of Dearborn,” Scribner’s, July 1931, 24-35; see Stolberg quote in Allan Nevins and Frank Ernest Hill, Ford: Decline and Rebirth, 1933-1962 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1963), 150-151; also see Bates, p. 212.

514 Thomas, Life for Us, 258-259; Bailer, “Negro Labor,” 164; Bates, The Making of Black Detroit, 142; Crisis 39, (February 1932): 64-65; Meier and Rudwick, Black Detroit, 200.

515 Thomas, Life for Us, 259; Bailer, “Negro Labor,” 169. Membership to join the association was 25 cents, and open to all African Americans. Although Ward and Marshall did not employ every member or prevent some of them from being laid off, many did benefit from their affiliation. In the same manner that buying cars could help save a job, word spread quickly throughout black Detroit that membership in the organization would assist one in obtaining a job as well as safeguard them against any company layoffs.

516 Initially, Henry Ford requested Ward and Marshall, along with the Wayne County District Voters Association, to support Richard Reading who was running for reelection. Scoring the endorsement was huge for Reading who was under investigation for political corruption, including graft, selling protection for policy games, and promotions to police officers. When his opponent, Richard Jeffries, Jr., learned of Ward and Marshall’s endorsement for Reading, he begged Ford, who he often hobnobbed with, to have the two Sociological managers switch their support. Though Ward was irritated, and threatened to quit his job, he inevitably chose to back Jeffries who won the race convincingly. Certainly, the corruption did not help Reading’s case and it ultimately resulted in the indictment of 135 persons. But Ward and Marshall’s support was also key, as Jeffries carried most of the black working-class neighborhoods. After Bennett persuaded Ward to remain at Ford, talking to him “like a son,” for the second time, he rewarded him with a $50-a-month raise for his efforts. See The Reminisces, p. 65-70, BFRC; also see Edward Jeffries and Dominic J. Capeci, eds., Detroit and the “Good War”: The World War II Letters of Mayor Edward and Friends (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1996), 2, 6-7.

517 The Reminisces, p. 58, BFRC.

518 “The Battle of the Overpass” is the appellation given to the brutal clash involving UAW labor organizers and security guards of the Ford Motor Company. The UAW had planned a leaflet campaign to take place on May 26, 1937, at the pedestrian overpass situated at Miller Road near Gate 4 of the Rouge Plant. Several of the UAW’s key organizers, including Richard Frankensteen and Walter Reuther, gathered at rough 2 pm, and were asked by James E. Kilpatrick, a photographer with the Detroit News, to pose for pictures on the overpass. Shortly thereafter, they were attacked by men from Ford’s Bennett-led Service Department. Bennett’s henchmen, rumored to have numbered as many as 40 assailants, also assaulted beret-wearing women who had arrived to pass out leaflets, along with photographers and reporters who had shown up for the event. Sadly, Dearborn police largely ignored the beatings, arguing that the Ford workers were protecting the company’s property. When news and photos of the incident made headlines around the country, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) reprimanded Ford and Bennett. Though the UAW had lost a significant battle that day, Ford’s reputation declined and the UAW was able to attract more
sympathizers to its union causes. Three years later, the UAW unionized Ford. For more details on the Battle of the Overpass, see Jenny Nolan, “The Battle of the Overpass,” Detroit News, August 7, 1997.

The Communist Party made greater inroads into the black community than Ward believed, and consensus amongst African Americans on the “red” issue had been that communists had earned their wings as credible allies. As Bates states, “During the period of the Popular Front from 1935 to 1939, communists supported cross-black unity and democratic coalition politics.” They had also defended the Scottsboro boys, taken part in the Ford Hunger March, and supported antilynching measures. Thus, African Americans accepted communists out of a joint belief that all humans deserved to be treated equally. For Bates quote and more on the black community’s relationship to the Communist Party, see Bates, The Making of Black Detroit, 231-232; quote taken from p. 231. For a broader analysis of the alliances forged between African Americans and communists, see Robin D.G. Kelley, Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990); also see Naison, Communists in Harlem during the Depression; also see Mark Soloman, The Cry for Unity: Communists and African Americans, 1917-1936 (Oxford: The University of Mississippi Press, 1998).

Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks, 184-185.

The Reminisces, p. 59, BFRC. Ward’s mockery that black Detroit did not trust Reuther was not inexact. Reuther’s credibility certainly ebbed and flowed as he, at times, was slow to hire African Americans on his staff and did not always become intimately acquainted with the problems black workers confronted. For more on the estrangement between African Americans and Reuther, see Lichtenstein, The Most Dangerous Man, 209.

The Reminisces, p. 58, BFRC.

Even in the wake of the CIO’s pledge of racial consensus, African Americans had reasons to remain cynical about unionization. While the CIO worked to remedy racial injustice from its ranks, late into the 1940s and early 1950s, black unionization was still being challenged. The CIO’s “Operation Dixie” campaign, which was aimed at organizing industries across the southern United States, lasted from only 1946 to 1953. Jim Crow laws, anti-black racial strife, the burgeoning clout of southern Dixiecrats, and emerging “Cold Ward” sentiments doomed the program. For black skeptics, the failure of “Operation Dixie” legitimized their view that the push for interracial coalitions, especially within union ranks, had its liabilities and limitations. For a broader analysis of the CIO’s “Operation Dixie” campaign, see Nelson Lichtenstein, “From Corporatism to Collective Bargaining: Organized Labor and the Eclipse of Social Democracy in the Postwar Era,” in The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order:1930-1980, eds., Steven Fraser and Gary Gerstle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 135-136.


Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks, 185.


Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks, 185.

Ibid; also see Bates, The Making of Black Detroit, 228-230; Bailer interview with Rev. Peck, Detroit, Michigan, March 6, 1940, in Bailer, “Negro Labor in the Automobile Industry,” 166; Thomas, Life for Us, 291-293.

Ibid, 292-293; ; Meier and Rudwick, Black Detroit, 85; Bates, 228.


Johnson’s speech, in many ways, previewed the human rights focus that characterized the vision Martin Luther King, Jr., instilled in the black freedom movement. As a fellow Morehouse man, King was influenced by Johnson, who along with Benjamin Mays and Howard Thurman, traveled to India to meet the Indian independence leader, Mohandas K. Gandhi during the 1930s. In the spring of 1950, Johnson’s
human rights message, which centered on Gandhi’s work, stirred King. As Thomas Jackson states, “King found Johnson ‘profound and electrifying’ and quickly bought a half dozen books on Gandhi.” For Jackson quote, see Thomas F. Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Struggle for Economic Justice* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 36.


533 Robin D.G. Kelley, “We Are Not What We Seem: Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South,” *Journal of American History* Vol. 80 No. 1 (June 1993): 75-112. In the same way that Kelley borrows the term “infrapolitics” from James C. Scott to discuss “the daily confrontations, evasive actions, and stifled thoughts that often inform organized political movements” in the context of black, southern workers who developed a sense of consciousness while still existing in aggrieved communities, I am also contending that black laborers in the North, specifically at the Ford Motor Company, engaged in daily, albeit tranquil acts of resistance and survival to shape their opposition to the extant power structure. Even as they appeared to comply with the existing social order at Ford, as meted out by Ward and Marshall, African Americans carved out alternative responses and strategies that, in time, permitted them to carve out a greater role within traditional mainstream politics. They may have not readily supported unionization, but their refusal to accept the racial status quo, for example, by loafing on the job when informed that they were called “niggers” or their decisions to buy cars to stave off potential layoffs reflected a burgeoning political consciousness. As Kelley states, “To assume that politics if something separate from all these events and decisions is to balkanize people’s lives and thus completely miss how struggles over power, autonomy, and pleasure take place in the daily lives of working people” (quote taken from p. 112).


536 The emergence of black Detroit’s political consciousness outside the comforts of the church is staggering and reveals African Americans’ agency to shape alternative spaces whereby they could become more socially informed and involved than historians have recognized. As scholars have chronicled, the majority of black political engagement was anchored in a prophetic religious tradition. Detroit, then, presents an interesting case study for how African Americans were able to devise new—often conventional—strategies to become enlightened about and energized to defy white racism. For a terse sampling of scholars who have examined, in part, how religious ideology infused black social movements, see Honey, *Southern Labor*, especially 71, 123-125, 136, and 206; Tera Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 44-68, 143; Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*; and Robert Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

537 In framing the ambivalent attitudes that black Detroiters had concerning unions, Dillard provides an example of the alternative spaces African Americans forged to engage in dialogue about the economic, political, and racial problems they faced. She states, “The pros and cons of union affiliation, and the question of whether the new CIO unions would be better and less racist than the old AFL ones, were hotly debated in Detroit area barbershops and beauty salons, in bars, on street corners, and around kitchen tables.” See Dillard, *Faith in the City*, 100.

538 The Reminisces, p. 81, BFRC.


540 Letter, Don Marshall to Willis Ward, July 5, 1941, Willis Ward Papers, BHC. It is worth noting that the Ford Motor Company put in place a company-wide, temporary hiring freeze that affected more than black men. But the order to halt the employment of African Americans preceded the decision to cut back jobs across the company.

Megan Taylor Shockley, “*We, Too, Are Americans*: African American Women in Detroit and Richmond, 1940-1954” (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 2004), 78.

Ibid; Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit*, 137-138;

Ibid, 138. Shockley, “*We, Too, Are Americans,*” 78. “Time not ripe” was a familiar refrain for white northerners who endeavored to slow the pace toward full racial equality between the races. For example, when two black female students tried to integrate an all-white female dormitory at Ohio State University, they were told that the “time was not ripe for colored girls and white students to live so intimately together.” See Steward, “Time not Ripe.” It is strange that Ward used the Sojourner Truth riots as a justification for the Ford Motor Company not to hire black women since the unrests began when white became enraged over the decision to permit African Americans the chance to move into their neighborhoods. On February 27, 1942, the eve of black integration into the Sojourner Truth projects, 150 whites burned a cross near the homes and plotted a way to keep African Americans out. By the next day, the protestors grew to 1200, some of them armed. When black renters arrived and attempted to cross the human wall that had been set up, mayhem ensued. Yet, by April, African Americans were allowed to move in. That Ward used the riots to deny black women jobs, once more, signified his proclivity for blaming African Americans for white racism. For more on the riots, see “The 1943 Detroit race riots, *Detroit News*, February 10, 1999; also see Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 121-123.

Shockley, “*We, Too, Are Americans,*” 78.

Ibid, 79; The Reminisces, p. 83, BFRC.


Ibid, 25, 83. Though Ford’s doors were opened to black women, they were not hired in the large numbers the UAW desired. Yet, as Megan Shockley states, “It enabled African American women to break into factories and establish a foothold, which led to more black women being hired throughout the war.” For Shockley quote, see Shockley, *We, Too, Are Americans*, 79.

The Reminisces, p. 84, 86, BFRC. Black women at Ford were not alone in confronting an industrial world drenched in sexism. As Annelise Orleck argues, “An aggravating factor for working women was that some male workers and employers felt that female workers were fair prey.” Even worse, “In an age when sexual matters were rarely discussed in public,” Orleck reveals, “neither labor leaders nor reformers expected unions to tackle the issue.” For Orleck quote, see Annelise Orleck, *Common Sense and A Little Fire: Women and Working-Class Politics in the United States, 1900-1965* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 72-73.


“Stooges for Ford,” *The Crisis*, May 1941; The Reminisces, p. 78-79, BFRC.

Carter, “The Other Side of Ford,” 12. A smear campaign led to Owens’ demise at Ford. A small colored faction, many of them loyal to Ward, spread vile stories about Owens. They accused him both of having multiple marriages and of having engaged in interracial affairs with white women. The group reported that white women were often seen coming into Rouge’s offices to see “Jesse Owens the runner.” Upon hearing the rumors, Bennett fired him.

The Reminisces, p. 79, BFRC.

Ibid, 106.


Ibid.
t the core of America's children thro
clung to his view that busing was unnecessary to achieving integration and improved education for
to desegregate. Justice Thurgood Marshall called the ruling "a giant step backward." Ford, nonetheless,
decision dealt with Detroit specifically, its ramifications extended North and S
improper and contrary to the American tradition of sanctioning local control over schools. Though the
Supreme Court determined "No Guarantee that it will Solve Educational Problems,"
561
nomination.

economy to shake off the recession by 1976 and may have placed Ford on better footing to win

to come in at 6.3% in 1975 but, instead, it was 5.7%. This small, but significant difference allowed the

Quoted, p. 155 and for a fuller analysis of the rise of neoconservatism, see chapter 4.

559 By Ford’s own admission, Republicans moved further to the right. “Since 1960, the party had swung to
the right. Zealots had taken over key positions and they seemed to believe that it was more important to
nominate a candidate who was ideologically pure than to find someone who would win an election.”
Because of this shift right, Ford fell somewhat out of favor with the new wave of conservatives. They were
disappointed in his choice of Nelson Rockefeller as his Vice-President, which Ford called his single biggest
achievement in the first 100 days in office. The “Far Right” was also upset with Gerald and his wife Betty’s
blunders that undermined the party’s social platform. Mrs. Ford, for her part, outraged
Republicans by downplaying the possible use of marijuana by her children, by professing that premarital
sex was normal, and by espousing support for the Supreme Court’s landmark 1973 Roe v. Wade decision.
Deeming Ford’s policies as “way too liberal,” the GOP looked to its new chosen champion, Ronald
Reagan, to steer the party’s ship further into the waters of neoconservatism. Ford survived the political
onslaught from Republicans but lost in the President Election to Jimmy Carter. He later confessed, “And it
burned the hell out of me that the diversion from Reagan caused me to spend an abnormal part of my time
trying to round individual delegates and raise money. That took me away from what I thought was the way

quotes, see p. 115 and for a fuller analysis of the rise of neoconservatism, see chapter 4.

I am referring to the GOP’s moderate and liberal-leaning conservatives whose policy views on some issues
are similar to those held by Nelson Rockefeller, Gerald Ford’s Vice-President. Ford would likely have been a
tad resistant to the label of being “Rockefeller Republican” and, to some degree, he was far less moderate
than, say, Rockefeller or Dwight Eisenhower. Ford’s politics, in many ways, was a Tertium Quid of both
moderate conservative and neo-conservatism, though he leaned far closer to the former than the latter. That
said, Ford’s views might not have been far too different from the political opinions espoused by Irving
Kristol and Norman Podhoretz in the early days of neoconservatism. As Critchlow points out,
“Neoconservatives still favored the welfare state and regulated capitalism” and while “some
neoconservatives were devout and practicing Christians and Jews…religious thinking was not at the core of
their thinking.” In fact, Critchlow notes that “most people in the movement tended to distrust what became
known as the Religious Right.” It is important to contextualize Critchlow’s arguments by also asserting that
neoconservatism was hardly of “one voice” in its nascent stages and still undergoing development from
what Kristol called a “current of thought” into an organized movement. In the latter phase, the individuals
like Ford who continued to favor a “modified form of capitalism” and were less defiant with regard to
operating somewhat of a welfare state were pushed out of the party’s central leadership. For Critchlow
quotes, see p. 115 and for a fuller analysis of the rise of neoconservatism, see chapter 4.

560 For more on the GOP’s distancing from Ford, see Douglas Brinkley, Gerald R. Ford: The American Presidential Series: The 38th President, 1974-1977 (New York: Henry Holt &
Company, 2007), 113-119. For Ford quote on the Republicans move to the right, see

559 By Ford’s own admission, Republicans moved further to the right. “Since 1960, the party had swung to
the right. Zealots had taken over key positions and they seemed to believe that it was more important to
nominate a candidate who was ideologically pure than to find someone who would win an election.”
Because of this shift right, Ford fell somewhat out of favor with the new wave of conservatives. They were
disappointed in his choice of Nelson Rockefeller as his Vice-President, which Ford called his single biggest
achievement in the first 100 days in office. The “Far Right” was also upset with Gerald and his wife Betty’s
blunders that undermined the party’s social platform. Mrs. Ford, for her part, outraged
Republicans by downplaying the possible use of marijuana by her children, by professing that premarital
sex was normal, and by espousing support for the Supreme Court’s landmark 1973 Roe v. Wade decision.
Deeming Ford’s policies as “way too liberal,” the GOP looked to its new chosen champion, Ronald
Reagan, to steer the party’s ship further into the waters of neoconservatism. Ford survived the political
onslaught from Republicans but lost in the President Election to Jimmy Carter. He later confessed, “And it
burned the hell out of me that the diversion from Reagan caused me to spend an abnormal part of my time
trying to round individual delegates and raise money. That took me away from what I thought was the way

New Press, 2010); 225; Yanek Mierczkowski, Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s (Lexington:
University of Kentucky, 2005), 189. Mierczkowski explains that the Ford Administration expected inflation
to come in at 6.3% in 1975 but, instead, it was 5.7%. This small, but significant difference allowed the
economy to shake off the recession by 1976 and may have placed Ford on better footing to win his party’s
nomination.

561 Ibid, 192; James Cameron, “Busing: New Court Ruling Both a Setback and Improvement but there is
No Guarantee that it will Solve Educational Problems,” Milwaukee Star, August 29, 1974. In a 5-4 ruling,
the Supreme Court determined that transferring black children from the inner city to white suburbs was
improper and contrary to the American tradition of sanctioning local control over schools. Though the
decision dealt with Detroit specifically, its ramifications extended North and South to other districts aiming
to desegregate. Justice Thurgood Marshall called the ruling “a giant step backward.” Ford, nonetheless,
clung to his view that busing was unnecessary to achieving integration and improved education for
America’s children throughout his presidency.

Vernon E. Jordan, “Carter Denouncers Need Second Look,” Milwaukee Star, April 29, 1976. In fairness, Ford was not alone in his criticisms of Carter. Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson postponed his plans to endorse Carter and angrily stated, “Is there no white politician I can trust?” Jesse Jackson, direct of Chicago’s Operation PUSH, added that Carter’s remarks were “a throwback to Hitlerian racism.” Bayard Rustin also impugned Carter, saying “he is only giving ammunition to those would divide America.” For his part, Carter did issue a public apology. “I do want to apologize to all those who have been concerned about the unfortunate use of the word ethnic purity. I don’t think there are ethnically pure neighborhoods in this country, but in response to a question that I thought was adequate on my part, I used a phrase that was, that was unfortunate.” It should be noted that Jordan’s criticisms of Ford were not a defense of Carter so much as it was an attempt to point out the President’s duplicity. For quotes from black leaders, see Time, “The Campaign: Candidate Carter: I Apologize,” April 19, 1976. For Carter’s apology, see “Jimmy Carter Doing Damage Control for ‘Ethnic Purity’ Remarks,” NBC Today Show, New York, NY: NBC Universal, April 19, 1976. Accessed May 18, 2013 from NBC Learn: https://archives.nbclearn.com/portal/site/k-12/browse/?cutecard=33592.

“Bring Us Together” was Richard Nixon’s campaign slogan and, as Terry Anderson stated, “after his inauguration in January 1969 most Americans desired just that: a time of national healing and unity.” Instead, the country was divided as urban riots, campus demonstrations, the Vietnam War, and the counterculture “youth quake” disrupted the path toward consensus. For Anderson quote, see Terry H. Anderson, The Pursuit of Fairness: A History of Affirmative Action (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 111.

Ford, A Time to Heal, 115, 140. Not every member of the black community was satisfied with this meeting. Charles Armstrong, a reporter for the Chicago Metro News, blasted Jesse Jackson and other “negro self-styled spokesmen” for their attendance. Armstrong was particularly upset with Jackson who he accused of supporting Sam McBride, a white owner of a Shell Gas Station in Chicago. McBride received nationwide coverage for charging $1.25 cents upward on fuel. Rather than Jackson critiquing these dealings, Armstrong stated that the leader of Chicago’s Operation PUSH defended McBride by arguing that major oil companies were gouging black dealers. Armstrong stated, “Many citizens in Chicago are planning some actions against Jackson, McBride, and others using the oil crisis as an excuse to rape blacks.” He added, “Some people told this reporter that Jackson is a disgrace to all blacks, and being a supposedly community leader his duties are to protect blacks. In place of doing this he organizes gouging gas dealings and tells the public that it is major oil firms who are responsible for overcharging and dirty gimmicks.” Others were upset that they had not been invited to the meeting, most notably Dr. Carlton Goodlett, President of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA. It turns out that Stanley Scott, the black White House assistant, purposely did not invite Goodlett since the NNPA chief and John Sengstacke, President of Sengstacke Publications, used their influence to block Scott and former presidential assistant Robert Brown from interviewing Democratic Presidents during the 1960s since the latter two were black Republicans. See, Charles B. Armstrong, “Jackson to See V.P. Ford—Support Rapist Gas Dealers,” Chicago Metro News, January 12, 1974; Axe Man, “The Hot Skillet,” Chicago Metro News, January 19, 1974.

The “master list of Nixon’s political opponents” was compiled by Charles W. Colson, Special Counsel to Richard Nixon, outlining people considered to be opponents of the former President. The list included organizations such as the Black Panther Party, Brookings Institution, Congressional Black Caucus, National Student Association, the National Welfare Rights Organization, and the Southern Leadership Conference, amongst others. It also included people from the world of academia, business, entertainment, and government. Academicians such as Derek Bok, Noam Chomsky, and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., were joined by entertainers like Carol Channing, Bill Cosby, Jane Fonda, Dick Gregory, John Lennon, and Barbara Streisand. See New York Times, “Lists of White House ‘Enemies’ and Memorandums Relating to Those Named,” June 28, 1973, p. 38.
Ibid. Chisholm’s allusion to Johnson was neither a reach nor was it based on the symbolism of Ford and Johnson having both ascended into the nation’s highest office because of a fallen leader—one through death, the other through dishonor. Johnson was a Texan who had been raised under Jim Crow, trained by Dixiecrat mentors, and once was an enemy to civil rights. Yet, black freedom movement affected his racial stance and guided his Great Society policies. Johnson declared that “freedom is not enough” and urged the heirs of Declaration of Independence to achieve “not just equality as a right and a theory, but equality as a fact and a result.” The hope for Ford to exhibit the posture on civil rights that Johnson had shown was immense if only because the former, unlike the latter, did not come of age believing in the virtues of segregation. For Johnson quote and more on his political transformation on the issue of race, see MacLean, Freedom is Not Enough, 5; also see Robert Dallek, Lyndon B. Johnson: Portrait of a President (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 97-108.


House Committee on Judiciary, Gerald R. Ford Vice Presidential Nomination: Hearings on Nomination of Gerald Ford to be Vice President of the United States of America, 93rd Congress, 1st sess., November 15-18, 19-21, 26, 1973.

“The freedom of choice” was also connected to notions of morality. There was an overriding belief by whites that whenever white schools desegregated, white homes suffered. In addition, because forced busing was glimpsed as a yearning of liberals far more change. These alterations could already be seen in the Supreme Court’s 1962 ruling outlawing school prayer and legalization of the sale of contraceptive devices. “Such decisions” according to Lisa McGirr, “only served further notice that the liberal state was the enemy of ‘moral virtue.’” Thus, antibusing was part and parcel of preserving the morality of choice even if it meant the prolongation of segregated schools. Lisa McGirr, Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New Right (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 159-160; quote taken from p. 160.

Kevin Kruse states, “Notably, the whites who invoked ‘freedom of association’ did not define the concept positively, in terms of what outside groups they could join, but negatively, in terms of what groups of outsiders they could shun.” For a detailed analysis of the “freedom of association,” see Kruse, White Flight, chapter 6; quote taken from p. 163.

White northerners like Ford regularly decried southern segregation while subtly upholding the racial status quo, provoking the black comedian Dick Gregory to lampoon the artificial dichotomy: “Down South they don’t care how close I get as long as I don’t get too big; and up North they don’t care how big I get as long as I don’t get too close.” For Gregory quote, see Dick Gregory, From the Back of the Bus (New York: Avon Books, 1962), 64.

Lassiter, “Socioeconomic Integration,” 128. Anti-bus hysteria pitted efforts to remedy racial injustice against the pervasive belief that individual achievement accounted for partiality. As Matthew Lassiter states, “The spatial landscape of the white-collar suburbs shaped a fundamental approval of the status quo, grounded in a historical narrative of color-blind individualism that emphasized the family privileges of class and consumerism rather than collective remedies for past discrimination” (128).


For more on the hypocrisy of the North, see Lukas, Common Ground, 233-234.


House Committee, Ford Vice Presidential Nomination; also see Washington Post, October 18, 1973, A2.


Busing Background Book, GRFPL.


Brinkley, Gerald R. Ford, 119.

Ford, A Time to Heal, 412.

Letter, Clayton E. Wilhite to the Honorable Willis F. Ward, August 23, 1976. Wilhite praised Ward for the film, calling it “universally accepted” Ford, members of the White House, and the Republican Party. Wilhite stated, “We don’t believe the film had a more moving or emotional sequence than the one you provided in your discussion of the President’s football days and friendships at the University of Michigan.”


Ford, “Inclusive America.”

Letter, Willis Ward to the President, August 23, 1976, GRFPL.

The Reminiscences, p. 21-23 (quote taken from p. 21), BFRC.

Ibid, 23.


For more on the “socially responsible individualism,” see Shaw, What a Woman Ought to Be, 4, 6, 54-56, 60-61, 66, 74, 170.

“Pro Basketball Planned for Detroit by Bomber,” Willis Ward Papers, BHC. Ward’s endorsement of a Negro basketball team mirrored the clarion calls African Americans made to develop their own enterprises. One of those pleas came exactly one week before Ward was benched in the game against Georgia Tech. John C. Dancy, of the Detroit Urban League, urged African Americans to support Memorial Park Cemetery and all other race business concerns.” Dancy made his appeal in a column written in the Tribune Independent of Michigan, which was considered to be the “Vanguard for Negro Rights” and had published an extensive article on Ward’s impending benching. In an article next to a feature that was titled, “U. Of M. Students Show Keen Resentment as School Bows to Southern Prejudice,” Dancy wrote, “Every time the Negro attempts something in his own behalf it is a step in the right direction. If we are ever to take our place in the fields of business, commerce or industry we must develop enterprises of our own.” Ironically, the Tribune Independent was owned by the family of Margaret Ward (nee McCall) who later married Ward. For Dancy quote, see John C. Dancy, “Memorial Park Merits Negro Support,” in Tribune Independent of Michigan, October 13, 1934.

Willis Ward, interview by John Behee, September 19, 1970, BHLUM.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Willis Ward, interview by John Behee, September 19, 1970, BHLUM

Willis F. Ward, “Commencement Speech at North Michigan University,” (speech, Marquette, MI, January 17, 1970), BHC.


Nick Salvatore, Singing in a Strange Land: C.L. Franklin, the Black Church, and the Transformation of America (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2005), 178, 181.


Letter, Willis Ward to the President, August 23, 1976, GRFPL.

Ward, “Commencement Speech.”

Litwack, North of Slavery, 111.


Donna Acquaviva, “Ward Strikes Blow For Lib in Campaign Lifter,” in *The Michigan Chronicle*, May 11, 1974. Several women leaders applauded Ward: Noreen Green Adelson, director and producer of the Detroit Town Hall Lecture series; Patricia Burnett, chairperson of the National Organization of Women (NOW); Theresa Brinson Strickland, supervisor of distributive education, Board of Education; Delores Norman, home economics supervisor, Detroit public schools; and Jeannette Weiss, member of Michigan Cancer Foundation, Myasthenia Gravis Foundation vice president and member of both the Economic club and Women’s Economic Club of Detroit.


“True Americanism” was the inclusionary ideal expressed by Theodore Roosevelt that contended that the best qualified, including immigrants, would be welcomed into American society. Roosevelt desired a society where merit would not be compromised by prejudice though racism hampered his civic nationalism. Still, Gary Gerstle points out that Roosevelt’s display of civil nationalism “gave nonwhite Americans something to work with, for its democratic and egalitarian ethos allowed them to believe that they could yet find a way to gain full citizenship rights and thus to include themselves in the great national experiment.” For more on Roosevelt’s true Americanism, see Theodore Roosevelt, *True Americanism: Four Essays* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1897); for Gerstle quote, see Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 46.

Black access to leisure activities also provided African Americans with the chance to substantiate their manhood. As Adrian Burgos states, “Those who suffered racial exclusion endeavored to challenge claims they lacked playing skill and ‘gentlemanly’ comportment. Through their performances on the professional ball fields and their conduct before the sporting public, these men attempted to change perceptions of who could be viewed as a…ballplayer and as a man.” For Burgos quote, see Adrian Burgos, *Playing America’s Game: Baseball, Latinos, and the Color Line* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 2.

In some instances, black athletes did not envision themselves as anything more than just athletic performers. Jesse Owens argued that his act of defiance against Aryan supremacy was unintended as he merely desired to compete on the track and field as he had done throughout his life. Joe Louis was strongly admonished by his management not to challenge the prevailing racial status quo and to avoid any actions that might discredit his race.


Henderson, *Sidelined*, 5, 8, 16; Wiggins, *Glory Bound*, 120. Although black athletes are thought of as traditionally conservative, it should not be assumed that other African Americans were the opposite. In fact, African Americans attending predominantly white institutions in the North were often disinterested in challenging racism. According to Raymond Wolters, “The black student at…integrated institutions were abused in many ways, and some blacks today say that these token Negros were ‘whitewashed’ intellectually. Exposure to a curriculum designed for whites and controlled by whites allegedly created a group of docile Negro graduates who made peace with the prevailing order and advanced their individual careers while ignoring the need to work for less privileged blacks. It is said that these ‘middle-class Negroes’ were deracinated by their experiences at predominantly white colleges; they did well on the white man’s examination only because they internalized white values and became white men with black skin.” For Wolters quote, see Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975, 314.

Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, xxxix.


Dude, “Crisis in ’34.”

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659 Ibid.
661 Ibid.
662 House Resolution 422, State of Michigan (1976)