

“Watch What We Do”: The Politics and Possibilities of Black Women’s  
Athletics, 1910-1970

By  
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## Abstract

“Watch What We Do”: The Politics and Possibilities of Black Women’s Athletics, 1910-1970 analyzes the ideological and institutional development of amateur and professional sports for black women in the United States before the passage of Title IX and during the Age of Jim Crow. It locates black women’s athletic history between silence and symbol, forgetting and remembrance. In considering the development of black women’s athletics and the symbolic black woman athlete, this project moves to reexamine our understanding of black women’s movement and mobility by considering the work that black women’s athletic bodies did for institution-building and international, national, and local statecraft. By focusing on black women in motion, this dissertation uses middle-class black institutions – like colleges and sports teams – to write a new history of black women’s labor. By tracing the long history of black women’s athletic participation, this dissertation demonstrates the ways in which gendered power dynamics, particularly intra-racial ones, mediated black Americans’ engagement with athletics and physical culture. While highlighting women who used athletics to gain social mobility or assert new notions of modern and respectable black womanhood, this project also examines black institutions, sporting organizations and state apparatuses that routinely used black women’s athletic bodies to advance their respective social, political and financial interests.

Readers: N.D.B Connolly, Ronald Walters, Marcia Chatelain, Sara Berry, Jen Culbert

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## Introduction

A slight breeze rustled her voluminous hair as Florence Griffith Joyner took her place on the track at the XXIV Olympiad. The track star popularly known as “Flo Jo” had already won two gold medals at the 1988 games. Seoul’s warm and dry September air, rippled around her as she anxiously awaited the baton pass from her teammate. The onlookers waited to see if she would make history or if, with what one sportswriter dubbed her long and flamboyant “dragon lady fingernails,” she’d botch the baton pass. When the time came, Joyner firmly grasped the pass from teammate, Sheila Echols, and she ran a quick 100 meters to where her teammate Evelyn Ashford stood. Another successful baton exchange and a blistering final relay leg from Ashford and it was over-- another gold medal and another entry into the history books. Joyner was officially the “world’s fastest woman” on the world’s fastest team. She was now the most decorated female sprinter in U.S. Olympic history.<sup>1</sup>

The woman Joyner supplanted in the history books watched the race intently from the stands. Wilma Rudolph, the former track sensation and gold medalist, was nearly three decades removed from her own Olympic glory. Yet reporters were quick to make comparisons between Rudolph and Joyner. Both women earned three gold medals at a single Olympiad. They competed in the same events.<sup>2</sup> They were from large families of

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<sup>1</sup> Official Report, Organization and Planning, The Games of the XXIV Olympiad; Wendy E. Lane,

<sup>2</sup> Both women earned gold in the 100m, 200m, 400 x 100m relays. At the time only one other woman had ever earned 3 gold medals in Olympic track history. Valerie Brisco-Hooks had won gold in the 200m, 400m and 400x 4m relays. While her feat matched Wilma’s it was considerably less

low economic means. Both were black women who were praised for their “attractiveness” and “class.” The Italian press even bestowed upon them the same nickname, “le tigress negress.”<sup>3</sup>

Despite their presumed similarities, there was one huge difference between them. In the more than two decades that had passed between Rudolph and Joyner’s respective victories, amateurism had been ushered out of track and field. Unlike Rudolph, Joyner could earn money and endorsements for her athletic success. And she quickly did, earning the other nickname of “Cash Flo.” Joyner enjoyed national and international endorsement deals amounting to an estimated three to four million dollars per year. Her name was on a fashion line. Mattel made a Barbie doll in her likeness. And she owned her own line of athletic wear, which netted her an additional three to four million dollars a year.<sup>4</sup> Far from feeling jilted from the disparities in their earnings, Rudolph fully supported Joyner. It’s “a good thing to see a ...Black female athlete [like Joyner] on the cover of *Time* and *Newsweek*.”<sup>5</sup> Rudolph saw Joyner as a direct part of her legacy. When Rudolph watched Joyner enter the history books that September in Seoul, she described feeling joy and satisfaction. For Rudolph it seemed a joint accomplishment. “It was a

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coved. “Valerie Brisco-Hooks: Triple Olympic Medal Winner,” *Ebony Magazine*, November 1984, pg. 172-178

<sup>3</sup> Wilma Rudolph, *Wilma* (New York: New American Library, 1977), 5; “World Wide Invitations Flood Wilma Rudolph,” *The Chicago Defender*, September 17, 1960; “Wilma Getting Taste Of Fame,” *Daily Defender (Daily Edition) (1956-1960)*, September 12, 1960. Kate Tyndall, "Spectator Sports the Fastest Woman Ever the World is Watching Florence Griffith Joyner - and Not Only when She Runs." *Newsday*, September 7, 1988; Moore, “The Spoils Of Victory”; Wendy E. Lane, “Golden girls hit track with style.”

<sup>4</sup> Anise C. Wallace, "Flojo One Of Few Seoul Stars To Cash In." *Chicago Tribune*, November 6, 1988. Moore, “The Spoils Of Victory.”

<sup>5</sup> Lane, “Golden girls hit track with style”

great thrill for me” remarked Rudolph of Joyner’s success, “every time she ran, I ran.”<sup>6</sup>

Media comparisons of black women past and present were not reserved to track and field. On Seoul’s Olympic tennis courts, Zina Garrison received treatment similar to that experienced by Joyner. The 25-year-old Texas tennis phenom was being hailed as the “next Althea Gibson,” as she was en route to earning two medals at the 1988 games.<sup>7</sup> Two years later, reporters would double-down on this comparison, as Garrison became the first black woman since Gibson to appear in a Grand Slam final at Wimbledon.

Cross-generational comparisons in sports media, in themselves, are not a problem. As it concerned black women, however, such juxtapositions present a simplistic genealogy. In light of the history of segregation and institutional racism, one generation of black women must, by necessity, pave the way for another. Rudolph and Gibson made later accomplishments of black women athletes possible. When journalists make these superficial comparisons they also render invisible the institutions that developed and sustained black women’s athletics. The analysis of Gibson and Garrison included comments about their individual appearances and tennis achievements yet they failed to mention the American Tennis Association (ATA), an African American organizations that helped Gibson and Garrison develop their respective tennis carriers, and that did the same for scores of black women for over seventy years. Representations of Rudolph, Gibson, Griffith-Joyner and Garrison all frame them as anomalies—where their presence

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<sup>6</sup> Rich Keenan Marney, "Wilma Rudolph 'It's Important to be Yourself and have Self-Confidence'." *Chicago Tribune* January 08, 1989

<sup>7</sup> Randy Phillips, "Houston's Garrison: A Tough Road to Centre Court." *Gazette*, August 7, 1986; Roy S. Johnson, "Miss Garrison Cuts A Mold Of Her Own." *New York Times* September 3, 1982, Late Edition (East Coast).

as black women in sports, rather than their greatness or their ties to deep, historic sporting communities, set them apart.

Media representations of black women athletes may divorce them from the longer history of black women in sport, but the women themselves demonstrate the collective nature of black achievement in sport. At the Seoul games, black women comprised two-thirds of the gold medal winning USA basketball team. In fact, since women's basketball became an Olympic sport in 1976, black women have made up no less than a third of the roster, which reflects the long history of competitive basketball leagues in black communities.<sup>8</sup> Also competing in Seoul were Lynette Love, Debra Holloway and Sharon Jewel, who took home the gold, silver and bronze medals, respectively, in Tae Kwon Do, a remarkable accomplishment in Korea, the birthplace of that martial art. The trio received relatively little coverage and no historical treatment in the media. Yet all three were educated and trained at Howard University, a black educational institution with a long history of supporting and developing a wide array of sporting opportunities for women.<sup>9</sup>

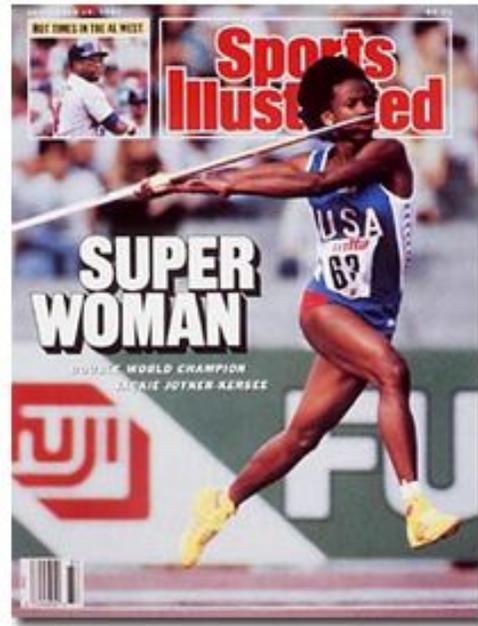
The 1988 Olympic games took place at the height of the “women's sporting revolution.” This was a new era of women's sports marked by the passage of Title IX, Billie Jean King's defeat of Bobby Riggs in a televised battle of the sexes tennis match,

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<sup>8</sup> USA Basketball Archives, Women's National Team Rosters, 1976-2012. Lynnette Woodward, captain of the 1984 women's Olympic basketball team, came to the 1988 games with the title of the “first female globetrotter,” securing a professional future with the traveling basketball showteam. Woodward not only demonstrates the continued lack of professional sporting opportunities for black women, she also parallels black women who played baseball in the Negro Leagues and were hired as gate attractions to financially boost black sporting organizations.

<sup>9</sup> “Great Olympic Movements: Seoul 1988,” *Ebony Magazine*, May 1992, 124

and the muscular and javelin-wielding Jackie Joyner-Kersey gracing the cover of *Sports Illustrated*.<sup>10</sup> The money these later black women were able to earn contrasts greatly with their predecessors.



*Figure 1. Jackie Joyner-Kersey on the Cover of Sports Illustrated, January 1987.  
Courtesy Sports Illustrated Archives*

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<sup>10</sup> Title IX refers a section of the 1972 Educational Amendments signed into law by President Richard Nixon. The section held that no person shall be discriminated on the basis of sex from an educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. While not specific to athletics the amendment had a severe impact on high school and college athletics for girls. Realizing the implications of the law many sporting organizations and athletic departments, including the National College Athletic Association (NCAA), attempted to change Title IX in court. These highly publicized challenges helped shape public knowledge of Title IX and led to widespread association of the amendments with sports. Title IX has also been used to address campus sexual assault and the handling of sexual harassment cases. The very public legal battles of sexual assault protection and Title IX at schools like the University of Tennessee and Baylor University have once again shifted public association with the amendment some fifty years after its passage. Deborah L. Blake, *Getting in the Game: Title IX and the Women's Sporting Revolution*, (New York: New York University Press, 2012); Susan Ware, *Game, Set, Match: Billy Jean King and the Revolution in Women's Sports*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Jessica Luther, *Unsportsmanlike Conduct: College Football and the Politics of Rape* (Brooklyn, NY: Edge of Sports, 2016). Sports Illustrated Archives, Cover image, January 1987; "The Promise of Title IX: Sexual Violence and the Law," *Dissent Magazine*, <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/title-ix-activism-sexual-violence-law>.

Simplified juxtapositions mute another continuity – the representative power of black women. When it comes to the larger development and institutional support available to black women in sports, their symbolic power is just as important as their actual accomplishments. Florence Joyner’s personal and financial manager, Gordon Baskin, responded thusly to questions about how Joyner’s retirement and its impact on her earnings and celebrity: “truth is...she’s worth more as a symbol.”<sup>11</sup>

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This dissertation analyzes the ideological and institutional development of amateur and professional sports for black women in the United States before the passage of Title IX and during the Age of Jim Crow. It locates black women’s athletic history between silence and symbol, forgetting and remembrance. In considering the development of black women’s athletics and the symbolic black woman athlete, I argue that we can reshape our understanding of black women’s movement and mobility – indeed their very meaning – by examining the work that black women’s athletic bodies did for institution-building and international, national, and local statecraft. By focusing on black women in motion, this dissertation uses middle-class black institutions – like colleges and sports teams – to write a new history of black women’s labor.

The passage of Title IX in 1972 was a watershed for women’s sports.<sup>12</sup> Not only did it increase participation of girls and women in high school and college sports, but it

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<sup>11</sup> Moore, “The Spoils Of Victory.”

also led to the increased creation of professional leagues for women. For black institutions that had supported and sustained black women's athletics throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, Title IX also served as a death knell. Black women sporting programs at historically black colleges and universities, in churches, and from countless community centers, suffered in ways similar to how Jim Crow schools, businesses and black male sporting leagues suffered in the years following integration. As Olympic coach and famed Tennessee State University track coach, Ed Temple noted, "once Title IX hit, that was it! We couldn't recruit against places like [the University of] Tennessee, they have the resources."<sup>13</sup>

There is a global story to be told here as well. In 1960, sports writer, Marion Jackson, claimed that the "Women's Sports Day at Tuskegee Institute," had been the "wedge that led to global [athletic] competition for Negro girls." After remarking on how much international goodwill black women athletes brought the United States world wide, Jackson notes that the girls have succeed by ignoring skeptics and silently indicating that "folks should simply watch what we do...on the track".<sup>14</sup> When Jackson highlights the connection between black college sports days and international athletic competition, he is highlighting the connection between sports programs for women in black institutions under segregation and famed global competition such as the Olympic Games. While

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<sup>12</sup> The effect of Title IX on the participation of women and girls in sport is vast. In the first thirty years of its passage the amount of girls playing high school sports rose 1079% (in comparison to a 22% increase for boys participation over the same time) and the [participation of women in collegiate sport rose 622% (compared to 46% of men's participation over the same time). Blake, *Getting in the Game: Title IX and the Women's Sporting Revolution*; "Title IX: 37 Words That Changed Everything," *espnW*, 2016,

<sup>13</sup> Ed Temple, in discussion with the author, July 11<sup>th</sup> 2015, Nashville, TN

<sup>14</sup> Marion E. Jackson, "Sports of the World," *Atlanta Daily World*, May 6, 1960.

colored school athletics and competition on the Olympic stage may seem worlds apart, for many black women, high school and college sports were indeed direct doors to the highest forms of global athletic recognition. Even more than that, sports served as the engine for black women's civic inclusion and a reimagining of the value of black women's work.

This dissertation traces the way black women used their athletic bodies to push for inclusion in both male-dominated black institutions during segregation and national narratives of American exceptionalism in cosmopolitan and international competitions. By tracing the long history of black women's athletic participation, I demonstrate the ways in which gendered power and the interracial business of athletics mediated black Americans' engagement with physical culture and citizenship. I also highlight black women who used athletics to gain social mobility and assert new notions of modern and respectable black womanhood.

This dissertation is not just concerned with the most visible and successful black women athletes. The preoccupation with individual narratives tends to obscure the widespread existence of black women in sports. Instead this project seeks to ground the experiences of ostensibly exceptional women within the black institutions and national sporting bodies that advanced and sustained black women's athletics more broadly. This dissertation thus explores both the politics *and* the possibilities of black women's involvement in sports, recognizing that even the exerted bodies of black women athletes, could be a site of profound community identity, national pride and Cold War geopolitics.

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Black women athletes remain vastly understudied in both black women's history as well as sports history.<sup>15</sup> Yet this dissertation's primary aim is not to simply fill an historical silence. Rather, "*Watch What We Do*" centers black women athletes within central concerns of labor history, business history, and the history of national and international belonging. It contends that understanding black women athletes enhances, even reconfigures, our sense of sports as a historical force.

For the black women competing in the 1988 Olympics, Korea seemed far indeed from where they had honed their athletic skills. Yet the story of the advance of black women's athletics did not just become global at the XXIV Olympiad. Historians of sport have paid close attention to the way the urbanization, immigration and migration altered the landscape of American cities and coincided with the rise of organized sports.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For works on black women athletes see: Jennifer H. Lansbury, *A Spectacular Leap: Black Women Athletes in Twentieth-Century America* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2014); Rita Liberti and Maureen M. Smith, *(Re)Presenting Wilma Rudolph* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2015); Rita Liberti, "'We Were Ladies, We Just Played Basketball Like Boys': African American Womanhood and Competitive Basketball at Bennett College, 1928-1942," *Journal of Sport History* 26, no. 3 (1999): 567-584; Patricia Vertinsky and Gwendolyn Captain, "More Myth Than History: American Culture and Representations of the Black Female's Athletic Ability," *Journal of Sport History* 25, no. 3 (1998): 532-561; For books that deal with gender in sports the more in depth treatment is Susan K. Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-century Women's Sport* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995) it features one chapter on black women; For books that study race and masculinity see: Chapter 5 of Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Theresa Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner: Boxing in the Shadow of the Global Color Line* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Books dealing with black athletes and politics include: Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph But the Struggle: 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete*, 1 edition (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2004); Damion L. Thomas, *Globetrotting: African American Athletes and Cold War Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012) black women athletes are largely absent from these accounts.

<sup>16</sup> Steven A. Riess, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991). Chris Elzey and David K. Wiggins, eds., *DC Sports: The Nation's Capital at Play*, 1 edition (Fayetteville, Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, 2015);

Scholars like Davarian Baldwin and Rob Ruck have analyzed sports and urban space together in order to trace the lives of black Americans in segregated cityscapes.<sup>17</sup> Others have looked at sports and rural places to illuminate processes of community and identity formation.<sup>18</sup> When sport and place are studied together, however, black women often remain conspicuously absent.

In black women's history, conversely, place has been (and continues to be) an important vein of analysis. Studies have traced black women and black girls labors in the Urban South, black women migrants in the Midwest, and black women reform efforts in cities North, South and West. There has even emerged in recent years a veritable subfield in black girls studies that interrogates the unique challenges faced by black girls and adolescents across the twentieth century.<sup>19</sup> This work has demonstrated the ways in which black women's and girls' gendered and racialized bodies have shaped city politics, changed the local labor force and shifted the possibilities of racial activism.<sup>20</sup>

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Daniel A. Nathan, *Baltimore Sports* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, 2016), Ryan Swanson and David K. Wiggins, eds., *Philly Sports: Teams, Games, and Athletes from Rocky's Town* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes*; Rob Ruck, *Sandlot Seasons: Sport in Black Pittsburgh* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

<sup>18</sup> Daniel A. Nathan, ed., *Rooting for the Home Team*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013); "America Needs Farmers': Communal Identity, the University of Iowa Football Team and the Farm Crisis of the 1980s - The International Journal of the History of Sport - Volume 27, Issue 8".

<sup>19</sup> See: Marcia Chatelain, *South Side Girls: Growing Up in the Great Migration*, (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2015); LaKisha Michelle Simmons, *Crescent City Girls: The Lives of Young Black Women in Segregated New Orleans*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015)

<sup>20</sup> Tera W. Hunter, *To "Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance--A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (Random House LLC, 2011); Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West," *Signs* 14, no. 4 (July 1, 1989): 912–920; Hazel V. Carby, "Policing the Black Woman's Body in an Urban Context," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 4 (1992):

Building on this sizable and growing literature, this dissertation merges the discussion of place and sport with the analysis of black women in rural and urban spaces. It reveals the ways in which sports were used both to liberate black women from certain forms of work and to police black women's bodies within changing cityscapes and rural communities.

I argue, further, that the *movement* of black women's athletic bodies between rural, urban and global spaces adds a key dimension to the emerging study of black women's internationalism.<sup>21</sup> For these athletic girls were not intellectuals or activists or wanderlusts, in the ways that usually defines studies of black internationalism. Truly, most of these women rarely traveled domestically outside of their small towns or city neighborhoods. Yet through athletic competitions, many black women in Jim Crow

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738; Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

<sup>21</sup> For more on black women's internationalism: See: Erik S. McDuffie, "'For Full Freedom of . . . Colored Women in Africa, Asia, and in These United States . . .': Black Women Radicals and the Practice of a Black Women's International," *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–30; Michelle Ann Stephens, *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914–1962* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Keisha N. Blain, "'We Want to Set the World on Fire': Black Nationalist Women and Diasporic Politics in the New Negro World, 1940–1944," *Journal of Social History*, June 23, 2015; Barbara Ransby, *Eslanda: The Large and Unconventional Life of Mrs. Paul Robeson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); Gerald Horne, *Race Woman: The Lives of Shirley Graham Du Bois* (New York: NYU Press, 2002); For analysis of a distinctly working-class black woman activist see: Keisha N. Blain, "'[F]or the Rights of Dark People in Every Part of the World': Pearl Sherrod, Black Internationalist Feminism, and Afro-Asian Politics during the 1930s," *Souls* 17, no. 1–2 (April 3, 2015): 90–112; For existing studies on black women internationals who were not activists or intellectuals see: Zakiya R. Adair, "Transgressive (Re) Presentations: Black Women, Vaudeville, and the Politics of Performance in Early Transatlantic Theater," *Understanding Blackness Through Performance: Contemporary Arts and the Representation of Identity*, 2013, 75; Jayna Brown, "Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern," 2009; Tiffany M. Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry*, *Women in American History* (Urbana ; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), Chapter 4

America were connected to a global community and engaged in the cultivation of global understandings of blackness, and perhaps even more critically, Americanness.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to physical movement, social mobility is another essential element of the story of black women's athletics. Within sports history, the use of sport for social mobility has been explored through the examination of sport, ethnicity and immigration as well as sports themselves moving from "low class" to "high-class amusements."<sup>23</sup> Focusing on black women who used sports for social and economic mobility intervenes in existent black women's historiography by shifting emphasis away from the conventional focus on middle-class institutions of respectability, such as churches, schools or women's clubs.<sup>24</sup> Through sport, we see black women use athletic programs as uplift organizations. We see independent sporting clubs operating in similar ways that reform agencies had in many cities of the north and south. Moreover, for poor black girls, the resources sometimes accompanying the sporting life, such as college scholarships,

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<sup>23</sup> Riess, *City Games*; Steven A. Riess, "Professional Baseball and Social Mobility," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 11, no. 2 (1980): 235–250; Steven A. Riess, "Sport and the American Dream," *Journal of Social History* 14, no. 2 (1980): 295–303; Adrian Burgos, *Playing America's Game: Baseball, Latinos, and the Color Line* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). Boxing and boxers, all male but both black and white, have also warranted much attention. See: Elliott J. Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner*; T. Runstedtler, "Visible Men: African American Boxers, the New Negro, and the Global Color Line," *Radical History Review* 2009, no. 103 (2009): 59–81; "A Fighting Chance: The Jewish-American Boxing Experience

<sup>24</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*; Chatelain, *South Side Girls*; Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Paula J. Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: W. Morrow, 1984); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press Chapel Hill, 1996).

allowed young women to use their athletic bodies to push for inclusion and carve out spaces for themselves.

Finally this dissertation pushes for a deeper understanding of what I call “athletic labor” - a concept not readily found in either sports history or black women’s history. While historians of sport have spent considerable time examining the economies of sport, less sustained focus has been placed on the athletic exertion itself.<sup>25</sup> Black women’s history has diligently and consistently examined black women’s labor and enhanced labor history as a field. Still much of these studies focus on black women as domestics, agricultural workers, teachers, social workers or nurses.<sup>26</sup> Even literature that critically expands our understandings of black women’s labor by highlighting mothers who argued and organized for economic justice or reforms in sex work advances certain normative assumptions about femininity as gendered segregated spheres of men’s work on the one side and women’s work on the other.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> “Black Baseball, Black Business: Race Enterprise and the Fate of the Segregated Dollar: Roberta J. Newman, Joel Nathan Rosen, Monte Irvin, Earl Smith; Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes*; Travis Vogan, *Keepers of the Flame: NFL Films and the Rise of Sports Media*, 1st Edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014); Michael Oriard, *Brand NFL: Making and Selling America’s Favorite Sport*, 2 edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> Hunter, *To ’Joy My Freedom*; Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers during the Jim Crow Era*, *Women in Culture and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Micki McElya, *Clinging To Mammy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*; Curwood, Anastasia, *Stormy Weather: Middle-Class African American Marriages Between the Two World Wars* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

<sup>27</sup> Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present*, 2 edition (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2009); Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Beacon Press, 2005); Lisa Levenstein, *A Movement Without Marches: African American Women and the Politics of Poverty in Postwar Philadelphia*, 1 edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States* (New York:

“Athletic labor” includes the labors of black women who work in male spaces in the midst of male fans, coaches, physical educators and sportswriters. In these positions, sport is tied to mothering and sex in ways that students of the existing literature on black women’s labor might recognize. At the same time, though, athletic labor is a physical labor of an all-together different kind. The professional female baseball player or the track star use a highly subjective standard of excellence set largely by men. Those who don’t receive compensation because of amateurism rules still labor tirelessly as ambassadors for the country. Those women are performing both an athletic and symbolic labor – a labor that is not grounded in domestic or mothering work- carrying with them the very image of the nation, both in its self perception and as its perceived by observers on the world stage.

And still, mothering mattered a great deal. For black women athletes, mothering and marriage marked the end of athletic careers that were initially supposed to exist only to cultivate strong and beautiful women. Some athletes hid their children. And coaches emphasized heteronormativity while constantly insisting that none of the female athletes got engaged or were married. In ways similar to emerging work on black women sex workers, athletics was a physical labor that was non-traditional and blurred lines of respectability and femininity.<sup>28</sup> Yet unlike sex work, athletics also remained a very public

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Routledge, 2004); Erin D. Chapman, *Prove It On Me: New Negroes, Sex, and Popular Culture in the 1920s*, 1 edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Talitha L. LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence: Black Women and Convict Labor in the New South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

<sup>28</sup> Cynthia M. Blair, *I’ve Got to Make My Livin’: Black Women’s Sex Work in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (Chicago ; London: University Of Chicago Press, 2010); LaShawn Harris, *Sex Workers, Psychics, and Numbers Runners: Black Women in New York City’s Underground Economy* (Urbana:

display where black women's working bodies were visible and scrutinized. While seemingly vastly different occupations, in terms of public morality, this dissertation highlights some of the ways black women laborers, such as athletes and sex workers, shared respectabilities, grey spaces, and at times, even physical brothels, as they jointly navigated white supremacy and patriarchy.

Concentrating on athletic and symbolic labor creates new avenues for considering black women as workers while also illuminating their exploitation. If we understand the physical labor of the black woman athlete, we can also assess what that labor generates, how institutions or organizations gain from her athleticism, and what her athletic body is worth as a symbol.

Perhaps, the absence of black women athletes in both black women's history as well as sports history is due to the perceived lack of sources- but perhaps not. Black women athletes rarely left archival paper trails. Yet, using the methods of African American history and gender history, this dissertation brings together various sources in order to locate the voices of black women athletes in new and under-examined places. This project uses newspapers, oral histories, institutional histories of black colleges, Olympic reports, State Department files and visual sources to foreground the voices, concerns and experiences of black women within the larger institutions and organizations they are moving within.

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University of Illinois Press, 2016). For additional work on female sex workers of color in a U.S. context see: Beth Bailey and David Farber, *The First Strange Place: The Alchemy of Race and Sex in World War II Hawaii* (Simon and Schuster, 2012).

This dissertation is arranged into two sections. The first section, Politics, moves from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the start of the post-World War Two era, tracing competing ideas that developed and constrained athletic opportunities for black women. Chapter One details the centrality of athletics and recreation to black middle class social welfare institutions in changing cityscapes. Chapter Two examines the development of women's athletics at black colleges as ideas about modernity on campus, respectable recreation, and gender collided forcefully in the inter war era. Chapter Three highlights a handful of black women who were able to play sports professionally in a time where professional sports for women were almost non-existent.

The second section, Possibilities, highlights elite black women athletes, mainly those in track and field in the 1950s and 1960s. I use the word "possibilities" to acknowledge that in some ways, these women were elite exceptions, yet they existed within the same structures constraining black women athletes as a group. Their successes and struggles highlight what was possible for black women athletes. Chapter Four discusses the mobility of elite athletes who were primarily from the rural south and were able to earn scholarships and opportunities to attend college and travel the world. Chapter Five examines black women as both icons of racial liberalism and capitalist democracy as the US State Department invested in black women athletes as goodwill ambassadors during the Cold War.

Taken together, the two sections of this dissertation form an account of black women's athletics prior to the passage of Title IX. By focusing on athletic and symbolic labor, it pushes readers to return to those comparative genealogies of Flo Jo and Rudolph

or Zina and Gibson with a deeper critical perspective. This dissertation concludes in fact, by asking readers to contextualize and understand the amount of money made by the athletes of the 1980s as part of the historical and largely ignored evolution of the political and social meaning of the black sporting woman.

## POLITICS

*“All I wanted to do was play, play, play...”<sup>1</sup>*  
*-Althea Gibson*

*“A Black Women’s body was never hers alone”<sup>2</sup>*  
*-Fannie Lou Hamer*

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<sup>1</sup> Althea Gibson quote from “Sport. That Gibson Girl,” *Time Magazine*, August 26, 1957

<sup>2</sup> McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street*. xvii

## Chapter 1

### **City Games: The Politics of Play and Leisure**

Lucy Diggs Slowe stood near the net on a decaying tennis court. She wore a white tennis skirt, short-sleeved white shirt and had her short hair pulled back with a few wayward strands sticking out. Baltimore's Druid Hill Park was bustling all around her, with black Americans who had traveled from near and far to watch the newly founded American Tennis Association's first annual national tennis tournament. It was 1917, twenty years since she had first arrived in Baltimore as a young girl. This city was where she had learned to play tennis. Baltimore's local social welfare organizations and black public schools had fostered her interest in the game. Her love for the sport endured well into her young adulthood as she played at Howard University and now played as a representative of her city in a national tournament. A newspaper photographer snapped her picture as she stood there firmly, confidently gripping her tennis racket: She was a national champion, the first black woman to ever earn that title.<sup>1</sup>

The photograph captured something more than an early twentieth-century black woman; like many of her peers she embraced being modern and respectable, but most importantly she was an athlete.

Slowe's journey from a young migrant girl from where with little means to a prominent 'race women,' educator and tennis champion epitomizes a larger story of

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<sup>1</sup> The organization of black athletic clubs, leagues, and tournaments led to the crowning of many national champions. Slowe was the first women in any black sporting league to earn that title.

migration, urbanization and black community formation in the early twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> In centering Slowe's experiences with sport, namely tennis, this chapter highlights the importance of recreation in the urban uplift reform efforts of white and black social reformers. Moreover as a black girl who grew in to a modern woman, Slowe demonstrated the way that recreation and reform intersected, and was deeply gendered.

Historians have offered compelling discussions about sport and the spatial politics of race and recreation in rapidly changing cities at the turn of the century.<sup>3</sup> Steven Reiss argues that the city, "more than any other single factor, influenced the development of sport and recreational amusements in America."<sup>4</sup> Early twentieth century urbanization gave rise to an organized sporting industry as athletics became both a point of civic pride

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<sup>2</sup> Historians have grappled with applying traditional class terminologies to black populations, particularly at the turn of the century. As Glenda Gilmore notes black people rarely referred to themselves as "middle class" instead using the words "elite" "prominent" or "race man" or "race women" to denote standing in the community. I follow my subjects who use the terms prominent and elite to describe both themselves and the organizations they run. They also use the term "lower class" to describe the black working poor. I also find Michele Mitchell's discussion and use of the term "aspiring class" to describe the people in between the elite and the working poor to be instructive. the term serves to both represent this group of people as well as indicate the fluid and fragile nature of black class status. Other historians have used "rising" and "striving" in this same regard. In this chapter I use prominent or elite to describe both the college educated black professional class as well as the institutions they run. While I also use the term aspiring class I recognize that aspiring folks often become elite, especially after interacting with the institutions discussed here. Slowe's family in particular was aspiring class, but Slowe herself became a prominent elite race women. Since this chapter, in part, tracks that transition, both terms will be used. See: Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Kevin Kelly Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era*, *Women in Culture and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> For more on sports in cities in the early twentieth century see: Riess, *City Games*; For an in depth look at race, sports and urban geographies see: Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes*, 193-223; Rob Ruck, *Sandlot Seasons*.

<sup>4</sup> Riess, *City Games*, 16.

and a means to reform urban pathologies. As race and class organized urban spatial arrangements, multiple sporting industries emerged simultaneously. Under segregation growing black urban communities looked to secure recreational and leisure space in addition to fair and accessible housing and work.<sup>5</sup>

Black sporting industries often built upon existing white institutions that barred them from entry. Black elite reformers embraced similar ideologies of “muscular Christianity” that underscored the formation of socio-religious organizations such as the Young Men’s Christen Association (YMCA), which provided organized recreation for youth.<sup>6</sup> Black schools formed their own interscholastic athletic leagues, while city based semi-professional leagues and recreational tournaments served the sporting needs of black adults. Various writers filled the pages of the black press extolling the virtue of “positive recreation” for “negro girls and boys” and celebrating efforts to expand athletic

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<sup>5</sup> John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*, Reprint edition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); While principally focused on years a bit later than those discussed in this chapter, both of these works offer good examinations of black American's push for recreational space under segregation: Andrew W. Kahrl, *The Land Was Ours: African American Beaches from Jim Crow to the Sunbelt South* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012); Victoria W. Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters: The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America*, Reprint edition (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> The term “muscular Christianity” refers to a Christian commitment to physical health. The ideology of muscular Christianity became prominent in the late 1800s, and was popularly advanced by English writers Charles Kinsey and Thomas Hughes, Canadian Ralph Conner, and President Theodore Roosevelt. The cornerstone of the ideology was that physical education was essential for developing physically fit bodies and morally sound character. It also endorsed a “vigorous masculinity”. Donald E. Hall, ed., *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*, 1 edition (Cambridge England ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920*, 1st Edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003). For more on the YMCA and other Christian uplift organizations see: Nina Mjagkij and Margaret Spratt, *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), Nina Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946* (Lexington, Ky: University Press of Kentucky, 1994),

opportunities for them. Yet the detailed coverage the emergent black sporting life was primarily concerned with boys and men.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, historians documenting the rise of black urban athletics have often glossed over or ignored the participation of girls and women.

The emerging urban black sporting life was not just a “masculinist space”.<sup>8</sup> While existing literature does sometimes engage with the gendered dimensions of black recreation, the emphasis is on the development of manhood and competing concepts of black masculinity. This focus further obfuscates the way organized athletics and recreation impacted black girls and women as well as the way the black elite theorized about the role of athletics in the development of black womanhood. Recreation was a vital component of black reformers’ attempts to police black girls’ bodies within cities and cultivate the next generation of respectable race women. Moreover, black women considered athletics to be a key component of modern womanhood and the rise of organized recreation also created new avenues for employment.

The following chapter explores Lucy Diggs Slowe’s little-known tennis career and Baltimore’s rising black sporting sphere in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Slowe has commanded historical attention before. Her role as prominent educator in Baltimore and Washington, D.C., as an administrator at Howard University and one of the founders of Alpha Kappa Alpha, the first black sorority, has made her a compelling

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<sup>7</sup> Bernard Webb, “Athletics In Baltimore: A Brief Review of the Achievements of Local Schools and Athletics Organizations In The Field Of Sport Written Especially for the Afro-American Ledger,” *Afro-American (1893-1988)*, October 16, 1915. See also the weekly “Sporting News” column in the *Afro* in the 1910s.

<sup>8</sup> Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes*, 195.

subject for historians examining the history of African American education, elite black women, concepts of new negro womanhood, and well known black institutions.<sup>9</sup> I build upon previous characterizations of Slowe by adding the prominent role of athletics in her life as a girl, college student and elite race women. Highlighting the way athleticism fit into Slowe’s well documented self-fashioning as a respectable modern negro woman who would lead and teach the next generation of race women, illuminates the function of athletics for black girls and women in cities and middle-class black institutions during the early twentieth century.

**“Jim Crowin’ at Druid Hill”<sup>10</sup>:**

**Recreation Space and Racial Segregation in Early 20th Century**

Born July 4, 1883 in Berryville, Virginia, Lucy Diggs Slowe was the youngest of six children. Following her parents’ early deaths, when she was six years old, Slowe and her sister Charlotte were placed under the care of her father’s sister, whom the girls called “Aunt Martha.” The girls relocated to Lexington, Virginia, where their aunt lived. Martha was strict with the girls and took great care to stress the importance of education. When Lucy was thirteen, Martha decided to move to Baltimore, noting that “city schools”

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<sup>9</sup> Carroll L. L. Miller and Anne S. Pruitt-Logan, *Faithful to the Task at Hand: The Life of Lucy Diggs Slowe* (SUNY Press, 2012); Patricia Bell-Scott, “To Keep My Self-Respect: Dean Lucy Diggs Slowe’s 1927 Memorandum on the Sexual Harassment of Black Women,” *NWSA Journal* 9, no. 2 (1997): 70–76; Linda M. Perkins, “Lucy Diggs Slowe: Champion of the Self-Determination of African-American Women in Higher Education,” *The Journal of Negro History* 81, no. 1/4 (1996): 89–104; Lawrence C. Ross, *The Divine Nine: The History of African American Fraternities and Sororities* (Kensington Books, 2001); Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*; Treva Blaine Lindsey, “Configuring modernities: New Negro Womanhood in the nation’s capital, 1890–1940” (Ph.D., Duke University, 2010), Treva B. Lindsey, “Climbing the Hilltop,” In Search of New Negro Womanhood at Howard University” in Davarian L. Baldwin and Minkah Makalani, eds., *Escape from New York: The New Negro Renaissance Beyond Harlem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> “Jim Crowin’ At Druid Hill Park,” *Afro-American*, June 10, 1905, ?.

offered more educational opportunities for the Slowe sisters.<sup>11</sup> Slowe was excited about the move and remembered “living in a dream” from the time Martha broke the news. “I shook the dust of Lexington from my feet,” Slowe recalled, “and faced the mysteries of the city.”<sup>12</sup>

Slowe’s 200-mile journey from Berryville to Baltimore reflected the growing migration of black Americans from rural to urban spaces in the years following the Civil War.<sup>13</sup> Baltimore, like Washington D.C. was a popular destination for black migrants. Just south of the Mason Dixon line, Baltimore had boasted a large population of free blacks during slavery and after abolition it provided relatively more educational and employment opportunities than many New South cities. An industrious port city, Baltimore also saw tremendous growth of its foreign-born citizenry, primarily immigrants from Russia, Italy, Poland and Ireland. By 1900, the city’s black population, which had been a little over 67,000 in 1890, was now around 77,000, or 14% of the

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<sup>11</sup> Lucy Diggs Slowe Papers (LDSP), Box 90, Folder 1; Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center (MSRC), Howard University. These papers were written as composition exercises for a class Slowe was in while obtaining her M.A. from Columbia University. Also see Carroll L. L. Miller and Anne S. Pruitt-Logan, *Faithful to the Task at Hand: The Life of Lucy Diggs Slowe* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 7-10.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> For more on the rural to urban migratory patterns of Black Americans following the Civil War, see Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South, from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992); Ira Berlin, *The Making of African America: The Four Great Migrations* (New York: Penguin, 2010).

population.<sup>14</sup> Baltimore's immigrant and native-born population continued to rise as well.<sup>15</sup>

In this age of fast-expanding cities, black city dwellers, in Baltimore and beyond, moved to make forceful claims on residential and recreational spaces. In Atlanta, where the black population grew from 20% of the city's inhabitants before the Civil War to more than 40% by the turn century, the black citizenry built hospitals, schools and aid societies, organized labor strikes and asserted their right to live and work within the city.<sup>16</sup> As a response to increasing segregation and white racial aggression, black entrepreneurs developed a black business district that "bolstered their autonomy and collective power".<sup>17</sup> In Philadelphia, a rapidly expanding black populous faced housing shortages as racist housing policies largely relegated black homeowners and renters to small and over populated residential area.<sup>18</sup> Black homeowners used their fragile class status and political enfranchisement to attempt to integrate neighborhoods and positions of city leadership while black renters in Philadelphia attempted to build coalitions to address comprehensive housing reform.<sup>19</sup> Like Atlanta and Philadelphia and other rapidly changing cities such as Chicago, Houston, and Nashville, black city dwellers challenged

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<sup>14</sup> Population of Baltimore City, 1790-1990, Maryland State Archives.

<sup>15</sup> The city's population had grown from 434,439 in 1890 to 508,957 in 1900. Richard L. Forstall, *Populations of States and Counties of the United States, 1790-1990*, U.S. Bureau of the Census (Washington, D.C., 1996) The immigrant population continued to rise as well and totaled 70,000 in 1900.

<sup>16</sup> Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>18</sup> Marcus Anthony Hunter, *Black Citymakers: How The Philadelphia Negro Changed Urban America*, 1 edition (Oxford University Press, 2015), 72–76.

<sup>19</sup> For an in-depth exploration of race and real estate and the relationship of black landlords and renters see: N. D. B. Connolly, *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the Remaking of Jim Crow South Florida* (University of Chicago Press, 2014).

residential segregation, demanded access to public amenities and resources and sought safe and fair employment while simultaneously growing vibrant black communities.<sup>20</sup>

Upon moving to Baltimore, Slowe, along with her aunt and sister, settled into a small house at 1116 Division Street.<sup>21</sup> Martha's daughter, Louise Stuart, whom Slowe called "Cousin Lou," lived in the house, along with her husband and two daughters.<sup>22</sup> Slowe's multigenerational and multi-family household is indicative of typical housing arrangements for poor and working-class urban dwellers. Yet Slowe's family was also part of a growing aspiring-class black population forming in West Baltimore. Unlike the black neighborhoods in East Baltimore, Slowe's neighborhood was located in close proximity to many city resources and amenities, in particular, Druid Hill Park.

Built in the 1880s, the "grassy slopes" and "shady groves" of Druid Hill Park were the largest and most popular in Baltimore.<sup>23</sup> Yet the park lay on the Northwest periphery of the city and was not easily accessible to all Baltimoreans. Noted famed architect and city planner, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr worried that "poor people can not be forced to spend their hard-earned money and scanty hours of recreation in travelling

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<sup>20</sup> Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*; Hunter, *Black Citymakers*; Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes*; Gabriel A. Briggs, *The New Negro in the Old South* (Rutgers University Press, 2015); Bernadette Pruitt and M. Hunter Hayes, *The Other Great Migration: The Movement of Rural African Americans to Houston, 1900-1941*, First Edition edition (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Population of the United States. Twelfth Census of the United States, Schedule No. 1 (1900), Stuart Household located at 1116 Division St., Baltimore, MD.

<sup>22</sup> Miller and Pruitt-Logan, 18

<sup>23</sup> Druid Hill as described by a *Baltimore Sun* journalist. "Druid Hill a Garden Spot," July 5, 1906, pg. 12; Druid Hill benefitted from Mayor Alcaeus Hooper's vision of a single, city-defining park that was "brought to perfection." While development slowed at Patterson, Clifton, and Carroll, Baltimore's other parks, Druid Hill flourished. For more, see James Edward Wells II, "The Historical Geography Of Racial And Ethnic Access Within Baltimore's Carroll Park: 1870-1954" (MA thesis, Ohio University, 2006).

out...to Druid Hill Park,”<sup>24</sup> While the poor and working-class citizens in the eastern part of the city found it hard to travel to Druid Hill, black citizens like Slowe, who were ideally located to access the park, visited it frequently. One *Baltimore Sun* reporter wrote that “about 30,000 persons visited the park...of that number 8,000-10,000 were negroes.”<sup>25</sup> As historian David Zang notes, there was a “certain fluid dimension” to race relations in late 19th century Baltimore. There was no written policy that barred blacks from Baltimore’s public parks. In fact, the first rule in the park’s rules and regulations stated that Druid Hill was to be “open to all person upon absolutely equal terms.”<sup>26</sup> A columnist from the *Baltimore Afro-American*, a leading black newspaper, wrote that at Druid Hill “colored people enjoyed every right that white people enjoyed,” adding that black Baltimoreans “felt like there was at least one place in Baltimore where they were free.”<sup>27</sup> This “freedom” would soon be tested.

The same year Slowe moved to Baltimore, the U.S. Supreme Court declared racial segregation to be constitutional under the doctrine of “separate but equal” and ushered in a period of legalized segregation, also known as “Jim Crow.”<sup>28</sup> Baltimore, as well as the

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<sup>24</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., “The Report upon the Development of Public Grounds for Baltimore,” 1904, 52. Olmsted Associates Manuscripts, Library of Congress. For more on Olmsted and the 1904 report, see David Holden, “1904 Olmsted Bros. Report: The Advancement of City Planning in Baltimore,” *The Olmstedian* Vol. 15, No. 2 (Fall 2004): 1-3.

<sup>25</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, July 5, 1906, pg. 12

<sup>26</sup> Barry Kessler and David Zang, *The Play Life of a City: Baltimore’s Recreation and Parks, 1900-1955* (Baltimore: Baltimore City Life Museums Baltimore City Dept. of Recreation and Parks, 1989), 31, Homewood House Reference Collection (HHRC), Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD.

<sup>27</sup> *Baltimore Afro-American*, June 10, 1903, pg.4

<sup>28</sup> *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 Supreme Court Case (1896). Homer Plessey, a mixed-race citizen of Louisiana, attempted to challenge Louisiana Law that mandated separate cars for “whites and coloreds.” Arrested after trying to ride in the whites-only car on the East Louisiana Railroad, Plessey claimed the law violated his 13th and 14th Amendment. After losing in Louisiana court system, the case was argued in front of the Supreme Court, which ruled against Plessey in a 7-1 decision. This

state of Maryland, began to introduce restrictive legislation that hardened the social and legal boundaries between the races and served to re-establish and reinforce a second-class black citizenry.<sup>29</sup> The segregation laws did not only target public places, but they also involved neighborhoods, by 1910 Baltimore had become the first city in the nation to pass residential segregation ordinances.<sup>30</sup> As black Baltimoreans fought for access in well-resourced, high-valued neighborhoods, a parallel battle was being waged over the right to maintain access to the city's public recreational space namely—the tennis courts at Druid Hill Park.<sup>31</sup>

There were many things to do in Druid Hill and the tennis courts fast became the biggest attraction. From the moment lawn tennis was introduced in the United States in the 1870s it was a game for the “upper classes.” Like golf, the exclusivity of the facility in which it was played added to the game's allure. That cities constructed lavish clubhouses, golf courses, and tennis courts and bragged about their “modern conveniences” seems to highlight Elizabeth C Barney's assessment that the enjoyment of the game revolved around “social intercourse” at the clubhouse or grounds. By 1900, Druid Hill boasted ten grass courts and ten clay courts. In 1902, the popularity of the

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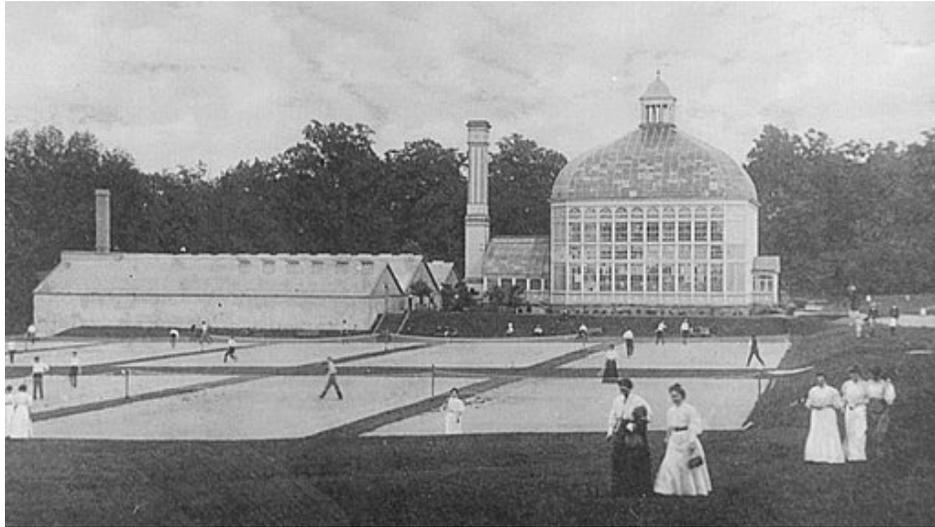
case would set the precedent for state laws mandating segregation until the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision overturned it in 1954.

<sup>29</sup> In 1902, Maryland passed laws that segregated railroads and steamships. Between 1898-1906 state Democrats introduced three state amendments to disenfranchise blacks. While these state amendments failed, the fear of growing black political power resulted in the legal segregation of the Republican party of Maryland in 1907.

<sup>30</sup> Gretchen Boger, “The Meaning of Neighborhood in the Modern City: Baltimore's Residential Segregation Ordinances, 1910-1913,” *Journal of Urban History* 35 (January 2009): 236-258.

<sup>31</sup> While private residential segregation and the segregation of public places were parallel processes, Historian Gretchen Boger reminds us that they were not identical ones. “Despite their surface similarities, Jim Crow segregation of public spaces and Jim Crow segregation of private residential neighborhoods had distinct geologies.” *Ibid.*, 238.

courts led the Parks Board to begin issuing permits for their use.<sup>32</sup> By all accounts, black players were able to get permits, yet this practice soon drew the ire of some white citizens who looked to the Park Board to address the problem of “the color line in Druid Hill Park.”<sup>33</sup>



*Figure 2. Tennis Courts at Druid Hill Park, Baltimore MD circa 1904,*

*Courtesy of Maryland Historical Society*

Letters from white Baltimoreans to the *Baltimore Sun* and the Park Board revealed a growing concern about the presence of black people in Druid Hill. Arguing that blacks were “encroaching on the tennis courts,” citizens urged the Park Board to “vote them off.”<sup>34</sup> “I don’t know who is responsible for the use of the ball ground at Druid Hill Park,” wrote a concerned citizen in 1903, “but it seems that the Negro element is too

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<sup>32</sup> Kessler and Zang, *The Play Life of a City*, 3.

<sup>33</sup> A.B.M., Letter the Editor, *Baltimore Sun*, June 15, 1903, pg. 7

<sup>34</sup> Letters to the Editor, *Baltimore Sun*, June 15, 1903; September 8, 1903; May 1905; June 6, 1905. Letters to the Park Board, Minutes to the Board of Park Commissioners, June, 1905; Letters to the Park Board, Minutes to the Board of Park Commissioners October 1905, Baltimore City Archives, Baltimore Record Group 51-5 (BCA BRG51-5).

frequently in possession of it.”<sup>35</sup> The letters argued that the presence of blacks on the tennis courts and in Druid Hill would bring a “strong probability of serious trouble,” create “disorder,” intimidate “young [white] girls,” and increase the spread of disease.<sup>36</sup> These concerns echoed the commonly cited arguments for racial segregation. Tropes of black lawlessness and sexual and cultural degeneracy were epitomized by the images of a brutish black man who lusted after white women and the loose black women who spread diseases, through numerous sexual encounters as well as an inability to keep a clean home and raise hygienic children. In cities across the nation white health department leaders and social scientists’ classification of non-white bodies as diseased “created nightmares of proximity between the diseased and healthy” that local governments and individual white citizens addressed by advocating for racial segregation in places of recreation and residential living.<sup>37</sup>

In 1905, the Park Board officially “voted off” blacks from the tennis courts.<sup>38</sup> The city made plans to build “negro courts” in a less desirable part of Druid Hill known as the

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<sup>35</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, June 15, 1903, pg.7

<sup>36</sup> Letters to the Editor, *Baltimore Sun*, June 15, 1903, pg.7; September 8, 1903, pg. 6; June 6, 1905, pg 7. Letters to the Park Board, Minutes to the Board of Park Commissioners, June 1905 (BCA BRG51-5).

<sup>37</sup> Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown* (University of California Press, 2001), 88; “Object To Colored Children.: Request for Change of Site of Their Playground Granted.,” *The Washington Post (1877-1922)*, July 27, 1905; Eleanor Tayleur, “The Negro Woman- Social and Moral Decadence.” *Outlook (1893-1924)*, Jan 30, 1904, pg. 266; “Negro Center Plan Is Backed By Park Board: Playground Proposed For Northwestern Section Of Baltimore Locality Has High Mortality Rate Lack Of Breathing Area Held Important Factor In Health Of District,” *The Sun (1837-1991)*, October 15, 1929; Daniel Chase, “What Provisions For The Negro’s Leisure Time: Narrow Streets, Vile Smelling, Alleys Are Traced to the Door of Crime by the Reporter SOCIALLY-MINDED WOMEN ARE NEEDED,” *Philadelphia Tribune (1912-2001)*, July 25, 1929.

<sup>38</sup> Minutes to the Board of Park Commissioners October 3, 1905 (BCA BRG51-5).

“sheepfold.”<sup>39</sup> Until the courts were built, blacks were only allowed to use “certain groves set aside for colored use.” The board argued that the “negro groves” were “in every way as desirable” as the rest of the tennis courts. Yet many black Baltimoreans disputed this notion. J.H. Murphy, the editor of *The Afro-American Ledger*, argued that there was only one “plausible explanation” for the new ruling:

The superintendent felt that colored people ought to be discriminated against in some way and as there was no reasonable excuse for keeping them out of the Park, there must be some way found to let them feel that this great people’s playground was not to be as free for them as for other people.<sup>40</sup>

Murphy also critiqued the arguments about black disorder. However, instead of dismissing the correlation between black bodies and inherent lawlessness, he ascribed that behavior to “lower class” blacks and drew distinction between them. “It has been the policy of the better class of colored people to frown down on anything which looked like rowdyism on the part of colored people in this park,” Murphy asserted, adding that he and other upper-class blacks were “willing and did all they could to keep good feeling on the part of all.”<sup>41</sup> For aspiring-class blacks such as Slowe, an essential part of claiming an upper-class status within the black community was by distinguishing one’s self from those blacks deemed less respectable due to a variety of things including their lack of education, style of dress or occupation.

The ability of elite blacks to distance themselves from those they deemed less respectable was hampered by the fact that racial segregation ordered the spatial

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<sup>39</sup> “Negroes are Ruled Off,” *Baltimore Sun*, October 4, 1905, pg.12

<sup>40</sup> “Jim Crowin’ At Druid Hill Park,” pg.4

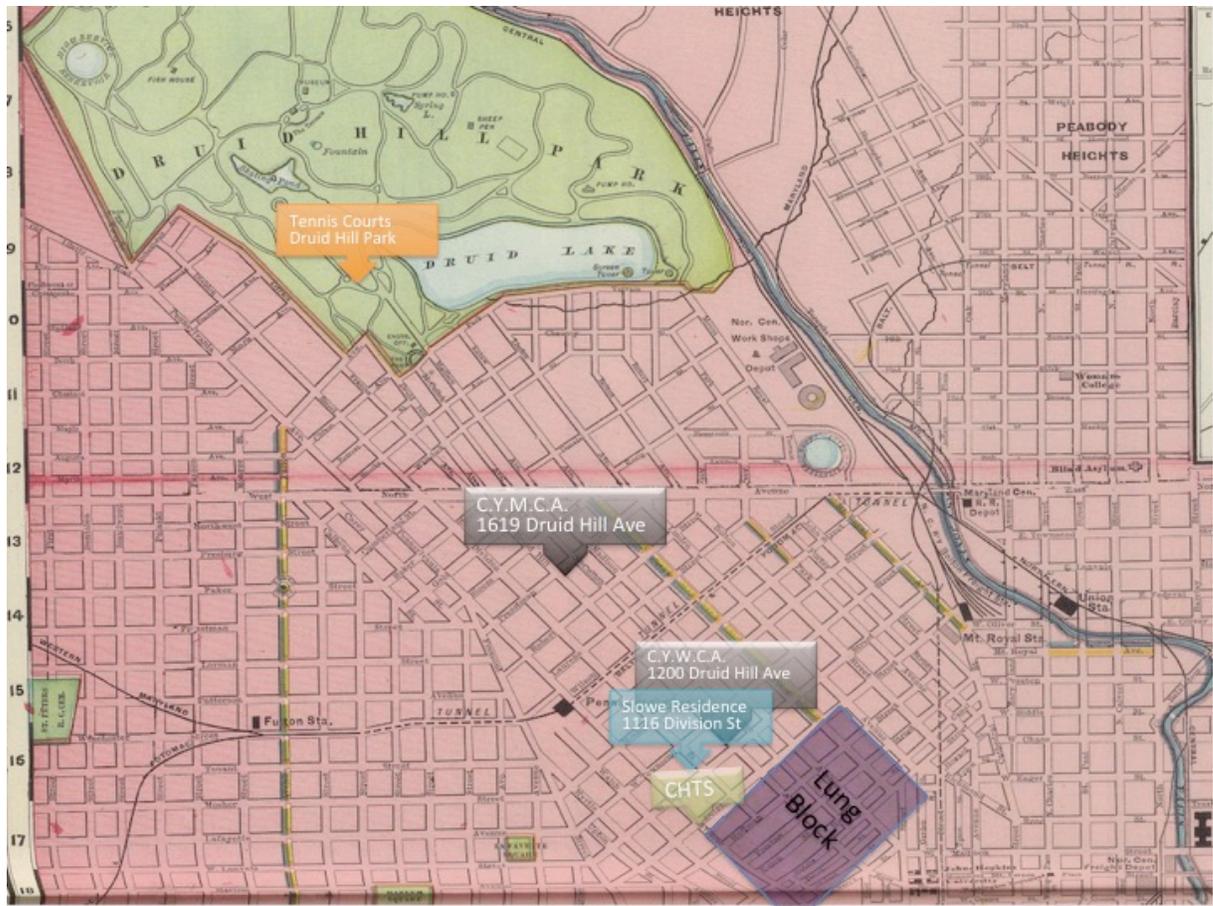
<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

arrangements of the city.<sup>42</sup> Well off black homeowners lived mere blocks away from the poorest black sections of the city. Small business owners contributed to a bustling black business district and relied almost entirely on a black clientele. Slowe's residence was within two blocks of the Colored High and Training School (CHTS) and the Colored Branch of the Young Man's Christian Association (CYMCA), two prominent black institutions. Yet she also lived two blocks from the infamous "lung block" designated by the health department and city officials as the "tuberculosis centre" of the city and the entire state.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Baldwin outlines similar process in Chicago in his discussion of "the Stroll" Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes*; For more on the relationship between middle class and working class blacks within urban space in the 20th century see: Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton University Press, 2005); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton University Press, 2014); Connolly, *A World More Concrete*; Mary Pattillo, *Black Picket Fences, Second Edition: Privilege and Peril Among the Black Middle Class* (University of Chicago Press, 2013); Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>43</sup> Janet E. Kemp, *Housing Conditions in Baltimore: Report of a Special Committee of the Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor and the Charity Organization Society, Submitting the Results of an Investigation Made by Janet E. Kemp* 1907, Reprinted by Arno Press, 1974



***Figure 3. Map of Southwest Baltimore 1903, Rand McNally and Company***

Publicized reports by the city’s health department and local white charity organizations painted the Druid Hill Avenue district with broad unsavory brushstrokes, drawing the ire of prominent black citizens. In 1908 an organization called the Colored Law and Order League sought to issue their own report on the conditions of colored neighborhoods in Baltimore. The League boasted that it was comprised of the “best colored men of the city,” who occupied the “most prominent and influential positions”

and were principally concerned with “any movement for civic betterment.”<sup>44</sup> The report from the league in many ways mirrored the public reports issued by white organizations. They decried the poor sanitary conditions of the houses and alleys and blasted the prevalence of gambling, prostitution, drinking and dancehalls and were particularly concerned with the “immorality among colored women and girls.”<sup>45</sup> Whereas a white report argued that the colored population of Lower Druid Hill had an “entirely undeveloped moral sense”.<sup>46</sup> The League offered a more nuanced critique.

The League ascribed the conditions of Lower Druid Hill to the “lowest class of colored citizens” and drew a firm distinction between the “colored men and women of prominence” who also occupied the periphery of the Lower Druid Hill area. Moreover, they pointed to the large of white owned saloons and lack of adequate police presence as key contributors to the conditions documented. The league attempted to work with white city leaders to petition the Liquor Board and Police board to revoke licenses of saloons and increase manpower in the area respectively. In courting white support for their causes, they argued, in part, that the elite black population would be and should be the watch dogs of the colored community, noting the locations of prominent black institutions that existed within and around the Lower Druid Hill area.

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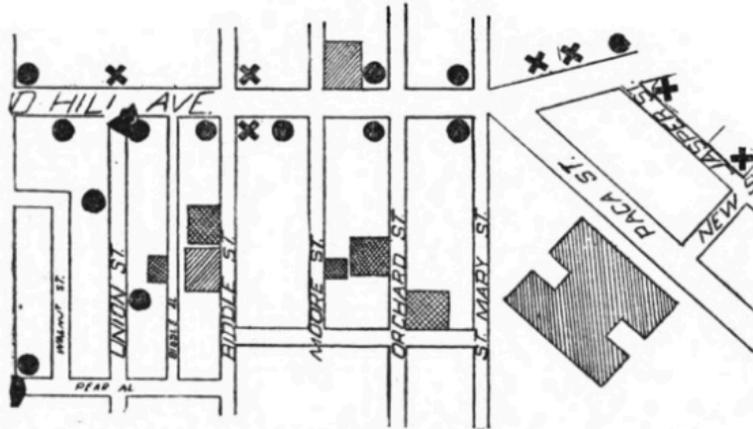
<sup>44</sup> James H. N. Waring, *Work of the Colored Law and Order League, Baltimore, MD* (Cheney, PA: Committee of Twelve for the Advancement of the Interests of the Negro Race, 1908)

<sup>45</sup> *Idid.*

<sup>46</sup> Kemp, Poor, and Society, *Housing Conditions in Baltimore.*

MAP  
SHOWING  
LOCATION OF SALOONS

- SALOONS conducted by WHITE MEN.
- ✕ " COLORED "
- ▨ SCHOOLS
- ▩ CHURCHES.



A map of the lower Druid Hill Avenue District. In this district there were forty-two saloons, fifteen churches, twelve schools, one home for old people, one home for friendless children, the colored Y. M. C. A. and the colored Y. W. C. A.

*Figure 4 Map of Saloons in part of the Lower Druid Hill Ave District  
as mapped by The Colored League of Law and Order*

The League and its report demonstrate three key things about the uplift ideology of prominent black citizens. First, while efforts were made to draw lines between the perceived lower class black populations, black elite reformers also took great care to illustrate the larger structural forces that contributed to the urban pathologies in the colored population. Second, the League demonstrates the way that community reform efforts were deeply gendered. The particular problem of immoral black girls and women was indeed a central preoccupation of the League, however it was mothers and women-led organizations tasked to solve it. While the Colored Law and Order league was

comprised exclusively of black men, the Federation of Women's clubs enthusiastically endorsed the efforts of the League.<sup>47</sup> This endorsement also speaks to the third point. Namely, that the network of black elite organizations formed a web that was intended to both protect elite black community members from the ills of segregation, while also acting as the buffer between the white citizenry and less respectable members of the black community. This institutional web was woven around Slowe as she would navigate urban life in Baltimore.

As Jim Crow crept into the fabric of the city, an emerging black elite created parallel black institutions in response to their exclusion from whites-only schools, social organizations, and sports leagues. Black middle-class arguments against discrimination, from residential segregation to the separate tennis courts in Druid Hill, reflected this burgeoning class ideology. Slowe made her way through elite black schools, joining tennis clubs and other social organizations. She was part of a growing group of blacks who, through their morals, their education, and their recreation, asserted a middle-class identity upon the backdrop of legalized racial segregation.

### **“What we do with our leisure”: Sports, Urban Reform, and the Black Elite**

As Aunt Martha had predicted, the educational opportunities for Slowe in Baltimore exceeded those available in rural Virginia. Baltimore, like many other urban centers, had developed schools for black youth that differed from the few primary and secondary schools in the rural south. Northern philanthropists, most notably Sears and Roebuck tycoon Julius Rosenwald, poured money into rural southern schools for

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<sup>47</sup> “Negro Law and Order League,” *The Sun (1837-1991)*, August 30, 1908.

blacks.<sup>48</sup> Yet these philanthropists overwhelmingly embraced the idea of industrial and “normal” education for blacks, which emphasized practical, skill-based education in agriculture, mechanics, and home economics.<sup>49</sup> However, schools in cities like Nashville, Philadelphia, and Baltimore adapted a classical liberal arts curriculum. The year Slowe began high school, Baltimore’s Colored High School merged with The Colored Polytechnic Institute to become The Colored High and Training School of Baltimore (CHTS). The merger resulted in an expanded curriculum that featured both classical education as well as professional training.

Prior to the merger, there was some local effort to try to close Baltimore’s Colored High School completely and simply provide a training school. The growing black elite who was “learned in arts and letters,” were dismayed by the news, and one school examiner argued that it was the school’s responsibility to promote “useful citizenship” through manual labor and domestic service and it was failing to do so. “This labor has become unreliable and inefficient,” the examiner bemoaned, “the old class of Eastern Shore cooks, trained by their mistresses in slavery days, has about passed away and but

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<sup>48</sup> For more on Rosenwald, see Mary S. Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006). Comprehensive examinations of northern philanthropy and southern black education include: James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South* (Harvard University Press, 2009); Eric Anderson and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *Dangerous Donations: Northern Philanthropy and Southern Black Education, 1902-1930* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999).

<sup>49</sup> The debate over industrial versus liberal arts curricula was the essential question surrounding the development of black education after the Civil War. From primary schools thru colleges, educators, politicians, philanthropists and journalists debated the merits and consequences of both types of schooling. Often represented by the Washington vs. DuBois debates although both men’s educational views were more nuanced than that simplistic dichotomy affords them.

very few have been trained since to take their places.”<sup>50</sup> Despite the protests, the merger was completed and the CHTS was formed.

Given the tremendous effect of education on black social mobility it is not surprising that schools like CHTS held a vital position within the community. Like the black church, schools were thought to shape and guide the next generation of “race men” and “race women” and united “the most respectable and well-to-do colored people in the city.”<sup>51</sup> It was here, at the CHTS, that Slowe’s progressive education would allow her to join a growing number of aspiring-class black women who, instead of going in to domestic service, would attend college and pursue professional careers as teachers, social workers, or nurses.<sup>52</sup> While manual training was still part of the curriculum, city schools for colored youth offered robust liberal arts instruction. School board funding from city governments, while relatively less than neighboring white schools, provided more resources than the northern philanthropic funds largely used to fund rural schools in the south.<sup>53</sup> In addition to differences in curriculum, city schools offered many extracurricular opportunities. Student government, clubs, organizations and athletic teams

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<sup>50</sup> Special Dispatch to the Baltimore Sun, “Colored Training School,” *The Sun (1837-1988)*, January 28, 1898, 535909152, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1988).

<sup>51</sup> Observations from a white *Baltimore Sun* reporter. “Colored Society There,” *The Sun*, June 18, 1904, pg.6

<sup>52</sup> For more on the professional opportunities black women found in the fields of teaching, nursing and social work see: Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do*.

<sup>53</sup> “Baltimore’s Excellent School Facilities: No Baltimore Youth Need Go Without Education--City Provides For All Polytechnic Schools, High Schools, Normal Colleges Are Provided for the Education of Lord Baltimore’s Children--Ample Opportunities Afforded For Educations--Colored Teachers Must Stand Same Tests as Do the Whites--No Inferior Teachers for Negro Youth,” *Afro-American (1893-1988)*, August 15, 1908. Northern philanthropists such as Julius Rosenwald and Rockefeller, had a interested in developing black education. Rosenwald was particularly concerned with the development of schools in the rural south, as was Anna Jeanes, a Philadelphian Quaker who founded the Jeanes Foundation later called the Negro Rural School Fund. For more on Rural and southern education see: Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*.

were common features of urban, black high schools. The CHTS was no exception, and it would be the place where Slowe first picked up a tennis racket.

Slowe had always been an active child. When she lived in Virginia she enjoyed racing against neighborhood kids, playing in the mud, and climbing trees. Despite Martha's disapproval at her niece's "ruggedness," Slowe recalls "some joyous times" at her "dignified aunt's house."<sup>54</sup> Though she loved playing outdoors, sports for Slowe was largely informal prior to arriving in Baltimore. Moreover, Aunt Martha, who had frowned upon her leisure activities in Virginia, encouraged them in Baltimore. When Slowe entered the CHTS she immediately joined the tennis club, basketball team, student government, and a young women's club. The sports teams played against other elite black schools in neighboring cities and enjoyed considerable attention in the Negro press.<sup>55</sup>

The girl's tennis club at the CHTS highlighted the emergence of organized athletics opportunities for black girls in the city. For middle- and upper-class white women, organized physical education and athletic programs emerged in the 1870s. These women, who had previously played sports as a "liberating pastime" and to "strengthen elite social ties," now began to play in competitive tournaments and join school leagues. The national sporting organizations for golf, tennis, and archery started to include

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<sup>54</sup> Untitled, LDSP, Box 90, Folder 1; MSRC.

<sup>55</sup> See, for instance, the *Baltimore Afro-American's* standing "High School Notes" section in its regular "About the City" column. While the paper would report news of interest, a great deal of its focus covered sporting engagements. Example: "About The City," *Afro-American*, October 24, 1903, pg. 8

women's championships as well by when....<sup>56</sup> By the turn of the century, middle- and upper-class blacks pushed for the subsequent development of comparable programs for black women. A 1908 newspaper column from the *Indianapolis Freeman* illustrated such sentiment, arguing:

Our neighbors' wives and daughters (white) take interest in athletics, and why not those of our race? Athletics are not copyrighted: they are at the disposal of everyone...why not our girls? Why wait until the white girls have worn all the "new" off?<sup>57</sup>

Applauding the "efforts...being made to get the fairer sex interested in athletics," the writer urges black women to "take up athletics, girls."<sup>58</sup> Slowe, like many other black girls, readily answered that call.

Aunt Martha's new interest in Slowe's extracurricular activity, as well as the school's commitment to them, also illustrates a moment when leisure and recreation were becoming a central element in philosophies of progressive era reform.<sup>59</sup> Organizations such as the Public Athletic League (PAL) and the Children's Playground Association (CPA) argued that the "play life of a people indicates its...vitality, morals, intelligence

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<sup>56</sup> Susan K. Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 13-17.

<sup>57</sup> "Baseball Among the Fairer Sex Coming into Prominence," *Indianapolis Freeman*, December 26, 1908, in *The Unlevel Playing Field: A Documentary History of the African American Experience in Sport*, ed. Patrick B. Miller and David K. Wiggins (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003): 55-57.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> For more on progressive era reform and recreation see Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011); John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, [1978] 2000); Elliott J. Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, [1986] 2012). For discussion of the "crisis of masculinity" and desire for the "strenuous life," see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

and fitness.”<sup>60</sup> These groups worked to build playgrounds, establish sports leagues and promote exercise for urban children. While the PAL and CPA argued that play was necessary for *all* children, the playgrounds and sports leagues often excluded black children from participation. In Druid Hill Park, for instance, the single, run-down playground for “colored youth” stood in stark contrast to the ten large play areas for white children.<sup>61</sup>

Black leaders such as W.E.B. DuBois and Emmett Scott echoed similar philosophies of leisure, arguing that “community recreational facilities” worked to deter crime, improve health and develop a “right-thinking citizenry.”<sup>62</sup> Advocating for the development of recreational facilities as a way to uplift the black poor and working class and steer its members away from idleness and vice echoed mainstream philosophies of “muscular Christianity.” However, the formation of organized athletic clubs and leagues also contributed to the development of black institutions that asserted the respectability of middle-class blacks and indicated that they were “fit” for national inclusion.<sup>63</sup>

The playground and recreation movement within urban black communities had two central aims. The first was to use recreation to help regulate the black community by engaging in a politics of racial uplift that centered on social welfare and “virtuous”

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<sup>60</sup> Kessler, *The Play Life of a City*, vii.

<sup>61</sup> Baltimore CPA Development Report, 1909 in National Recreation Congress. *Collection of Selected Papers*, 1909.

<sup>62</sup> Emmett J. Scott, “Leisure Time and the Colored Citizen,” *Playground* 18 (January 1925). See also W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Problem of Amusement,” *Southern Workman* 27, September 1897.

<sup>63</sup> For more on this see Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 204-209.

community development.<sup>64</sup> Using the same rhetoric as the mainstream playground movement, black reformers extolled the virtue of recreation while situating themselves as buffers to black urban degeneracy.

The second aim was to push local governments to apply equal application of municipal funds for the needs of its black citizenry. Often the latter aim was mobilized and used to make a compelling case to public recreation boards and private playground associations. Arguing that it was better for “the community to have children exercising on ladders...then haunting the doors of poolrooms or smoking cigarettes in hidden shadows,” black reform leaders sought city appropriations for black recreation facilities.<sup>65</sup>

In addition to public recreation, private progressive organizations like the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) or black owned community centers like the Neighborhood Union (NU) in Atlanta also provided recreation for black youth.<sup>66</sup> The YMCA, an international Christian organization, was founded in 1844. Its central aim was to develop the “mind, body and sprit”. Using a philosophy of “muscular Christianity,” local YMCAs carried out the national missions by offering recreational development, social services, and job training. The YMCA, and their female counterpart,

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<sup>64</sup> “How The Playground Movement Has Spread Over The World,” *The Sun (1837-1991)*, April 17, 1910; “Health Notes,” *The Chicago Defender (Big Weekend Edition) (1905-1966)*, June 7, 1913.

<sup>65</sup> “Virtue of the Playground,” *The Pittsburgh Courier (1911-1950), City Edition*, February 3, 1912; “NEGRO Center Plan Is Backed By Park Board”; “The Public Playground--What a Neighborhood Committee Did for the Playground Located at the Colored High and Training School.,” *Afro-American (1893-1988)*, August 4, 1906; “Colored Pupils Sing Well: School Children Give Concert for Public Playground Fund. They Charm a Big Audience at Convention Hall with a Varied Musical Programme.,” *The Washington Post (1877-1922)*, May 29, 1907; “Campaigning for Children’s Playground,” *The Chicago Defender (Big Weekend Edition) (1905-1966)*, April 17, 1920.

<sup>66</sup> The Neighborhood Union was founded by Lugenia Burns Hope in 1908. Building on her work in settlement houses in Chicago with Jane Adams, Hope established the NU to provide social welfare services to black Atlantans. These services included recreational programs for black youth. Hunter, *To ’Joy My Freedom*, 136–144.

the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), did not directly challenge Jim Crow, even within their organization. However, from the late 1880s, the YMCA/YWCA did provide separate services to black communities under the department of "Colored Work." The YMCA/YWCA did not provide equal funding to set up and maintain black branches of the organization.

Instead black community leaders held fundraising campaigns and targeted black community members, local whites and Northern philanthropists for financial backing of the establishment of colored branches of the YMCA/YWCA in cities such as Chicago, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Nashville, New York and Boston.<sup>67</sup> The collaborative funding effort was incentivized by philanthropists such as Julius Rosenwald who offered to contribute \$25,000 towards the construction of any Colored YMCA (CYMCA) in any city that could jointly raise at least \$75,000.<sup>68</sup> Prominent black leaders argued that having a dedicated CYMCA building- an not just a converted residence- would create a community space full of modern amenities necessary for a variety of wholesome activities that promote physical, moral and civil well being.<sup>69</sup> In Baltimore, the CYMCA

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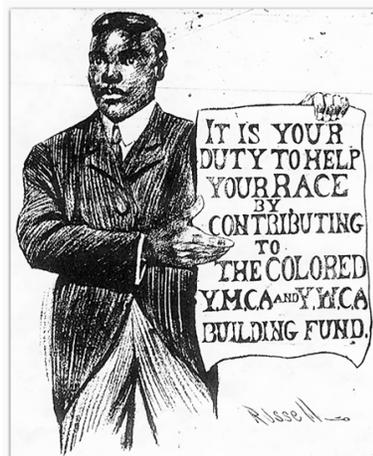
<sup>67</sup> Nina Mjagkij and Margaret Spratt, *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City* (New York: New York University Press, 1997); Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946* (Lexington, Ky: University Press of Kentucky, 1994); Jessica I. Elfenbein, *The Making of a Modern City: Philanthropy, Civic Culture, and the Baltimore YMCA* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001).

<sup>68</sup> Rosenwald Fund Reports, 1917, Financial Records, Box 7, Folder 1. Colored Work Department Records. Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota; *The Negro Year Book*, 1918-1919, Vol. 5 (Tuskegee, AL, 1919), pg. 252-253

<sup>69</sup> C.H. Tobias, "The Colored YMCA," *Crisis*, Vol. 9, No. 1, November 1914, pg. 33; Mason Hawkins, "What a New Building Will Mean to Baltimore," *Afro-American (1893-1988)*, November 20, 1915.

was erected in 1914 at 1609 Druid Hill Ave. Along with Rosenwald's gift of \$25,000, local whites contributed \$50,000 and local blacks another \$20,000.<sup>70</sup>

Despite fundraising pamphlets imploring black citizens to donate to both the Colored YWCA (CYWCA), the building fundraisers disproportionately funded CYMCAs. In fact of the thirteen cities that received Rosenwald funds for CYMCAs, only New York received similar funds from the philanthropists for CYWCAs. This was due to the New York branches being part of a joint plan.<sup>71</sup> In comparisons to the thirteen CYMCAs that all had a minimum building fund of \$100,000 (and many times double that) only one CYWCA, in New York, matched that number. Of the remaining YWCA's no other branch had a budget over \$50,000. In Baltimore, where the CYMCA had collected a building fund of \$110,000, the CYWCA only received \$10,000.<sup>72</sup>



***Figure 5 Pamphlet Advert for the CYMCA/CYWCA Building Fund, Promotional Material, Colored Work Department, YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota***

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<sup>70</sup> Negro Year Book, 1918-1919, pg. 252

<sup>71</sup> For more on the New York Branch of the CYWCA see: Judith Weisenfeld, *African American Women and Christian Activism: New York's Black YWCA, 1905-1945* (Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>72</sup> Negro Year Book, 1918-1919, pg. 254

Despite lack of funding the CYWCA was especially vital to expanding the recreational opportunities of black girls. The National YWCA had long argued for recreation as necessary component of girls physical and social development, labeling it a “expression of the wholeness of life” that helped facilitate the “full experience of growth”.<sup>73</sup> While the YWCA promoted athletics for all girls, white YWCA leaders saw recreation to be a central component of its interracial missionary work. From targeting Chinese girls in San Francisco, to American Indian girls in the midwest, to black girls along the eastern seaport, the white YMCA leaders believed they were “uplifting” and “helping them adjust to urban life” by “teaching morals, good hygiene, and strengthening weak bodies”.<sup>74</sup>

In fact black girls *in particular* were targeted for recreational programming as a way to cultivate “mental and physical development.”<sup>75</sup> Recreational opportunities for

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<sup>73</sup> Anna L. Brown, “The Department of Hygiene and Physical Education Report.” Sophia Smith Collection (SSC), YWCA of the USA Records, Group 6, Series V. Program Subjects, Subseries B. Health & Recreation, Box 591 Edith Gates, “Men, Women, and Health Education,” Women’s Press Clippings, SSC, YWCA of the USA Records, Group 6, Series V. Program Subjects, Subseries B. Health & Recreation, Box 591; Health Education Conference Program, 1919, SSC, YWCA of the USA Records, Group 6, Series V. Program Subjects, Subseries B. Health & Recreation, Box 593

<sup>74</sup> Shah, *Contagious Divides*. Ethel Carter, “The First American Girls- The Indian Work of the YMCA,” *Association Monthly*, 1919 clippings, SSC, YWCA of the USA Records, Record Group 6, Series IV, Constituent Groups, Subseries C. Interracial/Racial Justice- American Indian Work, Box 530; Ella Deloria, “Health Education for Indian Girls” 1913, SSC, YWCA of the USA Records, Record Group 6, Series IV, Constituent Groups, Subseries C. Interracial/Racial Justice- American Indian Work, Box 530; Martha McAdoo, “Phyllis Wheatley YWCA Passes a Milestone,” *Association Monthly*, 1918 clippings, SSC, YWCA of the USA Records, Record Group 6, Series IV, Constituent Groups, Subseries C. Interracial/Racial Justice- General, Box 532; NB Report to 4<sup>th</sup> Convention, SSC, YWCA of the USA Records, Record Group 6, Series IV, Constituent Groups, Subseries C. Interracial/Racial Justice- General, Box 532

<sup>75</sup> YMCA/YWCA Handbook, 1902-1903. Kautz Family YMCA Archives (KFYA), Y. USA. 36 Student Work Records, Box #31

black girls were propelled by white and black social concerns about black girls, practically southern migrants, within cities. White women were practically concerned with the “fate of negro girls,” punctuated by beliefs in their cultural degeneracy, vulnerability, and unhealthy bodies. Yet white women reformers believed that they could “uplift” and “nurture” black girls and by extension, due to reproductive ability, also the entire black race.<sup>76</sup> Black organizations, acutely aware of such claims, sought to protect black girls, primarily by policing their bodies and enforcing notions of respectability.<sup>77</sup>

The CYWCA adopted a similar recreational philosophy as the National YWCAs. Positive recreation became a central component of these protective reform efforts. Recreation for black girls was linked to developing “healthy bodies” due especially to the fact that they were the future biological reproducers of the race. Their ability to be fit “wives and mothers’ and produce strong offspring was paramount. As prominent physical educator, EB Henderson said, “the race of man needs a strong and virile womanhood.”<sup>78</sup>

In addition to creating recreational opportunities for black girls, the CWYCA offered an opportunity for black women to professionalize recreational and leadership work. The CWYCA employed local recreation directors and health educators. Recreation work was viewed as a combination of social work, teaching and physical education. While able to largely avoid domestic work, elite black women still faced constricted

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<sup>76</sup> D. Augustine Reid, “The Colored Helpers in Our Homes.,” *Friends’ Intelligencer (1853-1910)*, March 21, 1908; FRANCES A. KELLOR, “The Problem of the Young Negro Girl from the South.,” *New York Times*, March 19, 1905; Eleanor Tayleur, “The Negro Woman- Social and Moral Decadence.” *Outlook (1893-1924)*, Jan 30, 1904, pg. 266.

<sup>77</sup> Carby, “Policing the Black Woman’s Body in an Urban Context”; Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*; Hunter, *To ’Joy My Freedom*.

<sup>78</sup> Elizabeth Dunham, “Physical Education of Women at Hampton Institute,” *Southern Workman* 53 (April 1924), 167: See also: Edwin Bancroft Henderson, *The Negro in Sports*, Washington Associated Publishers, 1949

career choices, often regulated to teaching, social work, or nursing. Recreation work offered black women the opportunity to assume leadership positions within prominent organizations. CYWCA recreation directors, city based playground directors and school based physical educators, such as Slowe's tennis coach, represented the first wave of black women finding professional opportunities within athletics and recreation. Moreover, because such jobs existed primarily within elite black organizations, the profession was unique, physical but also a respectable employment and a means to upward mobility.

Whether it was through public schools, the YWCA, or local playground organizations, black girls like Slowe, found opportunities to play sports, including tennis, softball, gymnastics and basketball under the instruction of black women. Gender did not preclude black girls from organized athletics. Indeed it was the particular perceived threat of their feminine black bodies within urban spaces that sustained enthusiasm for their athletic involvement and fostered opportunities for their athletic development.

### **“Best and Noblest Self”: Cultivating Modern Black Women**

In 1904, Slowe prepared remarks for her high school graduation. During her time at the CHTS, Slowe had become fairly outspoken and well known in Baltimore's black community. In a speech entitled “A True Education,” Slowe applauded the well-rounded nature of her schooling, including her extracurricular activities.<sup>79</sup> Upon graduation, Slowe was offered admission at Howard University. Located in Washington, D.C., Howard was

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<sup>79</sup> Marion Thompson Wright Papers, as cited in Miller and Pruitt-Logan, *Faithful for the Task at Hand*, 20.

widely considered the “capstone of Negro education” and was the largest and, arguably the best, university for black Americans at the time.<sup>80</sup> At Howard, Slowe would find similar opportunities for a “true education.” Howard promised to be a place where “young [black] women who came from the best homes in the country” could receive a respectable, Christian education. Moreover, the school prided itself on being a place where students could experience the “larger benefits of university life in the capital of the nation where the highest facilities of culture and improvement exist[ed].”<sup>81</sup>

At Howard, Slowe majored in English and joined numerous student groups, including university choir and the debate club. In her senior year, Slowe and eight other women founded Alpha Kappa Alpha, the nation’s first black sorority. Slowe was elected its first president. College presented Slowe with numerous opportunities to try new activities, yet there was one extracurricular that remained constant in her life: tennis. Based on her ability, Slowe was named president of the Women’s Tennis Club at Howard and played for the duration of her college career.

When Slowe graduated from Howard in 1908, she moved back to Baltimore and accepted a position as a teacher at her old high school. Cementing herself as a prominent member of Baltimore’s black elite, Slowe joined many local organizations, including a literary society called the Browning Club, the Baltimore Chapter of the National

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<sup>80</sup> Rolfe Cobleigh, “A New Day for Howard University: Progress and Needs of a Great University,” *The Congregationalist*, July 27, 1922, pg. 108. For more on Howard, see Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 232; Walter Dyson, *Howard University, The Capstone of Negro Education, a History: 1867-1940* (Washington, DC: The Graduate School, Howard University, 1941); Rayford W. Logan, *Howard University: The First Hundred Years, 1867-1967* (New York: New York University Press, 1969).

<sup>81</sup> *Howard University Journal*, September 28, 1906, pg. 21

Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Du Bois Circle, a women's group that met to discuss the writing and philosophy of the brilliant and controversial leader. Slowe's desire to remain active coupled with her love for tennis also led her to join Baltimore's Monumental Tennis Club (MTC).

While baseball and football were more accessible and popular sports for urban black communities, a small group of aspiring-class and elite blacks were very interested in tennis. The fact that tennis was associated with an upper-class status made it an attractive sport for many blacks who sought to assert their own class status while also distancing themselves from "lower-class" sports like boxing. When the United States Lawn Tennis Association (USLTA) was founded in 1881, it immediately banned black players from participating, so blacks began to form city-wide tennis clubs such as MTC as a response to the USLTA's Jim Crow policies. As Slowe returned to Baltimore, tennis was gaining in popularity and the city's black elite was organizing for new facilities on which to play.

The desire to build new tennis courts derived from two concerns. First, the Druid Hill restrictions from 1905 left blacks with only two tennis courts on which to play. The black "doctors, lawyers, high school teachers and society ladies and gentlemen" dominated use of the court and "the ordinary citizen with nothing in front or behind his name" was reportedly told to "stay out of the fray."<sup>82</sup> Members of the black elite of Baltimore desired to distance themselves from the "ordinary citizen," while also endeavoring to connect with the middle-class populations of surrounding cities. In this

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<sup>82</sup> "Tennis Enthusiasts in a War to the Finish" *Baltimore Afro-American*, October 2 1909, pg. 4

vein, the desire to build tennis grounds and “modern clubhouses” was also fueled by friendly competition among clubs in Richmond, Washington, D.C., and New York. Improved tennis grounds would allow the MTC to host tournaments and to match the already established tennis facilities for black people in other East coast cities.

Attracting middle- and upper-class blacks from Richmond up to Boston, the local tennis tournaments drew “large and enthusiastic crowds” and functioned as large social events. As historian David K. Wiggins notes in his work on black college football “classics,” these sporting events worked to unite upper-class blacks while simultaneously promoting distinct city pride.<sup>83</sup> The competitions between cities also served as a barometer by which each city could assess itself. The campaign for athletic fields in Baltimore was bolstered by the constant losses to tennis clubs in Washington and Philadelphia. An *Afro-American* reporter lamented the fact that Baltimore had been “somewhat behind the other cities” in ensuring the “physical welfare of its race.”<sup>84</sup> Baltimoreans pointed out that while black Philadelphians could use the tennis courts on the roof of the John Wanamaker building, black Baltimoreans had “no such roof space.”<sup>85</sup> Similarly, reporters also claimed that the Association Tennis Club of Washington (ACTW) produced the “largest number of excellent players” and owed its “proficiency” to the proximity of its courts to white progressive organizations such as the Y.M.C.A. By 1915, however, the MTC had started to gain ground on its rival clubs. An “Athletics in

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<sup>83</sup> Wiggins, “The Biggest ‘Classic’ of Them All,” pg. 37

<sup>84</sup> “About the City-Tennis Tournament,” *Afro-American*, September 17, 1910, pg. 8; “Athletics in Baltimore” *Afro-American*, October 23, 1915, pg. 7

<sup>85</sup> “Tennis—A Game for Women,” *Afro-American*, September 18, 1915, pg. 4

Baltimore” spotlight noted that Baltimore could now boast “successful athletics clubs” in the city. The only woman singled out for recognition was Lucy Slowe, “a tennis talent.”<sup>86</sup>



***Figure 6. Lucy Diggs Slowe at Druid Hill Park, 1917. Courtesy of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington DC***

In the summer of 1916, Slowe and her fellow members of the MTC met with the ATCW to discuss the formation of a national tennis association. The tennis clubs from Baltimore and Washington decided to form a temporary organization and sent out letters

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<sup>86</sup> “Baltimore Defeated in Tennis Tournament,” *Afro-American*, August 7, 1915, pg. 4; “Baltimore to Have Tennis Grounds,” *Afro-American*, September 18, 1909, pg. 6; *Afro-American*, June 17, 1916, pg. 4; “More Interest in Athletic Field,” *Afro-American*, September 9, 1911, pg.4

to black tennis organizations throughout the United States. In November, representatives of black tennis clubs from Richmond to Chicago arrived in Washington to discuss the matter. After a vote, a permanent national organization, the American Tennis Association (ATA), was founded. The ATA, with co-sponsorship from the MTC, planned to hold its first national tennis championship in Baltimore's Druid Hill Park the following year. Hoping to attract the top black tennis talent from local and regional tournaments across the country, the ATA sent out flyers advertising the highly competitive stakes that the national tournament would bring. Headlining the ATA flyers were the players who had dominated the last few regional tournaments: Talley Holmes, Dr. John Wilkerson, and Lucy Slowe.<sup>87</sup>

Slowe had risen to prominence on the tennis circuit as both a women's player and in the mixed doubles category with Dr. John Wilkerson. Yet her tennis career was just part of her growing notoriety. In Baltimore, Slowe had become well known as a prominent "race woman" who was active in the community and social organizations. Slowe understood her visibility as a race woman and embraced and advocated for a "modern negro womanhood." Slowe stated, "regardless of the wish of many parents that their daughters become the adjuncts of 'man,' modern life forces them to be individuals." For Slowe, individual modern black womanhood was, at its essence, well rounded. Her athletic career was supplemented by community work and education. While teaching in Baltimore, Slowe simultaneously earned her Master of the Arts in English at Columbia University, one of the few black students enrolled at the time. Slowe became a vocal

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<sup>87</sup> "Sports and Athletics," *Afro-American*, June 24, 1916, pg. 6; "Tennis Tourney," *Afro-American*, September 23, 1916, pg. 1; "Miss Lucy Slowe Wins," *Afro-American*, August 26, 1916, 1.

member of the Baltimore NAACP chapter especially on the matter of suffrage. She notably delivered a speech entitled, “The Relation of the NAACP to the Suffrage Movement” in which she argued that the NAACP must support universal suffrage because a “voteless group in any republic is a helpless one.”<sup>88</sup> By 1915, however, Slowe began to feel limited in Baltimore. Washington, D.C., offered more professional and social opportunities for modern black women.<sup>89</sup>

Much to the dismay of black Baltimoreans, Slowe resigned her position at the CHTS and accepted a job at Washington’s Armstrong Manuel Training High School.<sup>90</sup> Within a year Slowe became “lady principal” of the school. Slowe also helped found Washington’s first black junior high school, Shaw, where she also served as principal. At Shaw, Slowe encouraged her pupils to excel in their studies and in leisure activities. Slowe especially advocated athletics to her female students, imploring them to “choose a wholesome sport and become the very best player you can.”<sup>91</sup> At Shaw, girls had several options for organized sports, including a track team, a schlagball team, and a girls tennis club.<sup>92</sup>

In addition to becoming a prominent educator and school administrator, Slowe began to establish herself in the Washington social scene. Slowe was named president of

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<sup>88</sup> “Miss Slowe for Women’s Suffrage” *Afro-American*, October 23 1915, pg. 1

<sup>89</sup> *Afro-American*, October 24, 1915, pg. 4; Miller and Pruitt-Logan, *Faithful for the Task at Hand*, 37-45; D. Augustine Reid, “The Colored Helpers in Our Homes.,” *Friends’ Intelligencer (1853-1910)*, March 21, 1908; Frances A. Kellor, “The Problem of the Young Negro Girl from the South.,” *New York Times*, March 19, 1905, sec. Second Magazine Section.

<sup>90</sup> The *Afro* reported that Armstrong offered to double Slowe’s salary. “Miss Slowe Resigns,” *Afro-American*, November 6, 1915, pg.1

<sup>91</sup> Lucy Slowe, “Have you a Hobby” *Junior High School Review*, June 1921, pg. 10

<sup>92</sup> Schlagball loosely translates into “hit the ball” and was a German-based ball game similar to cricket.

Washington's chapter of the College Alumni Club, a prestigious organization for college educated black women. Upon her appointment, women from Baltimore transferred their membership to the Washington chapter. While Slowe relocated her professional and social life to Washington, tennis kept her tied to Baltimore. Despite the success of the ATCW, Slowe continued to play with the MTC and represented Baltimore on the tennis circuit.

Slowe's continued dominance of black women's tennis was a point of pride for Baltimore's aspiring-class blacks. Under a headline that read "Miss Lucy Slowe Again Champion" the *Afro-American* celebrated her ATA win and lauded her for "representing the city well."<sup>93</sup> After winning successive championships, Slowe lost in the championships two years in a row to Miss Rae, who was from Jamaica.

In 1921, Slowe regained her crown and won back-to-back titles again. Despite the "strong competition" evident in the women's tennis championships, the event remained a footnote to the men's tournament. The women did not receive trophies or winnings for their accomplishments.<sup>94</sup> Although the black press applauded female athletes, the focus of women's athletics remained less about competition and more about the development of respectable women. "All the recreation our girls have are the dirty, low indecent places of amusement," lamented one paper, "the girls should have tennis clubs, basketball teams...gymnastic classes."<sup>95</sup> Tennis remained a means to a moral and respectable modern womanhood. "The modern women simply refuses to stay in the background," wrote another columnist, "she looks just right when she comes running down the steps to

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<sup>93</sup> "Miss Lucy Slowe Again Champion," *Afro-American*, September 8, 1917, pg. 4

<sup>94</sup> "Fighting for Tennis Honors" *Afro-American*, September 1, 1917, pg. 1

<sup>95</sup> *Afro-American*, April 17, 1915, pg. 7

greet you. She is ready to play tennis, golf, out to boating, swimming, fishing—a good healthy woman.”<sup>96</sup>

Slowe enjoyed tennis. She was fiercely competitive and relished winning each match she played. However more than anything, Slowe prided herself on being a “good healthy woman.” Yet as she accomplished more professionally, tennis had less of a role in her life. Slowe found herself questioning if she could sustain involvement in her many interests. Confiding to a friend, she wrote, “there are too many of me for me to know each one; and yet I feel each clamoring for a hearing from the depths within me. Which shall I listen too, above all others?”<sup>97</sup> Slowe juxtaposed her “vigorous self” that loved the “great outdoors, tennis, golfing and hikes” with her “demure self” and her “motherly self.” While she viewed these selves as parts of a whole, Slowe felt as if one had to move to the foreground, writing, “All of these are me; pray tell me which shall become articulate? Which shall lift its voice above all others? Which shall be the voice triumphant guiding me on to full expression of the best and noblest self.”<sup>98</sup>

Slowe’s juxtaposition of “vigorous” and “motherly” self underscores a larger belief about recreation and its relation to black womanhood. By regulating black girls’ bodies and painting athletic young women as respectable and modern, recreation was mobilized by elite blacks to cultivate black womanhood. However, once you are a respectable black woman, who is married and/or entrenched in a professional career, the prevailing belief from elite reformers, was that recreation had done its job. In the early

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<sup>96</sup> The Modern Women, *Afro-American*, August 12, 1916, pg. 7

<sup>97</sup> LDSP, Box 90-4, Folder 102; MSRC.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

20<sup>th</sup> century the opportunities for organized athletic engagement for black women, dropped drastically after college.

Slowe continued to encourage her students to be active. She continued to assert the fact that there was “not a more pressing problem then what we do with our leisure.”<sup>99</sup> Slowe helped organize and oversee multiple athletic clubs for girls. Yet Slowe also began to warn of “modern problems” that women face, noting that that “women cannot do two things well” and encouraging women to focus on a single facet of themselves.<sup>100</sup> Perhaps her introspection had led her to abandon tennis. Perhaps Slowe simply disagreed with her tennis rankings and refused to compete, as some papers asserted.<sup>101</sup> Whatever the reason, after nearly two decades of playing tennis, and four national championships singles titles and multiple doubles titles in six years of ATA tournament play, Slowe hung up her tennis racquet for good. Tennis was an essential component of developing a healthy and active life as a modern woman, but Slowe ultimately saw herself as an educator and an administrator. In 1924, the same year she stopped playing tennis, quit the MTC, Slowe was named Dean of Women at her alma mater, Howard University.

## **Conclusion**

Slowe’s juxtaposition of the “vigorous” and “motherly” self, along with her assertion that women cannot do “two things well” in many ways reveals a gendered double consciousness, a “peculiar sensation” not unlike Du Bois infamous description of having

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<sup>99</sup> *The Hilltop*, May 8, 1925, pg. 16

<sup>100</sup> “Women Cannot Do Two Things Well,” *Afro-American*, February 23, 1923, pg. 11

<sup>101</sup> Slowe would refute this claim, noting that while she as “dissatisfied with her omission from the top-seeded players” she simply choose to stop playing because she “felt like withdrawing.” Lucy Slowe, “Miss Slowe Did Not Quit Game,” *Afro-American*, August 29, 1924, pg. 15.

“two souls, two thoughts, two reconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body”.<sup>102</sup> The warring ideals in Slowe’s experience were engaged and active modern women vs a married respectable New Negro wife. Slowe’s upbringing in the city, punctuated by her experiences within elite black organizations and institutions, in many ways set up this divide.

Black women’s bodies were the site on which white observers and black reformers projected urban pathologies. Black institutions were invested in molding black girls into race women and used athletics as a major tool in this endeavor. From schools to playgrounds to the CYWCA, girls like Slowe were taught to find and develop their “vigorous” self in order to be physically and moral prepared to carry the future of the race in their every step. As they aged, these vigorous girls were to produce vigorous race babies and embrace their motherly selves. The decreasing number of athletic opportunities for black women as they grew older, underscored the black elite’s investment in athletics as the prevue of young women.

In some ways, the women who sought to professionalize organizational and recreational work, created a space for the merging of these identities. As playground

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<sup>102</sup> Double Consciousness is a concept introduced by W. E. B. Du Bois as a way to describe a split or divided identity. Applying this concept to the black experience in the United States, Du Bois writes: “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife- this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He does not wish to Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He wouldn’t bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face”, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Dover Thrift Editions (New York: Dover, 1903). pg. 2-3

directors, CYWCA athletics instructors and high school coaches, black women remained athletically engaged while also acting as mothers of the race as they cultivated the next generation of race women. This care engagement with athletics- framed as a facet of racial uplift- allowed black women to pry open the doors of opportunity and capitalize on their active labor.

At Howard, Slowe's would soon face a new wave of black women who, unlike her self, viewed recreation as more than just the cultivation of "mind, body and spirit". In the 1920s and 1930s the emerging generation of black college women would seek to re-define the function of athletics. In a time of protest and upheaval on black college campus, college girls would develop a new expression of modern and respectable athleticism that contrasted with Black women physical educators and leaders like Slowe, who continued to advocate for girls athletics primarily for the development of beauty and health.

## Chapter Two

### **Modern Girls on Campus: The Politics of Participation**

When Lucy Diggs Slowe arrived at Howard University in 1923, the newly appointed Dean of Women entered a rapidly changing and expanding campus. Howard, one of the most prominent Negro colleges in the country, was celebrating an admissions surge as students poured in from thirty-eight states and eleven different countries.<sup>1</sup> The university's faculty was expanding, as evidenced by the hiring of people like Dean Slowe, and the curriculum was being updated to reflect "modern needs" of a "national school for colored people."<sup>2</sup> Howard's growth and influence attracted investors. The University's alumni associations, the General Education Board (GEB) and the U.S. Government all contributed monetary support, primarily for infrastructural expansion and modernization. For Howard's administration, one particular achievement was particularly noteworthy. The President of the United States had signed the annual appropriation bill for the Department of the Interior. Included on the bill was a \$197,500 appropriation to Howard University for the construction of a brand new gymnasium, new athletic fields, a football stadium and clubhouses.<sup>3</sup> The celebration of this expansion project underscored a core feature of University administrators' plan to position Howard as the "leading

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<sup>1</sup> "2,277 Students Are Enrolled at Howard," *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (1921-1967), December 15, 1923.

<sup>2</sup> a. M. Emmett J. Scott, "Howard University, A National School For Colored People: Sends Forth Hundreds of Graduates in Its Collegiate and Professional Courses. Has Class A Rating In Various Branches Efforts Being Made to Obtain New Buildings and Larger Corps of Instructors.," *The Washington Post (1923-1954)*, September 7, 1924, sec. Editorial Society; "Work Begins Tomorrow At Howard University: Registration Indicates Larger Attendance in All the Departments. Faculty Is Enlarged," *The Washington Post (1923-1954)*, September 30, 1923, sec. General.

<sup>3</sup> "Howard to Have New Gym and Big Football Stadium," *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (1921-1967), March 24, 1923.

modern college for negroes”: the development of organized athletics and Physical Education.<sup>4</sup>

For Howard’s administration, physical education was essential to the growing college campus. The newly established Department of Physical Education- one for men and one for women- were thought to give every student a “healthy and properly developed body...and good moral training,” one press release explained. “Howard intends that her graduates shall not only be men and women of learning and efficiency, but also of character and lofty ideas.<sup>5</sup>” While female students were prominently accounted for in the university’s idea about the need and benefits of physical education, organized competitive athletics remained both essential to the university as well as the purview of men. As one Howard publication indicated, there was “very little concerning athletics for young women of the university.” Yet as the 1923 school year came to a close, there were indications that the absence of women from competitive collegiate athletics could be changing as well. “A very successful track meet was held,” remarked a student yearbook, proving that “athletics for women was not a waste and time” and in fact “very much desired by University women.” “The sprit shown” at the “well attended” track meet “indicated [the] possibility of athletics in the years to come.<sup>6</sup>”

Following World War I, black colleges like Howard experienced rapid growth and expansion. In the midst of these changing campuses, school administrators, faculty, alumni and students alike, all grappled with the question of what constituted a “modern negro college.” While the answers were varied and often times in conflict, athletics

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<sup>4</sup> emmett J. Scott, “Howard University, A National School For Colored People.”

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Bison Yearbook, 1923-24, “Athletics”

remained a central component of visions of a modern black institution. Scholars have noted the importance of sports to black college campuses in the interwar era when the growth of athletic departments sparked numerous debates over the value and function of black college sports. Both historically and historiographically, the invested interest in black college sports centers on football.<sup>7</sup> The attention paid to this single gendered sport necessarily regulates black women to the sidelines of historical memory. Indeed, the football centric exploration of black college sports eclipses black women's athletics and the contrasting ideas that precipitated, and sometimes impeded, their development.

The following chapter examines the arguments that shaped the development of athletics for women at black colleges during the interwar era. It juxtaposes the views and efforts of young college women who pushed for opportunities to play competitive sports with the organization of black women physical educators who asserted occupational autonomy in their attempts to develop and govern college athletics. The chapter also highlights black male coaches who invested in athletics for women as an avenue to modern racial uplift. Taken together, the debates over athletics for women at black colleges reveal larger intra-racial tensions along class and generational lines that produced juxtaposing views how modern black women should look, act, and play, and how they should prepare for their future as mothers, laborers and respectable "race women."

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<sup>7</sup> See: Michael Hurd, *Black college football, 1892-1992: one hundred years of history, education, and pride*. Donning Company Publishers, 1998; Patrick B. Miller, "To 'Bring the Race Along Rapidly': Sport, Student Culture, and Educational Mission at Historically Black Colleges During the Interwar Years," *History of Education Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1995): 111–133, doi:10.2307/369629; Charles Martin, *Benching Jim Crow: The Rise and Fall of the Color Line in Southern College Sports, 1890-1980*, 1st Edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Nathan, *Rooting for the Home Team*.

## Protests, Athletics and the Making of the Modern Black Campus

The emergence and growth of black colleges began rapidly after the conclusion of the Civil War.<sup>8</sup> Freedmen (and women) along with the Freedman's Bureau, American Missionary Association, and northern white philanthropists were immediately active in the creation and funding of black schools at the elementary, secondary and collegiate levels across the South.<sup>9</sup> Both men and women flocked towards these newly opened schools. Lucy Slowe, Dean of Women at Howard University, highlighted the fact that most of the emerging black colleges were co-educational. She noted that while Bennett, Spelman and Tillston were colleges exclusively for the education of black women, they "were no counterpart" of the institutions that exclusively educated white women.<sup>10</sup> As Slowe suggested, the history of white women in education was not parallel to that of black women. The institutions for white women's education were born out of seminary and finishing schools that had existed since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century- when most black women were still in bondage. White women had waged a long fight for admission into college and upon succeeding, the new women's schools were set up in relation to long standing elite universities such as Harvard and Columbia. For black Americans,

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<sup>8</sup> Key institutions that were founded in the first 5 years after the war include: Fisk (1865), Shaw (1865), Howard (1867), Atlanta (1867), Straight College (1869) and Tusculum (1869)

<sup>9</sup> For more on the history of the funding of black colleges see: Eric Anderson, *Dangerous Donations: Northern Philanthropy and Southern Black Education, 1902-1930* (Columbia, Mo: University of Missouri Press, 1999); James D Anderson, "Northern Philanthropy and the Training of Black Leadership: Fisk University, a Case Study, 1915-1930," *New Perspectives on Black Educational History* (1978): 97-111; Henry N. 1924; Drewry, *Stand and Prosper: Private Black Colleges and Their Students* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> Lucy D. Slowe, "Higher Education of Negro Women," *The Journal of Negro Education* 2, no. 3 (July 1933): 352; The White women's colleges that Slowe references include the Famed 7-Sister Schools (Mount Holyoke, Vassar, Wellesley, Smith, Radcliffe, Bryn Mawr and Barnard) as well as Wells College and Mills College.

most emerging colleges were founded as co-educational from the very beginning.

Nevertheless, the admission of black women to college did not translate into equal claim to the space.

Black colleges were popularly understood as spaces for the education of “Race Leaders” who were assumed to be male. In his landmark work published in *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois argued that Black Colleges had a clear function. He wrote that they must “maintain the standards of popular education”; “seek social regeneration of the Negro”; “help in the solution of the problems of race”; and stressed that above all else, black colleges “must develop men.”<sup>11</sup> Black colleges may have set out to “develop men,” but they were admitting women. By 1920, the trend was clear- the number of black women on campus was increasing more rapidly than that of their male counter parts.<sup>12</sup>

The end of World War I ushered in a growth and expansion of American higher education. The college enrollment rate nearly doubled nationwide. The flow into colleges

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<sup>11</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903, Dover Thrift Editions (New York: Dover, 1994.) pg. 66. Historian Herbert Aptheker argues that Du Bois’s use of “men” simply reflect the “male-supremacist bias” of the time. Aptheker goes on to assert that its “purely verbal” for Du Bois because he was, in fact, ahead of his time in advocating for women’s rights. (Herbert Aptheker, Forward in William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *The Education of Black People: Ten Critiques, 1906-1960*, vol. 363 (University of Massachusetts Press, 1973). I reject this simplification of Du Bois’s gender politics and refer to the outstanding work of scholars who have examined the gender politics around Du Bois as a person, a public persona, a novelist and a discourse See: Susan Kay Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum, *Next to the Color Line: Gender, Sexuality, and WEB Du Bois* (Choice Publishing Co., Ltd., 2007). Especially the articles by Hazel Carby, Joy James and Mason Stokes.

<sup>12</sup> For example, a study of Fisk students from 1925-1928 shows that their was 35% more women then men on campus a huge shift from a decade earlier. See: Ambrose 1894-1962 Caliver, *A Personnel Study of Negro College Students: a Study of the Relations Between Certain Background Factors of Negro College Students and Their Subsequent Careers in College* (New York city: Teachers college, Columbia university, 1931), Marion Cuthbert, “Education and Marginality: A Study of the Negro Woman” (Dissertation, Columbia University, 1942). And Charles S. Johnson, *The Negro College Graduate* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938). It should be noted that some have called into question the validity of the quantitative parts of Johnson’s study. Cuthbert borrows heavily from his data as well. For more on this see the critique by Martin D. Jenkins, *The Journal of Negro Education* 8, no. 2 (April 1, 1939): 223–226,

was even more pronounced for black Americans whose college enrollment rate quadrupled after the war. The rapid growth at black colleges was led by black women whose college enrollment sextupled during the same period. While a small number of black coeds were attending predominantly white schools of the north and west, the majority poured into black colleges- 90% of which were located in the American south.<sup>13</sup>

Some black educators viewed the increasing presence of black women on campus as evidence that black Americans were “not using the masculine resources of the race.”<sup>14</sup> To these educators, the primary function of the Negro college remained the education of male leaders. Schools, however, continued to encourage black women to enroll. Advertisements from elite black colleges proclaimed themselves to be the “Place for Your Girl,” and positioned themselves as cultivators of a “high standard of independent womanhood.”<sup>15</sup> At the same time, black women educators and administrators approached the changing demographics in quite a different way.

Black women sought to alter the curriculums and extra-curricular activities available to black women in college in order to produce “well-rounded women...ready to assume the responsibilities that life will place on her shoulders.”<sup>16</sup> Putting it more plainly, a black women administrator remarked that the “truest function” of the college training of

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<sup>13</sup> Monroe Work, *The Negro Year Book, 1946-47* (Tuskegee, AL, 1948) pg. 34

<sup>14</sup> Caliver, *A Personnel Study of Negro College Students*; *ibid.*; Caliver, Ambrose, “The Education of Negro Leaders,” *Journal of Negro Education* 17, no. 3 (Summer 1948): 240–48.

<sup>15</sup> For the purposes of this project I am defining “middle class black colleges” as the schools in the four central southern areas of Nashville, Atlanta, Washington DC and New Orleans, that were relatively well resourced with financial backing from northern philanthropies and also endorsed a liberal arts curriculum. Advertisements for black colleges were featured in leading black publications such as the *Crisis* and *Opportunity*. Here I am quoting ads that ran in *Crisis*, Vol. 24, No. 3, July 1922, pg. 100-102.

<sup>16</sup> Lucy Diggs Slowe, “The Education of Negro College Women for Social Responsibility, Slowe Papers, MSRC, Series L 90-6, Folder 130

black women was to ensure she was ready to “meet the material problems of life...to earn a living, manage her resources and cope with the manifold difficulties involved in the job of being a bread winner, a wife and a mother.”<sup>17</sup> At Howard, Dean Slowe argued against female students being exclusively regulated to home economics or traditionally feminized disciplines such as social work or teaching. Slowe insisted that course work in economics, sociology and psychology were essential to preparing modern women to thrive in an “industrial democracy,” and she encouraged students to think broadly about career options after college.<sup>18</sup> Despite the presence of Slowe and other female administrators, the control of universities largely remained in the hands of males, many of who remained committed to defining their colleges as masculine spaces.<sup>19</sup> Athletics, particularly football, became a key component of cultivating institutional prestige around projections of masculinity and strength.

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<sup>17</sup> Lucy Diggs Slowe, “The Colored Girl Enters College— What Shall She Expect,” Slowe Papers, MSRC, Series L 90-6, Folder 121; Lucy Diggs Slowe, “The Education of Negro College Women for Social Responsibility, Slowe Papers, MSRC, Series L 90-6, Folder 130 “Bennett College for Women,” *Opportunity*, May 1928; Florence Read, “The Place of the Women’s College in the Pattern of Negro Education,” *Opportunity*, Vol. 15, No. 9, September 1937; Lucy Diggs Slowe, “A College for Girls,” *Opportunity*, Vol. 16, October 1938

<sup>18</sup> Lucy Diggs Slowe, “The College Woman and Her Community,” opening speech presented at the National Association of College Women, Atlanta, Georgia, April 1934, in Howard University Alumni Journal, Slowe Papers, MRSC, Series L, box 90-6, folder 120; Slowe, Lucy Diggs Slowe, “The Colored Girl Enters College— What Shall She Expect,” Slowe Papers, MSRC, Series L 90-6, Folder 121; For more on Slowe’s development of New Negro Womanhood on Howard’s campus see Treva B. Lindsey’s chapter in Baldwin and Makalani, *Escape from New York*.

<sup>19</sup> For more on Slowe and the handful of other black women administrators in higher education see: Linda M. Perkins, “Lucy Diggs Slowe: Champion of the Self-Determination of African-American Women in Higher Education,” *The Journal of Negro History* 81, no. 1/4 (January 1, 1996): 89–104, doi:10.2307/2717610; edited by Alan R. Sadovnik and Susan F, *Founding Mothers and Others: Women Educational Leaders During the Progressive Era*, 1st ed (New York: Palgrave, 2002), [https://catalyst.library.jhu.edu/catalog/bib\\_2262849](https://catalyst.library.jhu.edu/catalog/bib_2262849); James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 1988); Rayford Whittingham Logan, *Howard University: The First Hundred Years, 1867-1967* (NYU Press, 1969); Marybeth Gasman and Roger L. Geiger, *Higher Education for African Americans Before the Civil Rights Era, 1900-1964* (Transaction Publishers, 2012).

The investment in athletics at black colleges mirrored the rise of college sports at white institutions. While elite private universities like Harvard and Yale had long boasted popular football teams, controversies in the early 1900s had led to some schools to consider banning football all together. Out of this movement of “football crisis” the National Colligate Athletic Association (NCAA) was formed to govern colligate sport. As universities grew and expanded after the First World War, so to did their football programs. By the 1920s college football was a lucrative institutional investment as college games generated money and popularity for school. The commercialization of college football coincided with a shift away from the elite northeastern private schools, as colleges in the Midwest and South began to be dominant.<sup>20</sup> For black colleges however, the importance of college football extended beyond financial incentives.

There are three multiple reasons that sports, especially football, were central priorities of many black colleges. First, college sports could enhance the schools appeal and shape its reputation. As E.B. Henderson observed, “the glare and glamour [of athletics] attracted to scholastic halls many a backwoods boy and girl who would have been plowing and mating in the countryside untrained and in hum-drum living, but who

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<sup>20</sup> For more on the history of college football, the rise of commercialization and shift away from the “big three” private schools see: John Sayle Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy* (JHU Press, 2002); Gerald R. Gems, *For Pride, Profit, and Patriarchy: Football and the Incorporation of American Cultural Values* (Scarecrow Press, 2000); Raymond Schmidt, *Shaping College Football: The Transformation of an American Sport, 1919-1930* (Syracuse University Press, 2007); Ronald A. Smith, “Intercollegiate Athletics/Football History at the Dawn of a New Century,” *Journal of Sport History* 29, no. 2 (2002): 229–239; Andrew Doyle, “Turning the Tide: College Football and Southern Progressivism,” *Southern Cultures* 3, no. 3 (January 4, 2012): 28–51, doi:10.1353/scu.1997.0021; Guy Lewis, “The Beginning of Organized Collegiate Sport,” *American Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (1970): 222–229, doi:10.2307/2711645; Allen L. Sack, “Yale 29—Harvard 4: The Professionalization of College Football,” *Quest* 19, no. 1 (January 1, 1973): 24–34, doi:10.1080/00336297.1973.10519746; Ronald A. Smith, “Harvard and Columbia and a Reconsideration of the 1905-06 Football Crisis,” *Journal of Sport History* 8, no. 3 (1981): 5–19.

are now being turned into high class and more useful products of society.”<sup>21</sup> While Henderson’s quote reflects his Du Bosian ideology about the value of book education versus agricultural labor, it also demonstrates the way sports became a compelling advertisement for black colleges. A successful program could go a long way towards selling a school as a leading Negro institution, whereas a poor program could be a damaging blow to the school’s reputation. “No school in this day can expect to attract promising men and women that does not give organized athletics a foremost place,” said J.R.E. Lee, the President of Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU). “Where there are no athletics it is very likely true that only deadheads are attracted. Young men and women of promise desire to be connect to institutions with sprit and force.”<sup>22</sup>

The inclusion of women in both Henderson and Lee’s observations show that the cultivation of sporting culture was not just thought to be for the benefit of men. However the role women played in a robust sporting climate was not that of athletes but rather onlookers. College coeds role in the spectacle that was black college football underscore another second key reason for the promotion of the sport on campus. The games promoted positive community engagement. Students and locals crowded the stadiums to see the marching bands, pageantry and fellowship that surrounded the game itself. In fact, the Bennett College student newspaper often offered a report on the fashions spotted on

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<sup>21</sup> Henderson, “Sports,” *The Messenger* 8 (February 1926) Pg. 51

<sup>22</sup> J.R.E. Lee Sr, as quoted in Leedell W. Neyland and John W. Riley, *The History of Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University* (University of Florida Press, 1963).Pg. 127

the sidelines of football games.<sup>23</sup> As David Wiggins argues in his examination of the annual thanksgiving classic between Howard and Lincoln (PA), these sporting events created venues for black elites in various cities to network and build community.<sup>24</sup> College football games also provided the larger black community with affordable leisure.



***Figure 7. Black College Women at Howard University Football Game, Griffith Stadium, Washington D.C. ca. 1920, Courtesy of Scurlock Studio Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.***

The third reason black colleges invested in sports was that many administrators viewed the construction of successful football teams to be projects of racial uplift. In the early 1900s, the idea that sports could foster vigorous and strong men drew on Victorian ideas of the “strenuous life” and prevalent concepts of muscular Christianity. The rigor of athletics was an avenue for black men to demonstrate productive citizenship and strength. Black colleges joined white schools in choosing mascots that invoked strength, such as

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<sup>23</sup> For example see: “Miss Bennett Meets Dame Fashion,” *The Bennett Banner*, October, 1942, pg. 4, Thomas F. Holgate Library Archives, Bennett College

<sup>24</sup> Davis K. Wiggins, “The Biggest ‘Classic’ of Them All: Howard University and Lincoln University Thanksgiving Day Football Games, 1919-1929” in Nathan, *Rooting for the Home Team*, 36–54.

the Wiley Wildcats or the Lincoln Tigers.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the prospect of black athletic teams facing of and potentially beating white teams, positioned black college sports as sites of muscular assimilation and symbolic victories in the same manner as Jack Johnson's boxing titles. Integrated opportunities in college sports were few in far between. In fact a rare game between a white football team and a "team of colored all-stars" resulted in a humiliating, 51-0 loss for the black squad.<sup>26</sup> This highly anticipated game sent black sportswriters into a panic with the resulting loss. One writer declared it the "most disappointing spectacle of the decade" and lamented that it would "set negro college football back years."<sup>27</sup>

As the 1920s approached and concepts of self-determination informed emerging New Negro ideologies, college sports began to represent a different path of racial uplift. According to outspoken leaders like Henderson, the rise of the organized black sporting industry, from the teams to the referees to the coaches, demonstrated black Americans ability to organize and sustain their own institutions. The Colored Interscholastic Athletic Association (C.I.A.A) had formed in 1912 to set the rules and regulations for black college sports at schools along the Atlantic coast. The years following saw the formation of the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association (S.I.A.A.), South- Atlantic Athletic

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<sup>25</sup> Hurd, *Black College Football*, pg. 153-162

<sup>26</sup> "Bears Invited to Play Colored Stars for Charity," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)*, August 9, 1938; George Strickler, "Bears Battle Colored Star Eleven Tonight: Bears Battle Colored Star Eleven Tonight," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)*, September 23, 1938; Frank A. Young, "All Stars Unable To Halt Bears; Lose 51-0: Instructions," *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967)*, October 1, 1938, sec. Sports; "All Stars Helpless As Chicago Bears Roll Down Field To Win 51-0," *Philadelphia Tribune (1912-2001)*, September 29, 1938. For more on this match see: Michael Oriard, *King Football: Sport and Spectacle in the Golden Age of Radio and Newsreels, Movies and Magazines, the Weekly and the Daily Press* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2005), 324–326.

<sup>27</sup> William G. Nunn, "All-Stars Fall Before Battering Chicago Bears: 'Pros' Too Strong So All-Stars Lose, 51-0," *The Pittsburgh Courier (1911-1950), City Edition*, October 1, 1938, sec. Sports.

Association (SAAA) and the Southern Athletic Conference (SAC). These associations were less organized and developed than the C.I.A.A. Yet the loose governance of black college sports was compounded a rising critique some administrators were putting forth regarding the vaulted importance of sport on campus. At elite black liberal arts schools, like Fisk and Howard, the place of athletics was becoming hotly contested. As administrators attempted to assert control on campus, their visions for their respective universities began to clash with the increasingly vocal student populations. For administrators at Fisk and Howard, their advocacy of academics over athletics would become a key target for black college student rebellions of the 1920s.

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In the 1920s, black colleges, like their white counterparts, experienced repeated episodes of campus protest and unrest. The growing youth movement was embedded with a postwar radicalism that pushed back at authoritarian control and autocratic modes of management. While laborers pushed for union representation and staged worker's strikes, college students challenged the authority of college administrators and what many students considered their "conservative ideals."<sup>28</sup> For black college students, the New Negro movement, which encompassed a wide array of literary, artistic, economic expressions and protests, was equally formative in 1920s.<sup>29</sup> Writer and philosopher Alain

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<sup>28</sup> John R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 2nd ed (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011); David O. Levine, *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration, 1915-1940* (Cornell University Press, 1988).

<sup>29</sup> Wolters, Raymond, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Martin Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina University Press, 2004); Herbert Aptheker, "The Negro College Student in the 1920s-Years

Locke noted that protests from black college students were also a result of “a feeling of racial repression and the need for more positive and favorable conditions for the expression and cultivation of the developing race spirit.”<sup>30</sup> As black college women joined their peers in protest, they also began developing their autonomy as “modern girls” who sought to define and control their bodies for themselves.<sup>31</sup> Black coeds asserted their claim over their bodily autonomy by pushing back at administrations like Fisk and Talladega in battles over their dress codes requirements, the constant presence of chaperones, and the lack of competitive athletic opportunity.

From the turn of the century, play days had represented the athletic programming for women on college campuses. These events emphasized movement and moderation so as to not overexert the feminine body. At black colleges across the South, young women petitioned their respective administrations for more competitive athletic programming. At Fisk, students asked for an athletic association to organize and oversee intramural games for women.<sup>32</sup> Howard coeds flooded planning meetings in the Department of Physical

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of Preparation and Protest: An Introduction,” *Science and Society* 33, no. 2 (Spring 1969). For more on the New Negro Movement see: Alain Locke, *The New Negro* (Antheum, 1925); Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2009); Davarian L. Baldwin and Minkah Makalani, eds., *Escape from New York: The New Negro Renaissance Beyond Harlem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013). For work on New Negroes and black girls and women see: Erin D. Chapman, *Prove It On Me: New Negroes, Sex, and Popular Culture in the 1920s* (Oxford University Press, 2012); Marcia Chatelain, *South Side Girls: Growing Up in the Great Migration*, Chapter 2 (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2015); Keisha N. Blain, “‘We Want to Set the World on Fire’: Black Nationalist Women and Diasporic Politics in the New Negro World, 1940–1944,” *Journal of Social History* (June 23, 2015)

<sup>30</sup> Alain Locke, “Negro education Bids for Par,” *Survey* 54 (September 1, 1915) 569-570

<sup>31</sup> The Modern Girl around the World Research Group et al., *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization* (Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>32</sup> Clipping of student petition, Constance Fisher Scrapbook, Fisk University 1920-1924, Constance Fisher Papers, Tuskegee University Archives (TUA), Box 1, uncategorized materials

education, hoping to demonstrate interest in school-sponsored basketball and tennis leagues.<sup>33</sup>

And the interest was there. As surveys of black collegians showed, “athletics and outdoor sports,” was the most frequently cited hobby or interest for women on campus. One survey of Fisk undergraduates demonstrated that nearly 60% of women reported a high interest in basketball, compared to just 20% of men. Indeed, with the exception of football and baseball, Fisk women were more interested in almost every sport, including golf, tennis, volleyball, swimming and track. They were also more interested in attending games than their male classmates.<sup>34</sup>

By the mid-1920s, the student dissatisfaction with authoritarian rule on campus reached a boiling point. The days of letter writing and meetings had seemingly passed as students began to turn to more aggressive protest tactics. Student strikes, boycotting classes, marches, and sit-ins sought to draw attention to the plethora of issues about which students were unhappy. While the issues varied a bit, a central commonality was that black college students, both men and women, wanted less governing over them, more bodily autonomy, and increased support for the components of a modern education that they deemed essential- namely athletics, social organizations such as fraternities and sororities and a student senate that had the ear of the administration.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> “Athletic Leaders Confer At Howard: Physical Education Association Research Find’s Prepared Teachers Scare Students Attend Increasing Interest in Girls’ Basketball Show,” *Afro-American (1893-1988)*, May 24, 1930.

<sup>34</sup> Caliver, *A Personnel Study of Negro College Students*, 51–54; Cuthbert, “Education and Marginality: A Study of the Negro Woman,” 123–136.

<sup>35</sup> Wolters, Raymond, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s*; Marcia Lynn Johnson, “Student Protest at Fisk University in the 1920’s,” *Negro History Bulletin* 33, no. 6

While some schools had less-defined organization, others, like Fisk, demonstrated an highly structured approach to their protests. Recognizing that the concerns of male and female students varied slightly, Fisk students met in same-sex groups before merging their lists into a public petition. The male students echoed sentiments on other campuses as they railed against compulsory ROTC, the lack of support for football programs, smoking bans, and the over-policing of interactions between the sexes. Black women also voiced concerns about smoking bans and over-present chaperones, and they also advocated for athletic associations and more relaxed dress codes.<sup>36</sup>

As the story about the Fisk protest gained traction in the black press however, the women's concerns were overshadowed by public debates about the importance of football to the "development of manhood on campus."<sup>37</sup> For black reporters and commentators, the successes of an athletic program like football were directly related to modern suitability of a campus to develop race men. And yet black women who also attempted to tie athletics to their concepts of a modern campus were routinely ignored. It seemed that despite the rhetoric from black women administrators, black institutions of higher education were still primarily aimed at serving and molding the modern *male* race leaders.

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(October 1, 1970); Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930*, 243–247.

<sup>36</sup>“Is it Fair” Pamphlet on Fisk Student Concerns, September 1924, President McKenzie Papers, Fisk University Archives (FUA), Box 26

<sup>37</sup> “Fisk College Students Quit By Hundreds,” *Afro-American (1893-1988)*, February 14, 1925, 530631408, Proquest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988); “Fisk President Is Master Of Publicity,” *Afro-American (1893-1988)*, March 7, 1925, 530508691, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

By the end of the 1920s, the large-scale student protests were winding down. The student protests at Fisk had forced the president out and the newly appointed president quickly pledged to strengthen the football programs, established athletic associations, lifted the smoking ban for men, and welcomed fraternities and sororities on to campus.<sup>38</sup> At Howard, the president had also resigned leading to the appointment of the school's first black president, Mordecai Johnson.<sup>39</sup> By the 1930s, Du Bois, a vocal advocate for the student protests, took a pilgrimage to southern Negro colleges and declared them to be "thoroughly modern."<sup>40</sup> In this new chapter of black college life, athletic associations for women increased in size and function, providing young black college women an increased opportunity to play sports in a competitive manner.

The black women on campus who pushed their respective administrations for competitive athletics advocated for their interests as modern girls on campus. What is more, they asserted their place within a black institution and demonstrated the ability to shape institutions to conform to their needs as well. Lost in the protest and petitions, however, is the fact that these coeds never challenged the philosophies of athletics that schools put forward. Black college girls may have wanted more competitive programming, but the reasons why they wanted it still hinged on the benefits of athletics for the development of a "high standard of womanliness" achieved, in part by

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<sup>38</sup> "President McKenzie Quits Fisk University Following Agitation for a Negro in His Stead," *New York Times*, April 24, 1925. "New Program At Fisk Univ. After McKenzie's Removal, Outlined By Rev. P. E. Baker," *The Pittsburgh Courier (1911-1950)*, July 11, 1925, City Edition edition, 201841028, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Pittsburgh Courier (1911-2002).

<sup>39</sup> Alumnus, "PUBLIC AND PRESS URGED TO TAKE HAND IN OUSTING HOWARD'S PREXY," *Afro-American (1893-1988)*, August 15, 1925, 530560886, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988).

<sup>40</sup> W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, "Does the Negro Need Separate Schools?," *The Journal of Negro Education* 4, no. 3 (July 1935)

emphasizing “good health and fair play.”<sup>41</sup> It is perhaps due to this framing that schools did not mind setting up women’s athletic associations. By the 1930s, athletic associations and intra-mural play was a feature of most elite black institutions. To govern these newly established associations, schools largely turned to black women physical educators to oversee the emerging programs.

### **Black Women Physical Educators and Promotion of Productive Athletics**

At the end of her first year as Director of Physical Education for Women at Fisk University, Sadie Daniels drafted recommendations for the future of the department. While noting that it had been “very pleasant year” in which the Fisk girls were “deeply interested in athletic activities,” Daniels attested that it could have been a more successful year if Fisk had the right athletic facilities. After lamenting the “poorly kept courts” and the wooden floors that caused many splinters, Daniels turned to her most important recommendation. “Because of the modern trend in women’s athletics, I feel that women should control women’s athletics,” she opined. Daniels proceeded to lay out the ways that Fisk could “change the set-up of athletic control for women” at the university, including the appointment of more women to the athletic control board and the hiring of a comptroller of the university specifically for women’s athletics.<sup>42</sup>

Daniels was one of a handful of black women physical educators who oversaw the growth of women’s athletics on campus. They largely promoted non-competitive intra-mural games, with the most prominent sports being tennis, golf, field hockey and “girls-

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<sup>41</sup> Clipping of student petition, Constance Fisher Scrapbook, Fisk University 1920-1924, Constance Fisher Papers, Tuskegee University Archives (TUA), Box 1, uncategorized materials

<sup>42</sup> Letter from Sadie Daniels to President Thomas Jones, June 17, 1935, Thomas E. Jones Papers, FUA, Box 31, Folder 1

rules” basketball. These women understood women’s athletics to be a vital part of developing and maintain a healthy “minds, bodies and sprits” as well as preparing women, both mentally and physically, for motherhood. Black women physical educators organized with each other and looked to strengthen their institutional role at their respective schools. A large part of their organizing efforts was the avocations of women being hired to design, implement and oversee athletics programs for colleges girls. Blending the traditional occupations of social work and teaching, black women physical educators carved out a space for their progressive presence within athletics and black institutions.



*Figure 8. Women's Tennis Club, Howard University, ca. 1930. Courtesy of Scurlock Studio Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History*

The field of physical education expanded following the end of World War One; during wartime, the government had discovered that many aspiring soldiers had failed their fitness exams and at the state level, governments sought to improve physical fitness. By the beginning of the 1920s, at least twenty states had passed laws requiring high schools to provide mandatory P.E. classes. Although colleges similarly began to expand or create physical educational programs, organized physical education classes were late to come to black colleges. Still a handful of black women earned degrees in Physical Education and discovered professional opportunity in athletic work in black colleges.<sup>43</sup>

Like the reformers a decade earlier who had begun city-based recreation programs for black girls, black women physical educators linked athletics to community *and* individual health. Howard's director of athletics for women, Mary Reeves Allen, articulated the concept of "beauty-health" that emphasized the particular "biological, physiological, sociological and psychological phenomena" of black women's lives.<sup>44</sup> To understand and value female beauty, they argued, one must account for, and strengthen all these aspects. With "productive athletics" black women could engage with "beauty-health" and honor their bodies "tenderers, grace, curves, loveliness" and mostly vitally "sacredness of its motherhood". As she taught her students at Howard, black women who

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<sup>43</sup> For more on black physical educators see: Jacqueline McDowell, "Head Black woman in charge: An investigation of Black female athletic directors' negotiation of their gender, race, and class identities" (Ph.D., Texas A&M University, 2008); Cahn, *Coming on Strong : Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-century Women's Sport*, 68–72. Martha H. Verbrugge, *Active Bodies: A History of Women's Physical Education in Twentieth-Century America*, 1 edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>44</sup> Beauty, n.d, Box 160-7, Folder 10, Mary Reeves Allen Papers, MSRC

engaged in “wholesome” athletics for the benefit of their individual health were in fact strengthen the entire community, through their eventual unions and children.



***Figure 9. Mary Reeves Allen, Director of Women's Athletics, Howard University, 1928 Yearbook Photo***

In linking athletics to the development of the black family and advancement of the race, Allen and other black women physical educators built on existing rhetoric that city recreation leaders like Ruth Arnett had employed when developing athletics in city YWCAs and other organized recreational programs. Arnett claimed athletics produced “the right sort of girl” - one who was strong, self-reliant, physically developed and appealing to “real race men.” The failure to develop athletic women thus endangered the future of the race as a whole. Bemoaning girls who “could not hike, run or climb” Arnett

wondered “if this round-shouldered, flat-chested girl is our mother of tomorrow, what will her children be.”<sup>45</sup>

Despite physical educators like Allen who advocated for physical engagement by black women, most black women physical educators drew a fine line between the wholesome intramural competition they curated and competitive athletics comparable to men’s sports. As sporting organizations such as the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) were beginning to promote women’s competitive athletics, both white and black women educators vehemently opposed these apparently parallel developments.

International developments hastened the rise of organized competitive sports for women in the United States. In 1921, Alice Milliat, a French women and pioneer of women’s sports, founded the Fédération Sportive Féminine Internationale (FSFI). Protesting the International Amateur Athletic Federation’s (IAAF) refusal to admit women’s athletics to the 1920 Olympic Games, the FSFI planned their own Women’s World Games in 1922.<sup>46</sup> White women physical educators opposed these games on the premise that it would highlight all athletics, not just the respectable sports that they governed at their middle class institutions. As one member of the American Physical

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<sup>45</sup> Ruth Arnett, “Girls Need Physical Education,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (1921-1967), December 10, 1921.

<sup>46</sup> Mary H. Leigh and Therese M. Bonin, "The pioneering role of Madame Alice Milliat and the FSFI in establishing international trade and field competition for women." *Journal of Sport History* 4, no. 1 (1977): 72-83; For more on the early formation of women’s international sport see: Sheila Mitchell, "Women's participation in the Olympic Games 1900-1926." *Journal of Sport History* 4, no. 2 (1977): 208-228; Susan K. Cahn, *Coming on Strong : Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-century Women’s Sport* (New York :: Free Press ;, 1994), 56–62.

Education Association (APEA) confided to a colloque, “It is more surprising that apparently nice girls are planning to go over [To the games in Paris].”<sup>47</sup>

The prevailing association of certain sports, most notably track and field, with masculine qualities and working class populations, placed it in opposition to the sports “nice girls” play such as tennis, swimming or golf. Women physical educators and male sporting organizers both opposed competitive athletics for women. One AAU president ardently opposed track for women because he had “no desire to make girls public characters,” rhetorically linking competitive track to the negatively viewed “public” profession of prostitution.<sup>48</sup> Yet, in an attempt to quash Milliat and the FSFI and retain absolute control over international sport, the male headed sporting organizations of the IAAF and IOC began passing measures to include women’s athletics in international competitions. The domino affect of this calculated inclusion was that national sporting bodies such as the AAU began to also open up competitive opportunities. In 1924, two years after the FSFI’s Women’s Games, the AAU held its first national track championships for women.<sup>49</sup> Mr. Prout the AAU President, reluctantly stated, “ The girls have become athletes. We can’t stop them. We must simply standardize their games.”<sup>50</sup>

White women physical educators shared Prout’s assessment of the changing tide of women’s athletics. They quickly formed organized coalitions of professional women

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<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Mary Henson Leigh, "The evolution of women's participation in the Summer Olympic Games, 1900-1948." PhD Dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1974.

<sup>48</sup> Letter in *New York Times*, July 13, 1913, pg. 4 as quoted in Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, pg. 60

<sup>49</sup> Leigh and Bonin, "The pioneering role of Madame Alice Milliat" pg. 72-83; Cahn , *Coming on Strong*, pg. 59-62

<sup>50</sup> *New York Herald*, April 9, 1922 as quoted in Leigh’s The evolution of women's participation in the Summer Olympic Game, pg. 227

in athletic and recreation work. In 1923, they formed the Women's Division of the newly organized National Amateur Athletic Federation (NAAF) and together with the Council on Women's Athletics (CWA) sought to assert their control over the governance of sports for women and girls. The CWA and NAAF's Women's Division centered their mission on developing "sport for the girl and not the girl for the sport," and mounted an aggressive stand against the increasingly progressive AAU.<sup>51</sup> Over the next decade debates about what sports girls should play and how they should play animated the national organized sporting establishment. The CWA and Women's division pushed for the adaption of "girls rules" for basketball that sought to curb the physicality of the game. They also promoted "play days" and inter-class friendly competitions instead of intercollegiate tournaments and leagues.<sup>52</sup>

Similarly minded black women physical educators supported this agenda, yet few black women were able to work within the APEA, CWA or NAAF. The few who did like Allen, came from the elite back liberal arts schools. By the 1920s, schools like Howard, Spelman and Fisk had fully embraced the ideas of "wholesome recreation" and attempted

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<sup>51</sup> Alice Allene Sefton, *The Women's Division, National Amateur Athletic Federation: Sixteen Years of Progress in Athletics for Girls and Women, 1923-1939*. Stanford University Press, 1941; For more on the organizational development of women's sports in the early twentieth century see: Cahn, *Coming on Strong : Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-century Women's Sport*, 55-74; Mary Henson Leigh, "The Evolution of Women's Participation in the Summer Olympic Games, 1900-1948" (The Ohio State University, 1974); Joan S. Hult, "Women's Struggle for Governance in U.S. Amateur Athletics," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 24, no. 3 (September 1, 1989): 249-263; Ellen Gerber, "The controlled development of collegiate sport for women, 1923-1936." *Journal of Sport History* 2, no. 1 (1975): 1-28.

<sup>52</sup> These debates often took place in the pages of the *American Physical Education Review (APER)* later known as the *Journal of Health and Physical Education (JOHPE)* See for example: Mabel Lee, "The Case for and Against Inter-collegiate Competition for Women and the Situation as It Stands Today," *APER* 29, January 1924, pg. 13; Fredrick Rand Rogers, "Physical Education Programs for Girls," *APER* 33, May, 1928 pg.354; Helen Smith, "Athletic Education," *JOHPE* 2, January 1931, pg 8.

to phase competitive sports out of their athletic departments, in favor of play days. Despite the shared vision for girls athletics, black women in the field desired their own organization that could challenge the CIAA and other black male headed organizations that govern black college sports. Thusly, in 1938, Allen, along with the women physical education heads at Virginia State and Hampton Universities, founded the Women's Sports Day Association (WSDA).



*Figure 10. Women's Athletic Day, Howard University, ca. 1940s. Courtesy of Scurlock Studio Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History*

The WSDA shared many goals of the CWA and Women's division, however it also embraced a more community-minded focus that linked non-competitive recreation with the development of moral and fit women that would benefit the entire race.

Therefore black women physical educators reinforced the idea that the development of women's athletics was a project of racial uplift. The WSDA stood to promote the ideas of "beauty health" in an organized way while also networking with other black women-led organizations such as the National Association of College Women. Founded by Mary Church Terrell in 1923, the NACW had been outspoken against competitive athletics.<sup>53</sup> Following a 1929 meeting which included a discussion of inter-collegiate competitive athletics for women, the official NACW Journal reported that the participants had concluded that:

Inter-collegiate athletics should not be encouraged with all their undesirable physiological and sociological features. Inter-class and intra-class games serve every good purpose of the inter-collegiate games and avoid all the harmful effects.<sup>54</sup>

The association between the WSDA and the NACW underscores the importance of black women's professional networks in institution building. These black women who often were segregated from both male and white organizations founded parallel ones that directly spoke to the unique needs of black women. In networking with each other, they lent resources, numbers and, through the framework of organizations, institutional backing to a wide array of issues central to the development and well-being of black women.

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<sup>53</sup> The NACW began as the College Alumnae Club (CAC) in 1910. As it continued to grow and more chapters formed the members voted to make it a national organization, similar to Terrell's earlier organization, the National Association of Colored Women founded in the late 1800s. In 1974 the NACW became the National Association of University Women (NAUW). For more see: Mary Carter, "The Educational Activities of the National Association of College Women, 1923-1960," (M.Ed Thesis, Howard University, 1962); Linda M. Perkins, "The National Association Of College Women: Vanguard Of Black Women's Leadership And Education, 1923-1954," *The Journal of Education* 172, no. 3 (1990): 65-75.

<sup>54</sup> "Summary of the Conference of Deans and Advisors to Women in Colored Schools," *Journal of the National Association of College Women* 6 (1929), pg. 38

In opposition to the AAU and IOC and as well as male educators who more often promoted competitive sports, black women positioned themselves as the gatekeepers for women's athletics in colleges. When Howard University tried to merge the men's and women's physical education programs, Allen opposed, saying "women's interests in all directions [would] become submerged in the interest of men's athletics."<sup>55</sup> Many black women physical educators believed that the interest in men's athletics displayed crude notions of commercialism and misguided priorities. Elizabeth Dunham, the director at Hampton, said it would be "distinctly unwise" to leave women's athletics under the control of men, since women "come to school to study and not to join a traveling troupe of athletic performers."<sup>56</sup>

This line of argument gained traction in the mid-1930s when many leaders were publically calling attention to the negative recent trends in men's athletics at black colleges. Dubois- once a staunch advocate of black college sports - publically reprimanded black college students for "surrendering to silly ideals" about semi-professional athletics and Greek letter societies" while "despising scholarship" and hard work.<sup>57</sup> Du Bois and his colleague George Streater worked together to run a critical feature in the influential *Crisis* about black college football, highlighting the use of over-age students, the decline of academics in favor of football development, and the role of

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<sup>55</sup> Letter from Department of Physical Education for Women to Dr. Charles H. Thompson, Dean, College of Liberal Arts, Howard University, October 14, 1939. Box 160-8, Folder 9, Allen Papers, MSRC

<sup>56</sup> Elizabeth Dunham, "Physical Education of Women at Hampton Institute," *Southern Workman* 53 (April 1924), 167

<sup>57</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, "Education and Work," a commencement speech delivered at Howard University, June 6, 1930. Du Bois Papers, (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives (SCUA), University of Massachusetts, Amherst Libraries

money in retaining good players and building up programs at the expense of other facilities on campus.<sup>58</sup> Allison Davis neatly summed up the critique in a sarcastic poem entitled “The Second Generation: College Athlete”:

*Juggling basketballs  
and women,  
you won't work  
you wont study  
you won't marry  
but you have four “letters”  
and a fraternity pin  
college education  
of a hundred like you every year  
will bring the race along rapidly<sup>59</sup>*

This changing public sentiment around the ills of college athletics gave black women physical educators the moral authority to assert the need for their professional existence. Despite these claims, however, these women faced a lack of professional opportunities, arguing constantly for fair wages, and often times performing duties beyond scope of their jobs, such as serving as dorm matrons. The professional development of black physical educators was restricted both by the lack of integrated physical training schools and the dearth of black colleges that offered the major. While a

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<sup>58</sup> George Streater, “Football in Negro Colleges,” *Crisis* 39, April 1932, pg. 129. Letters from Streater to Du Bois reveal growing concern about black college football between 1930-1932. Streater set out to collect information from major college football programs to bolster their case documenting the ills of football. They were particularly concerned with commercialism, de-emphasis on academics, and the use of students who should have graduated or were only loosely connected to the school. Letter from Du Bois to George Streater, December 1, 1930, Du Bois Papers, (MS 312), SCUA; Letter from George Streater to Du Bois, December 5, 1930, Du Bois Papers, (MS 312), SCUA; Letter from Du Bois to George Streater, December 9, 1930, Du Bois Papers, (MS 312), SCUA; Letter from George Streater to Du Bois, January 5, 1931, Du Bois Papers, (MS 312), SCUA; Letter from George Streater to Du Bois, January 16, 1931, Du Bois Papers, (MS 312), SCUA; Letter from George Streater to Du Bois, January 30, 1932, Du Bois Papers, (MS 312), SCUA

<sup>59</sup> Allison Davis, “The Second Generation: College Athlete,” *Crisis* 35, March 1928

few black women were able to gain admission to white organizations, black women were largely marginalized from the larger professional networks of physical educators. At black schools they found some traction in the elite liberal arts colleges. Yet women like Allen still had to fight to legitimize their profession. Physical educators joined with women like Slowe who were using their roles as Deans of Women, to carve out professional space in black institutions. Allen, Dunham and their counterparts at elite black colleges asserted an emerging professional identity for black women. In contrast to their efforts, however many black land grant college and state schools were still developing competitive athletics for women, and unlike the liberal arts schools, these programs were largely under the control of men.

### **Competitive Sports for Black College Women**

By the end of the 1920s, competitive sports for women, especially track and basketball, had fallen out of favor with the general public. The seemingly progressive decision to include women's track events in the 1928 Olympic Games had backfired when, after the completion of the 800 meter race, several women collapsed at the finish line from exhaustion. This image of over-exerted girls fainting in the sun only served to solidify the idea that sports for women were "unhealthy" "unfeminine" and very unsuitable for the "weak bodies of the fairer sex".<sup>60</sup>

The work of black women physical educators resulted in many colleges, including elite black schools like Howard, Fisk and Spelman, backing away from competitive

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<sup>60</sup> "IOC- quotations for and against women's completion," nd. Avery Brundage Collection, Box 115, University of Illinois Archives

athletics, choosing instead to focus instead on play days, and the respectable upper class sports of tennis and golf. However, other black colleges moved in the opposite direction. Seeing an opportunity for black women to become involved with easily accessible sports such as basketball and track, competitive programs were founded at places like Morgan State University in Baltimore, and Prairie View College in Texas. In fact, by 1940 only 25% of black colleges opposed women's athletics, a number that stands out even more when compared to the 83% of white institutions that opposed the development of varsity athletics for women.<sup>61</sup>

The specific reasons for individual coaches and administrations to invest in women's sports varied. Some echoed the sentiments of black women educators who encouraged the development of physical education but endorsed non-competitive forms. "These girls of ours must get the wholehearted support of the press, pulpit and public," one man noted, "as there is nothing better than athletics to develop the body, spirit in mind. Give our girls a chance."<sup>62</sup> While other male athletic directors supported competitive athletics for women was along the same lines in which they advocated the importance of sports for men: to benefit the race. Largely though it is clear that the college women themselves continued to insist on equal sporting opportunity.

While the petitions for competitive athletics may have been ignored at Fisk, at other schools like Tuskegee, when women students pushed for the formation of athletic

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<sup>61</sup> A.W. Ellis, "The Status of Health and Physical Education for Women in Negro Colleges and Universities," *Research Quarterly of The American Association of Health* 10, no. 2 (May 1939), 58-63 and Ellen Gerber, "The Controlled Development of Collegiate Sport for Women, 1923-1936," *Journal of Sports History* 2 (Spring 1975), 1-28.

<sup>62</sup> George M. Bell, "Who's Denying 'Em?: Give the Girls a Chance," *The New York Amsterdam News (1922-1938)*, June 5, 1929.

teams their requests were met. In 1929 the women of Tuskegee used their weekly “girls meeting” to impress upon the Dean of Women their desire for a track team. After hearing their request, the Dean of Women, Edna Landers, put the matter to a vote. The Tuskegee women “Voted heartily in favor” of the proposed team and at least 45 women immediately signed up for it before the meeting conclude.<sup>63</sup> Cleve Abbott, the infamous athletic director at Tuskegee University, approved of the vote and officially formed the competitive program for women. Abbott’s approval is not all that surprising given his efforts to establish multiple athletic teams for women in other sports as well. It is likely that his commitment to developing women’s sports was fueled in part by his daughter, Jessie, who wanted to play sports and didn’t have any place else to do it.<sup>64</sup>

While their support and resources were not equally distributed, it was clear that training black women in the fields of track and basketball might generate interracial sporting opportunities for women to use their talent to benefit the race.<sup>65</sup> As one newspaper foreshadowed, “girls show promise in national events...reporting on 3 colored girls,” who competed “amongst 105 white ones.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Athletic News Bureau, Tuskegee Institute, February 1929, Track and Field Papers, TUA

<sup>64</sup> Black Women Oral History Project Interviews; A. Lillian Thompson interview with Jessie Abbott, October 11, 1977. OH-31, T-32/Jessie Abbott. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>65</sup> Track and basketball, sports that required fewer resources to play than golf or tennis, were emerging as the sole province of working class white ethnic women and black women. Unlike black women, white working class immigrants got most of their sporting opportunities through their job. By the 1920s, industries hoping to dissuade workers from striking or forming unions began sponsoring activities to court goodwill towards employers. The industry-sponsored leagues offered white working class women the opportunity to engage in low cost recreation. While some black women played for industry-based teams. Black colleges remained the central place for black women’s athletics. Cahn, *Coming on Strong*

<sup>66</sup> “Colored Girls Gave Promise of Coming to the Front in Athletics,” *The New York Amsterdam News* (1922-1938), July 29, 1931.

This sentiment was echoed in newspapers across the county as black women's athletic teams began to face off against white ones. Basketball teams or "girls fives" were a popular feature. These teams were usually sponsored by newspapers or connected to local YWCAs. While the most robust coverage of these teams was reserved for their interracial games, the inter-racial competitions still drew attention. Sports writers empathized their popularity and positive contribution to their respective communities. "Washington Lassies...have given their hometown publicity of the kind that can hardly be reckoned with in terms of dollars and cents," boasted one paper.<sup>67</sup>

Writers emphasized the ability and attractiveness of black women athletes thus allowing their columns to present women's sports in a way that guarded against tropes of masculinity. Calling one team the "Ziegfeld Follies of basketball" a *Courier* sportswriter presented the team proof that "healthful exercise aids beauty and feminine charm."<sup>68</sup> This language demonstrates the way sportswriters and coaches, adopted the "beauty-health" rhetoric used by black female physical educators. Therefore endorsing their theory while extending it to include competitive sports.

The effect of black women educators could be seen beyond the use of their athletic philosophy. The constant coverage of black women in sports also coincided with

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<sup>67</sup> "Washington, Pa. Lassies, Famed For Beauty And Ability, Have Been Termed The 'Ziegfeld Follies' Of The Basketball World By Admirers: Out of Town Team, Always Factor in District Championship Race, Exemplifies Theory That Healthful Exercise Is Aid to Beauty and Feminine Charm Have Largest Following of Any of Girls' Fives; Charlie West's Sister Manages Team and Jumps Center--Minister's Pretty Daughters Are Players," *The Pittsburgh Courier (1911-1950), City Edition*, March 26, 1927.

<sup>68</sup> The Zeigfeld Follies was an elaborate heretical production on Broadway for the first half of the twentieth century. The show was famous for its attractive chorus girls, popularly called the "Follies" or the "Follie girls". Ibid; "Beauty To Clash With Beauty When Washington Lassies Meet Rankin Girls' Quintet On Floor," *The Pittsburgh Courier (1911-1950), City Edition*, March 6, 1926, sec. Athletics the World Over.

emerging sports columns written by black women. The writers were often former athletes or trained physical educators whose columns gave updates on women's sporting competition and also reported on any issues or discussion surrounding women in sport. These columns served to normalize women's place within the sporting realm, as black women were literally granted dedicated space in the sports section. Moreover, they built upon the work of black women physical educators who sought to further professionalize athletic and recreational work. Sports writing presented yet another avenue for black women to engage with sports professionally.<sup>69</sup>

Despite the support of competitive women's athletics in the pages of the black press, many black colleges remained wary of negative stereotypes about black women's bodies and behaviors. In order to try to avoid scrutiny of black college girls who played sports, athletic directors also emphasized their femininity and respectability. At Bennett, a progressive college for black women, this distinction was made clear as the university strived to promote the incredible success of their athletic basketball team as well as beauty and respectability of their "Bennett belles". Again, black male athletic directors appropriated the language of black women educators, and applied it to the expansion of competitive athletics.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> In addition to coverage by black male sports writers, a few black women began to have running sports columns reporting on women's athletics. For example see: IVORA (Ike) KING, "Women in Sports," *Afro-American (1893-1988)*, August 27, 1932; IVORA KING, "Women in Sports," *Afro-American (1893-1988)*, March 19, 1932; Ike King, "Women In Sports: Feminine Yet Athletic," *Afro-American (1893-1988)*, September 19, 1931; Sara L. Humphries, "Women's Sports: Between Games," *Atlanta Daily World (1932-2003)*, March 29, 1940; Faith Woodson, "As Girls See It," *Afro-American (1893-1988)*, April 14, 1928; Inez Patterson, "Girls In Sports," *Philadelphia Tribune (1912-2001)*, September 26, 1929.

Despite the endorsement of competitive games for women, both land grant colleges as well as sportswriters drew a distinct line between college athletes and semi-professional ones. College women played sports within institutions that conferred class status. Aspiring class blacks sought access to college because it was the process of going there that could provide upward mobility. Sports were extra curricular activities that enhanced the collegiate experience, but they weren't professions.

In a much-anticipated match between the Bennett basketball team and the traveling newspaper-sponsored Philadelphia Tribunes, one of the few semi-pro teams for black women, over a thousand people squeezed into the gymnasium on three consecutive nights to witness the bouts. While the college girls were competitive, the physicality of the Tribune girls overwhelmed them. After the game, Bennett players and coaches drew stark juxtapositions between the college belles and the professional women. They cast the women as brutish, aggressive and - most importantly - not refined like them. One Bennett player recalled thinking that their appearance was appalling. Describing one Tribune girl as looking like a "ruffian." "She looked like she had been out pickin' cotton all day, shavin' hogs and everything else."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Liberti, "' We Were Ladies, We Just Played Basketball like Boys': African American Womanhood and Competitive Basketball at Bennett College, 1928-1942."

<sup>71</sup> Rita Liberti interview with Lucille Towsand as quoted in Ibid.



*Figure 11. Bennett College Basketball Team (on left), 1932, Courtesy of Bennett College Archives; Tribune Girls Basketball Team (on right), ca. 1930s, Courtesy of the Philadelphia Tribune*

This juxtaposition was revealing. It demonstrated that part of the reason competitive college sports were embraced was due to the fact that sports were seen as temporary recreation before women went into their real jobs as teachers, social workers and - or - mothers. In contrast, women who played professional sports were seen as much more transgressive. Their style of play reinforced the belief that athletics made women less feminine. Moreover, the juxtaposition evident in the series showcases the fact that intra-racial competitions that didn't contribute to opportunities of race pride, resulted in less leeway for black women athletes to be deemed respectable. In contrast to the negative reception of the Tribune Girls at Bennett, when the same team played - and often beat - white women's semi-professional teams they were celebrated widely in the black press.

## **Conclusion**

The Bennett competitive basketball team was as a short-lived anomaly. By the 1930s, Bennett joined with the other liberal arts schools and moved away from competitive sport. Instead the college joined the Women's Athletic Associations (WAA) and began to participate in regional sports days with schools like Hampton. Tennis, golf, swimming, "girls rules" basketball and field hockey continued to offered at schools like Bennett and Howard. However track and field, basketball and competitive tournaments were mostly found at land grant state schools. While these programs enjoyed institutional support and frequent attention from the black press, they were seen exclusively as extra-curricular activities. Colleges were not in the practice of developing women for professional careers in athletics.<sup>72</sup>

Yet black women physical educators modeled an avenue for professionalizing athletic labor. Their quest for professional autonomy and authoritative control over girls and women's athletics carved out an institutional space for black women in the "modern Negro university." These women presented an alternate career for black women and by doing so demonstrated ways in which young women could continue to interact with sports after college. Indeed, many college athletes expressed desire to go in to physical education work.

While black women physical educators effectively controlled athletics for black women in liberal arts colleges, the contrasting development of women's sports at land grant schools provided competitive athletics to black college students. Despite not having the same type of athletic involvement available to them, black women college students at all types of schools continued to advocate for athletic programming and enthusiastically

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<sup>72</sup> *Bennett Banner*, October 1934.

take to the field, court and track. For most of them, college would mark one of the last opportunities to play sports. A small few, however, found ways to professionalize their post-collegiate engagement with sports, as physical educators, sports writers, and occasionally as athletes themselves.

## Chapter Three

### **“Peddling Flesh” The Politics of Representation**

In a 1954 article aimed at discovering the “truth about women athletes,” *Jet* magazine described a scene from an unnamed “southern Negro college”. The campus was awaiting a visit from Toni Stone, a professional baseball player from the Kansas City Monarchs—who also happened to be a woman. Her impending arrival was causing some apprehension on campus as “officials awaited with worried anxiety” and “scholarly professors raised their eyebrows, expecting the worst...” Yet when Stone arrived in a “pink flowered dress,” she put concerns to bed as she “enthralled the campus with her feminine charm and grace.” A faculty member commented: “I thought she’d be chewing tobacco and swearing like a man.” By the time Stone left, the same professor was relieved: “She was a lady through and through.”<sup>1</sup>

What was the reason for the concern about Toni Stone’s presence on campus? Given the prominence of women’s sports at southern black colleges, the anxiety of school officials and professors seems perplexing. Yet three issues made Stone a different athlete than the young women who played sports at black colleges. First, Stone played baseball, a sport not many women played, although softball was becoming an increasing presence on black campuses. Track and basketball remained the most common sports for black women athletes to play. Secondly, Stone played baseball with men. This kind of coed play was uncommon. Mixed doubles tennis matches were the rare occasion in which men

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<sup>1</sup> “The Truth about Women Athletes,” *Jet*, August 5, 1954, 56-58

and women would compete on the same field. Lastly, and perhaps most unsettling, Toni Stone was a *professional* baseball player.

As previously discussed, much of the support for black girl's participation in sport was rooted in the belief that athletics cultivated a strong and healthy body and instilled positive character traits that would help black women become modern and respectable women and, most importantly, mothers. College sports often marked the last competitive sporting outlet for black women, as semi-professional and professional sports leagues were virtually non-existent for them. Community recreation programs and city based tennis and golf leagues often provided the only continued organized athletic opportunity for black women after college. Even those women who would be come Physical Education leaders, earned money by teaching or supervising sports and recreation, not by playing it. Stone's ability to earn money by playing baseball was not only uncommon, but it also contradicted the often cited reasons for women to participate in sports. Stone was not concerned with race motherhood or social cultivation, she was playing for her own pleasure and for her own economic benefit.

This chapter focuses on Stone, and other black women baseball players who competed professionally in the 1950s. Stone, Connie Morgan and Mamie "Peanut" Johnson, were African American women who, after being turned away from the All American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL) played for the Negro Leagues. The women played for three seasons (1953-1955) and generated much-needed publicity to a black baseball league slowly in decline.

In understanding how black women baseball players were treated as cultural commodities, this chapter creates important avenues for thinking about non- traditional forms of black women's labor, in this case athletics, as well as symbolic labor and its costs. Stone, Morgan and Johnson's bodies were used by white and black businessmen to generate profit for a depleted black institution while also operating as site where contested ideas about black femininity, physicality and public consumption collided. Through it all, these black women athletes attempted to negotiate, capitalize on, and challenge the way others depicted them. The efforts of Stone, Morgan and Johnson to control the ways in which they were represented and remembered are worthy of consideration. This history does not simply showcase them as individual actors, but rather highlights the limitations placed on black women athletes. Stone, Morgan and Johnson could not control their representations . Their effective silencing by white owners and the black male sporting establishment in the 1950s illuminates the politics and power dynamics behind their simplified stories.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For more on black women as symbols see: Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, a Symbol* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1997); Jeanne Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks* (Beacon Press, 2013); McElya, *Clinging To Mammy*.



**Figure 12. Negro League Flyer depicting Toni Stone, Peanut Johnson and Connie Morgan, 1953.**

*Courtesy Of the Pittsburgh Courier*

Toni Stone, Peanut Johnson and Connie Morgan grew up in different areas of the United States, yet their respective athletic experiences prior to entering professional baseball underscores the widespread institutional growth of black women's athletics in the mid-twentieth century. Born in 1921, Stone was raised in Saint Paul, Minnesota where her devoutly Catholic, working-class family resided in the predominately black neighborhood of Rondo. Born Marcenia Lyle, Stone went by Toni from an early age and by adolescence she had picked up another nickname- Tomboy. An outstanding athlete

who excelled at a variety of sports, Stone quickly turned heads in the school and citywide sports leagues. By the time she was 15 years old Stone had lettered in tennis, track and field, and softball at Hammond Junior High School. She also achieved honors from the citywide Junior High School Girls Athletic Association and became the first girl to earn three separate letters in one year.<sup>3</sup> The school-based girls' athletic leagues in which Stone competed were common in black institutions by the interwar era.

Mamie "Peanut" Johnson was born in South Carolina in 1935, but spent her adolescence in both New Jersey and Washington D.C. Despite her small frame, Johnson was naturally athletic with a long history of formal and informal athletic participation. Black girls in northern cities largely participated in athletic leagues through organizations such as the Police Athletic League (PAL), Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) and Young Woman's Christian Association (YWCA). In New Jersey, Johnson joined a local PAL that sponsored a wide array of sporting leagues and activities; yet, the PAL sponsored baseball league was all white and mostly male. Johnson was intent on playing baseball, but the New Jersey PAL was initially reluctant to admit her, relenting only after witnessing her skill on the field.<sup>4</sup>

Connie Morgan was also born in 1935 and raised in a northern city, Philadelphia, yet her experience in organized sports differed markedly from Johnson's. Some citywide teams were certainly all white and male, but Philadelphia also had a long tradition of organized sport leagues for black girls. The Dolly Vardens, for instance, were a

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<sup>3</sup> "Girl Athlete," *Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder*, June 25th, 1937

<sup>4</sup> Ackmann, 160

Philadelphia-area black women's professional baseball team founded in 1867.<sup>5</sup> Divided between the Chester Dolly Vardens No. 1 and the Philadelphia Dolly Vardens No. 2, these "colored female base-ball nines" would meet on a field in Lamokin Woods and earn money playing each other.<sup>6</sup> In 1935, the year Morgan was born, Philadelphia had two separate teams in the Colored Women's Basketball League, The Germantown Hornets and the Philadelphia Quicksteppers. In 1949, after playing a variety of sports in high school, Morgan joined a local colored women's softball team, the North Philadelphia Honey Drippers.<sup>7</sup>

The opportunity for Stone, Johnson and Morgan to play organized sports in the 1930s and 1940s came, in part, from the efforts of black, middle-class physical educators in early twentieth century who had encouraged black women to "take up athletics."<sup>8</sup> E.B. Henderson, a well-known black physical educator, extolled the "prominence" of "national exponents of women's sport." Henderson argued that the athletic skill and character of black women should be "displayed... to a wider extent," adding that, "the race of man needs the inspiration of strong virile womanhood."<sup>9</sup> Henderson's arguments

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<sup>5</sup> The Dolly Vardens are considered by some to be the first paid baseball team – white or black, male or female. They formed one year after the first organized women's baseball team formed at Vassar College and two years before the Cincinnati Red Stockings (widely regarded as the first professional baseball team) formed.

<sup>6</sup> Historical Society of Philadelphia, *Baseball in Philadelphia Exhibit Materials*

<sup>7</sup> "Honeydrippers Torrid Pace Scares Off Opposition In North Softball Division," *Philadelphia Tribune (1912-2001)*, August 26, 1952, 532039791, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Philadelphia Tribune.

<sup>8</sup> "Baseball Among the Fairer Sex Coming into Prominence," *Indianapolis Freeman*, December 26, 1908, in *The Unlevel Playing Field: A Documentary History of the African American Experience in Sport*, eds. Patrick B. Miller and David K. Wiggins (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003): 55-57

<sup>9</sup> Despite a handful of black educators who thought promoting competitive sports for women was "unwise," most black schools encouraged girls to "choose a wholesome sport and become the very

underscore the connections between women's athletics and an emergent black identity in post-emancipation America. Although athletics carried the stigma of being "not truly feminine" for black women, they also provided an opportunity to demonstrate the strength and health of the race. While black physical educators and sportswriters still invested far fewer resources and less energy in girls' athletics than they did in black males', the recognition of the 'race benefits' of girls' participation in sports allowed sports to blossom within black institutions.<sup>10</sup>

While black institutions supported women's athletics, the *type* of sport was often limited. Golf and tennis were seen as the most respectable sports for black girls to play, but due to the often prohibitive cost of the equipment for these sports, track and basketball, instead, gained great popularity among black athletes in cities and in rural areas. As softball rose to prominence in the 1930s, black high schools, colleges, and recreation centers began offering softball for girls in lieu of baseball. However, many black women still played baseball informally in neighborhood games, and sandlot ball was especially common in rural black communities. Stone and Johnson both grew up playing softball for their schools while playing Little League and sandlot ball with the boys after school. Stone, like some women, found softball to be an inadequate replacement for her love of baseball. Stone wanted to "devote all her time to hard ball"- and she would soon have the chance.<sup>11</sup>

### **"Here to Play Ball" (and Fill Seats)**

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best player" they could be. See: Elizabeth Dunham, "Physical Education of Women at Hampton Institute," *Southern Workman* 53 (April 1924), 167

<sup>11</sup> Sam Lacy, "First Woman In Pro Baseball," *Afro-American (1893-1988)*, May 2, 1953, 531873886, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American.

In the 1950s, desegregation of various kinds changed black baseball in a myriad of ways. In the years following Jackie Robinson's integration of white major league baseball in 1947, there was a slow but steady exodus of Negro Leaguers to the "big leagues." The influx of black players in Major League Baseball also brought an influx of black baseball fans. Baseball's integration coincided with post-war migration and metropolitan growth that created major demographic shifts in urban center. Ultimately this meant that MLB stadiums that once stood in white, ethnic enclaves were now situated in increasingly or predominantly black areas. Moreover, white flight and the rise of television meant that many white baseball fans were opting to stay in the suburbs and watch the games at home. MLB teams attempted to remedy their gate losses by capitalizing on black fans. Indeed, black baseball fans continued to follow and support their favorite Negro League stars by following and supporting their new MLB team. Additionally, many integrationist-minded blacks flocked to MLB stadiums to cheer on the small number of high achieving black players. Yet the growth of black MLB players and fans came at the expense of the Negro Leagues who struggled to fill stadium seats. Moreover, black baseball owners were rarely compensated for the players they lost to the Major League Teams. Negro League owners were hemorrhaging players, fans and revenue and desperately looking for a way to stop the bleeding.

The Negro National League (NNL) folded in 1948, ending the famous East-West game between the NNL and the Negro American League (NAL). In subsequent years, the NAL operated as the only professional Negro baseball league.<sup>12</sup> In 1952, Hank Aaron

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<sup>12</sup> Neil Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball: The Rise and Fall of a Black Institution* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2004)

left the Indianapolis Clowns for the Milwaukee Braves farm system. Concerned about losing the latest Negro League star, Clowns owner, Syd Pollock, went searching for a player who could help the team on the field but especially at ticket gates. After scouring the barnstorming Negro minor leagues, Pollock came across a player that he thought would meet his needs: Toni Stone.

After graduating high school, Stone had left Minnesota for California. Now in her twenties, Stone was determined to play baseball. While she had only played it recreationally during high school, her passion for the game was fueled by exposure to barnstorming Negro League teams and from hanging around local “old timers” who frequently exchanged stories about their playing days.<sup>13</sup> In California, Stone gained a roster spot on an independent local team called the San Francisco Sea Lions. In 1948, she caught the eye of a semi-professional team, the New Orleans Creoles, who invited her to tour with the team. While her semi-professional barnstorming did not generate huge press, local sports writers used her presence as a selling point when advertising the barnstorming games. “A girl second-sacker...should be something to see here Sunday,” advertised the *Atlanta Daily World*, labeling Stone as “more than a novelty but slightly a miracle.”<sup>14</sup>

When Pollack heard about Stone, he saw her as an attractive commodity- a press-generating addition to his baseball team. In 1953, he hired Stone, making her the first

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<sup>13</sup> Toni Stone, Interview with Bill Kruissink. March, 26, 1996. National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Inc., Cooperstown, NY. For additional information on Toni Stone see Martha Ackmann’s thorough biography entitled “Curveball: The Remarkable Story of Toni Stone (Lawrence Hill Books, 2010)

<sup>14</sup> Marion E Jackson, “Sports Of The World,” *Atlanta Daily World (1932-2003)*, May 11, 1950, pg. 5.

woman to play professional baseball on a men's team. She entered the Clowns rotation at second base, filling Hank Aaron's vacated spot.<sup>15</sup>

Bringing women into baseball to generate profit was not a new endeavor. As historian, Susan Cahn notes, the AAGBAL deliberately contrasted "masculine" baseball skills with "feminine" appearance and qualities to create a spectacle of "gender contrast."<sup>16</sup> AAGBAL officials believed that the public would flood the stadium gates to see the "amazing spectacle of beskirted girls throwing, catching, hitting and running like men."<sup>17</sup> The initial spectacle proved to be as popular as the official predicted. The AAGBAL was widely popular, and the league, which was initially thought to be a wartime placeholder for men's professional baseball, lasted for more than a decade. Perhaps the AAGBAL's business success inspired Pollock. Instead of a girl's baseball league, however, he would bring in one woman to play baseball with men.

"This is no publicity stunt," Pollock proclaimed in his press release announcing the signing of Stone. "Toni will be the first to admit her diamond foes show her no mercy because of her sex."<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, Pollock was known for both his sensational headlines and promotional tactics. His barnstorming Miami Ethiopian Clowns of the 1930s and 1940s were known for their "clowning" both on and off the field. Pollock, like good friend Abe Saperstein, owner of the Harlem Globetrotters, believed that the best way to fill stadium seats was through showmanship and comedy. The Ethiopian

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<sup>16</sup> Susan K. Cahn, *Coming on Strong : Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport* (New York : Free Press, 1994), 140–141.

<sup>17</sup> "Girl's Baseball as Show," *AAGBAL Handbook* (AAGBAL Management Corporation, 1945), AAGBAL Records, Pennsylvania State Universities Libraries. As cited in Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, pg. 318

<sup>18</sup> *Los Angeles Weekly*, February 28, 1953

Clowns were known to wear face paint, grass skirts, and clown suits on the field. Additionally the teams specialized in slapstick comedy and “pepper ball” which Pollock described as a “deft manipulation of the spheroid in the now-you-see-it, now-you-don’t performance.”<sup>19</sup> Despite the popularity of the Clowns, prominent black sportswriters such as Cum Posey, who was also a former baseball player, took issue with “clowning,” lambasting it as “demeaning to Blacks.”<sup>20</sup> The Pittsburgh *Courier’s* Wendell Smith found clowning to be “the kind of nonsense which many white people like to believe is ...typical of Negroes.” Smith’s larger gripe was with white owners, agents, and promoters, such as Pollock, who wielded influence in Negro Leagues.<sup>21</sup> By the time Stone joined the Clowns they had relocated to Indianapolis, toned-down their slapstick antics, and had just won their third NAL Championship. Yet when it came to writing headlines Pollock was still as dramatic as ever. “The latest masculine enterprise to fall before the advance of wearers of skirts and panties is the baseball diamond,” he declared at the signing of Stone.<sup>22</sup>

In the mid-twentieth century, when even the most prominent black sportswriters could rarely expect to travel to out-of-town sporting events, the black press relied on news, updates and box scores mailed directly from each respective team.<sup>23</sup> Pollock, who

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<sup>19</sup> *Indianapolis Recorder*, June 7 1941

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* October 5th 1940

<sup>21</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 28 1942. For more on the Clowns and the debates about their antics see Lanctot, *7 Negro League Baseball*, Chap. 7 as well as Robert Mohl, “Clowning Around: The Miami Ethiopian Clowns and Cultural Conflict in Baseball. For more on Syd Pollock and white owners in the Negro leagues see Alan Pollock and James Reily, *Barnstorming to Heaven: Syd Pollock and his Black Teams* (University of Alabama Press, 2006)

<sup>22</sup> *Los Angeles Weekly*, July 1953

<sup>23</sup> A notice in the Chicago Defender exemplifies this practice. The “Notice to Baseball Men” reviews instructions for submitting game reports including how to take score, how to list the home and away

appreciated the utility of a press release as a promotional tool, often employed sensationalized speech to garner interest in his product. Nicknaming Stone the “Gal Guardian of Second Base,” Pollock widely distributed press releases that advertised Stone’s lucrative contract, athletic ability, and, tellingly, her feminine qualities. The press releases painted Stone as a young lady who played second base like a female Hank Aaron and enjoyed “womanly things.”<sup>24</sup> In reality, Stone, having played for years in obscurity, was approaching thirty-three years old; she had natural athleticism, to be sure, but only average baseball statistics. Moreover, while the actual amount Stone earned is unclear, we can be fairly certain that it was not the \$12,000 Pollock advertised. Even reports of a more modest contract of \$5,000 were met with skepticism. In an open letter to Stone, sportswriter, Sam Lacy, complimented her on making money, before adding, “at least that’s what your bosses say and that’s what they tell you to say when your asked the question.”<sup>25</sup> Lacy also notes how peculiar it was that the owner would release such financial information since “they’ve always made a point of keeping secret what they pay their ball players.” Stone has stated that she made a “lousy \$300 a month,” while noting that much of her pay, along with her teammates, went to maintaining the team bus so that they could make to games.<sup>26</sup> The emphasis on how much Stone was making also diverted questions from how much Pollock would be making off of her. In terms of her personal

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teams and the strict submission deadlines. It also cautions teams against “withholding games because they do not win” *Chicago Defender*, May 18<sup>th</sup> 1929.

<sup>24</sup> *Los Angeles Weekly*, July 1953, similar versions of Pollock’s press releases appear in the *Defender*, *Courier*, *Baltimore Afro American*, *Kansas City Call*, and *Indianapolis Freeman*. The Press Releases appear with different headings but are the same article.

<sup>25</sup> From A-Z Weekly Column, *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 25 1953

<sup>26</sup> “First Woman in Pro Baseball Remembers,” *Alameda Journal*, April 1996

sensibilities, and counter to Pollock's portrayal, Stone was still that "tomboy" from Minnesota who preferred pants to skirts and baseball to cooking. Even with Stone making no secret of her age, her pay, or her personal preferences, Pollock's hyperbolic articles would largely determine the few representations of Stone that appeared in the black press during her career.

The news that a female ball player would take the field on the NAL's opening day quickly made its way around the black newspapers. Press releases were sent out well in advanced of the game in early June. Pre-season exhibition games generated additional curiosity about the "gal on second base."<sup>27</sup> Still, as Stone and the Clowns packed up and departed Beaumont, Texas after their last exhibition game, the future of the NAL appeared dim. The usual excitement and community celebrations to mark the league's opening day had declined in recent years. The NAL was "on its last leg" and there was little optimism that the league could be salvaged.<sup>28</sup>

In that knowledge, the spectacle that awaited the Clowns in Kansas City was startling. Thousands congregated to cookout and gather around Blues Stadium; the crowd swelled with excitement and anticipation. Right before the game there was a "picturesque parade" that Pollock claimed, perhaps with his trademark overstatement, was unrivaled in "all [his] years in baseball."<sup>29</sup> That evening a reported 18,205 fans packed the stadium to witness the Monarchs defeat the Clowns on a night in which Toni Stone played three innings. Stone's debut was not a particularly convincing one, as she went 0-for-2 and did not make any plays in the field. Yet observers were so taken with

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<sup>27</sup> *Indianapolis Freeman*, May 1953

<sup>28</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 1953

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

the suddenly revived interest in the NAL that Stone's limited night received secondary coverage. "Who Said the Negro American League is Dead," asked one headline above pictures of the stadium crowd. The other half of the page featured a picture of Stone at bat under a subtitle that read "Healthy Signs."<sup>30</sup> The opening day turnout exemplified the renewed interest that Stone's presence brought to the NAL. The black press reporting of the game demonstrated the investment of an elite black institution in the success of another black institution. Indeed the press and the NAL had an important relationship that showcases the ways black institutions helped promote and sustain each other.<sup>31</sup>

Regarded by reporters as "box office magic" Stone became the promotional face of the NAL. Pollock featured her on the Clowns scorecards and flyers. Brief game announcements in black newspapers consistently included a note on the "gal infielder."<sup>32</sup> Game attendance remained high in the coming months and gate receipts and profits came in amounts that the Negro League teams had not seen since the late 1940s.<sup>33</sup> Stone even attracted some short-lived attention from the mainstream white press. Famed columnist and occasional television panelist, Dorothy Kilgallen, made note of the "21-year-old Negro Lass" in her syndicated column "The Voice of Broadway."<sup>34</sup> "She belts home

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<sup>30</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 6<sup>th</sup> 1953

<sup>31</sup> "Black Baseball, Black Business: Race Enterprise and the Fate of the Segregated Dollar:

<sup>32</sup> Indianapolis Clowns Scorecard, Indianapolis Clowns vs. Memphis Red Sox, Griffith Stadium 1953, . National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Inc., Cooperstown, NY. For game announcements see *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 1953, August 1953, *Chicago Defender*, July 1953, *Kansas City Call*, June 1953, *Washington Post*, 1953, *Baltimore Afro American*, 1953

<sup>33</sup> Gate receipts, budget sheets and financial statements from the Thomas Baird Collection, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas as compiled and presented by Neil Lancot, *Baseball*, 380-382

<sup>34</sup> Dorothy Kilgallen's column focused mainly on celebrity news and gossip, although she occasionally wrote about politics and organized crime. Kilgallen was also a Pulitzer-prize-nominated journalist. She is perhaps most famous for obtaining an exclusive interview with Jack Ruby before

runs as easily as most girls catch stitches in their knitting,” Kilgallen noted, adding that Stone was leaving metropolitan baseball scouts “goggle-eyed.”<sup>35</sup> Delighted by the success of his female drawing card, Pollock set out to find insurance in case Stone was injured or unavailable, telling her that he couldn’t “risk letting the public down” if she was unable to play.<sup>36</sup> More realistically, Pollock was protecting his financial interests. In order to insure he could continue to capitalize on the publicity his “lady ball player” brought his team; Pollock went in search of another girl.

As the 1953 season continued, letters began pouring in from women interested in playing baseball as well as from male coaches and promoters who had “discovered” potential female players. Sometimes addressed to Stone specifically, women all over were asking for tips and requesting tryouts. Reportedly, Pollock kept a “gal file” with all the received letters, and Stone recalled that, “old Syd always had a gang of [women] standing up and trying...out.”<sup>37</sup> In July, Pollock brought in Doris Jackson, a sixteen-year-old from Philadelphia who had written Stone personally about getting a tryout. Jackson shadowed the team and participated in pre-game warm ups. Pollock regarded her as a “good prospect,” with Stone adding, “all she needs is a little experience and practice hitting.”<sup>38</sup> When asked by reporters why she wanted to tryout for the Clowns, Jackson responded that she was “thrilled with the novelty of being a big-time player” and wanted

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dying unexpectedly in what some believe to be a planned murder to cover up the truth about the JFK assassination

<sup>35</sup> “The Voice of Broadway” Syndicated, *Kings Features Syndicate* and appearing in the *Schenectady Express*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, April 1953. Reprinted in “Monarchs Open Home with Clowns,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 1953

<sup>36</sup> Letter from Syd Pollock to Toni Stone, January 1954, Stone Family private archive, as noted in Ackmann, 164

<sup>37</sup> Pollock, 46

<sup>38</sup> “Philly Girl Gets Tryout with Clowns,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, July 21, 1953

to build on her current career at Overbrook High School. Similar to Stone, Jackson excelled on her school-sponsored teams as well as on her all-male teams from the local recreation clubs. She also, like Stone, honed her experience playing sandlot ball with boys. It is unclear how long Jackson stayed on with the team or why she eventually returned home before ever playing in a game. However, Pollock's intentions were very clear, the Clowns would soon be bringing in another girl player.

Towards the end of the 1953 season, Bish Tyson, a promoter and recruiter with ties to the Clowns, observed Mamie "Peanut" Johnson playing baseball with a recreational team in Washington D.C., known as the St. Cyprians. After informing the Clowns' business manager, Buster Downs, a try-out was arranged, after which Johnson, a five-foot-four, 120-pound pitcher, was invited to join the Clowns in the post-season as well as their off-season exhibition games.<sup>39</sup> Johnson joined without hesitation, recalling that "Mr. Downs told me to get on the bus and I did and I was gone."<sup>40</sup>

Peanut was a fitting nickname for Johnson...Born in South Carolina in 1935, she spent her adolescence in both New Jersey and Washington D.C. Despite her small frame, Johnson was naturally athletic with a long history of formal and informal athletic participation. While living in New Jersey, she joined the all-white, mostly male, Police Athletic League (PAL) that sponsored a wide array of sporting leagues and activities. Initially reluctant to admit her, the PAL League relented after witnessing her skill on the

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<sup>39</sup> Jean Hastings Ardell, "Mamie 'Peanut' Johnson: The Last Female Voice of the Negro Leagues," *Nine: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture*, Vol. 10, No.1 Fall 2001

<sup>40</sup> Mamie "Peanut" Johnson interview with Reba Goldman for the University of Baltimore Oral History Project, 1998

field.<sup>41</sup> Upon moving to Washington D.C., Johnson played some organized girl's softball, but, similar to Stone and Jackson, mostly enjoyed sandlot baseball with neighborhood boys. While on the St. Cyprians in 1952, Johnson and another female teammate attempted to try out for the women's baseball team in Alexandria, VA. Upon arriving at the try-out it became clear that the all-white team had no intention of integrating their league. "They looked at me like I was crazy, Johnson recalls, noting that the experience "taught her segregation."<sup>42</sup> Johnson joined the Clowns the following year.

Despite acquiring Johnson, Pollock was still on the look out for yet another girl to potentially play in the field, and he continued to hold occasional try-outs for women. After receiving a letter of interest from a 19-year-old Philadelphia woman, Connie Morgan, the Clowns invited her down to Baltimore for a try-out. Unlike, Stone or Johnson, the Philadelphia native did not have extensive experience playing with boys. A multi-sport athlete for Bartram High School, Morgan grew up playing exclusively in formal girls' athletic leagues. Prior to joining the Clowns, Morgan played multiple positions for the North Philadelphia Honey Drippers,. Upon arriving in Baltimore, Morgan impressed the Clowns' management with her "good arm" as well as her appearance.<sup>43</sup> Morgan's lighter skin, curvy figure, and curled hair also stood in stark contrast to the muscular build of the darker skinned Stone. Taken with her "feminine appearance" Pollock requested that Morgan try on a Clowns uniform, "just to see what it

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<sup>41</sup> Ackmann, 160

<sup>42</sup> Ardell, 184, Toni Stone also describes her attempts to play for the AAGPBL, noting that she wrote numerous letters of inquiry and never received a response. Additionally, a South Bend newspaper in 1951, mentions a failed attempt by Elizabeth Jackson and Marie Mazier, to try-out for the AAGPBL.

<sup>43</sup> Pollock, 48 and "Send in the Clowns, er, Indians" *Indianapolis Star*, 1995

would *look* like.”<sup>44</sup> The Clowns, who were in Baltimore to play Jackie Robinson’s All-Star Team, seized the opportunity to stage some shots of Morgan with Jackie Robinson, Luke Easter, Pee Wee Reese, and Gil Hodges.<sup>45</sup> A picture of Robinson holding a bat and chatting with Morgan would soon be widely distributed with the caption “Learning Tips from a Pro” (Image 2). The image served to capitalize on Robinson’s wide appeal while legitimizing Morgan as a worthy baseball disciple. Pollock never invited Stone to take part of the photo shoot.



*Figure 13. Jackie Robinson Gives Batting Tips to Connie Morgan, 1954 Courtesy of the Negro League Museum*

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<sup>44</sup> Pollock, 48; Ackmann, 164

<sup>45</sup> Jackie Robinson headlined a team of Black major leaguers who, with some white players, formed a team in the off-season that toured and competed with teams in the NAL.

Frustrated by the inevitable loss of playing time with the addition of Morgan at second base, Stone began to re-evaluate her position on the team and in the Negro Leagues in general. Voicing her discontent when Pollock officially signed both Morgan and Johnson, Stone inquired about playing for another team. She had heard that other teams were looking to add girl players as well and inquired with other teams. Pollock reminded Stone that he owned the rights to her contract and she could play for him or leave the league. Yet with Morgan, Johnson, and the prospect of acquiring other, younger women, Pollock would eventually relent. Seeing an opportunity to capitalize on other owners' desire to replicate his success, Pollock sold Stone's contract to the rival Kansas City Monarchs prior to the start of the 1954 season.<sup>46</sup>

The sensationalized press releases announcing the sale of Stone's contract (for an undisclosed sum), and the acquisition of his two new "lady ball players" reminded fans that Pollock was "always good for something novel each season."<sup>47</sup> Attempting to generate the same level of interest that was created by Stone, he signed Morgan and Johnson for a reported \$10,000 and \$5,000, respectively. And he framed his new players as must-see upgrades over the older and recently released Toni Stone. Introducing Morgan as "the most sensational girl player ever seen" Pollock asserted that she was "on par with man major leaguers."<sup>48</sup> Pollock confirmed that Morgan was "slated to get regular female assignment in the starting lineup." The picture of Robison with Morgan became the Clowns' official scorecard image. The presence of three women in the league quickly

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<sup>46</sup> Ackmann, 165; *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 1954

<sup>47</sup> "Clowns Sell Toni Stone to KC Nine," March 1954; "Hometown Miss to Replace Toni Stone at Second Base," *Philadelphia Tribune*, March 9 1954 Again, Press Releases appear with different headings but are the same article

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

became the promotional ticket for the NAL. Advertisements urging fans to come “see the Feminine Stars” were released when the Morgan’s Clowns and Stone’s Monarchs played each other.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, pictures and profiles of each woman were regular features in the Laff Book, a program book with jokes, cartoons, articles and pictures that was handed out at the Clown’s Games.<sup>50</sup> The women’s inclusion in the Laff Book served to associate them with the other “sideshows” or entertainment acts. They may have been “stars” but Stone, Morgan and Johnson continued to fight to be recognized as athletes.

### **The Diamond as Contested Terrain**

When Clowns manager and former catcher, Buster Haywood, heard news that Pollock planned to sign a girl to the Clowns, his response was straightforward: she may have had some prior experience but “playing with men was a whole different story.”<sup>51</sup> Feeling that Stone’s presence would devalue the game, Haywood was vehemently opposed to her hiring. Moreover, Haywood did not believe women should be in baseball, regardless of their physical ability. Manager, Bunny Downs, joked that “Buster wouldn’t want Len Horne if Lena Horne could play second like [Ray] Neil, hit like [Josh] Gibson, run like [Speed] Merchant, talk like J.B. Martin and dance like Bojangles.”<sup>52</sup>

The archive does not allow us access to how other athletes felt about Stone, Johnson, and Morgan. It is likely that some men choose to keep their disapproval silent because they understood the women to be instrumental in helping them get paid. The

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<sup>49</sup> Flyer, July, 13<sup>th</sup>, 1954, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Inc., Cooperstown, NY

<sup>50</sup> The Laff Book, Indianapolis Clowns Program Book, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Inc., Cooperstown, NY

<sup>51</sup> “Women in Negro Baseball League,” *Atlanta Inquirer*, April 2001

<sup>52</sup> Pollock, 256

men were well aware of the women's utility as drawing cards. Harold Hair, a former member of the Birmingham Black Barons, recalls pitchers limiting the pitches they threw her to fastballs. Sam Lacy observed this practice and made note of it in his open letter to Stone. "They aren't curving you," Lacy wrote, "they aren't throwing any softer, they're not doing that but they are not curving you either."<sup>53</sup> Hair notes that the players observed these type of "unwritten rules" because they knew "people came to see her [Stone] play...She was a drawing card."<sup>54</sup> If the players ever forgot that fact, they would be quickly reminded. Once Willie Brown intentionally delivered a ball late from third base, causing Stone to be spiked by the base runner. Immediately after the game, manager, Buster Downs, let into the team: "This lady is putting money in our pockets. We don't want her hurt turning double plays." With candor about Stone's value to the team, Downs ranted, "you men are expendable, she ain't".<sup>55</sup>

Despite recriminations, some players physically and verbally humiliated Stone, Johnson, and likely Morgan as well, though Morgan never mentioned any specific incidents. Behind the men's calculated silences were the catcalls and the snide jokes. A "go home and make your husband some biscuits," comment was flung in from the outfield once.<sup>56</sup> A catcher once termed a ball thrown inside Stone's strike zone, "pussy high." On the field, the women endured intentionally hard throws (one ball was thrown with such velocity that it knocked Stone unconscious) and wandering, groping gloves

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<sup>53</sup> *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 25 1953

<sup>54</sup> "Toni Stone" ESPN Documentary, February 2012

<sup>55</sup> Pollock, 244

<sup>56</sup> Toni Stone interview with Bill Krussinick

when tagged out on base. Off the field, they were subject to ridicule, sexual advances and isolation.

This treatment was not without a response, however. Johnson recalls exacting revenge on loudmouth players by beaming them with a fastball, telling one reporter “because sometimes, honey, you just get mad.”<sup>57</sup> Stone was also known to fight back. Recalling a play in which a second baseman ran his glove between Stone’s legs and across her chest when tagging her out, Harold Hair notes that Stone “started fighting him, hitting and swinging at that guy.”<sup>58</sup> Similarly, when a teammate was sexually harassing her on the bus, management told her to take care of it herself. The next time the player approached her, Stone started swing a baseball bat at his head. “I didn’t have no problems after that,” she said.<sup>59</sup> Mostly, though, women consistently downplayed any issues they had with their teammates. Engaging in a “culture of dissemblance,” the women, instead classified any incidents as “hazing” and or the process of “earning respect,” or just didn’t address it at all.<sup>60</sup> Constantly reminded that there was “no crying in baseball,” appearing “tough” and having the ability to “take it” was paramount to their continuation in the league.<sup>61</sup> Publicly decrying sexual advances and emphasizing the familial nature of the team helped the women demonstrate their respectability, as well.

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<sup>57</sup> “Making Pitch for Women,” *Baltimore Sun*, June 1999

<sup>58</sup> Harold Hair interview, “Toni Stone, ESPN Documentary, 2012

<sup>59</sup> Taped Oral History, Baseball Hall of Fame Archives, Cooperstown, NY, 1991

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. Darlene Clark Hine defines the “culture of dissemblance” as the choice black women made to create an appearance of openness while shielding their “inner lives” and traumas from their oppressors. “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West,” *Signs* 14, no. 4 (July 1, 1989): 912–20.

<sup>61</sup> The lime “not crying in baseball” later became infamous in the 1992 movie “A League of Their Own” adding to a long influence of black experience being depicted in film. Toni Stone interview, 1991; Mamie Peanut Johnson, National Visionary Leadership Project, Oral History Archives; Connie Morgan interview with Donna Devoe; Ardell, 185

“Once you make it clear there ain’t gonna be no monkey business...they give you your respect,” Stone told a reporter her first year in the NAL.<sup>62</sup> Johnson told newspapers that she “made it clear;” she was “here to play ball and nothing else.”<sup>63</sup>

Regardless of the various strategies for deflecting sexual harassment, traveling on a bus full of men did not help the image of black baseball players as moral women. Stone, in particular, was met with skeptics when the team would try to find lodging in various cities. Often times the proprietor would assume she was a prostitute and refused her entrance, directing her to the nearest brothel instead. Both management and players on the team were unable to (or choose not to) defend her presence, so Stone frequently lodged in brothels. Stone found some relief in the situation, however, when the women in the brothels took interest in her. “They took me in,” Stone recalled, “They were wrong women...but they were good girls.”<sup>64</sup> The women would leave her money and extra food and occasionally wash and iron her uniform. When Stone was having problems supporting and protecting her chest during games, it was the women in one of the brothels who helped her sew in padding.<sup>65</sup>

By the time Stone left the League, she had built a network of “sporting gals” who not only helped her out, but were fierce supporters as well. Urging Stone to “represent” they often attended her games and saved clippings about her. The support of the “sporting girls” for the girl in sports highlights an informal network of women who supported non-traditional and controversial means of labor. Perhaps the way Stone “represented” was

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<sup>62</sup> “Lady Ball Player,” 1953

<sup>63</sup> Mamie Peanut Johnson, NVLP, *Philadelphia Tribune*, 1954

<sup>64</sup> Toni Stone interview with Jean Ardell Hastings in Ackmann, 168

<sup>65</sup> Harris, *Sex Workers, Psychics, and Numbers Runners*; Blair, *I’ve Got to Make My Livin’*.

providing black women with a symbol of professional autonomy and embodied a modern black womanhood that was imbedded with physicality and pushed the boundaries of respectability. Indeed, other black women also seemed feverishly to support the women in the league. Other black women also seemed to support the women in the league. “Women really came out to watch,” former player and Monarchs manager, Buck O’Neil, recalled.<sup>66</sup> The *Philadelphia Tribune* reported the crowds of women “hugging and kissing” Connie Morgan after a Clowns game, similar to the scene Stone described to *Ebony* 1953.<sup>67</sup> “I think I brought more women to the game,” said Stone, noting how old women wanted to shake her hand and little girls wanted her autograph.<sup>68</sup>

Despite the support received by many women, black men were less receptive to a woman’s presence on the diamond. Sportswriters and other members of the black press were particularly critical, and unlike the players, they were especially vocal. “Although the ladies appear a sure fire hit at the box office, I am not going to be one of their enthusiast,” wrote Luix Virgil Overbea for the *Philadelphia Tribune*. Expressing skepticism at Stone, Morgan, and Johnson’s athletic abilities, Overbea was specifically put off by their presence as drawing cards. Recommending the formation of professional women teams, Overbea wrote, “I don’t want to see women in baseball togs on the basis of curiosity, I do want to see them as excellent athletes.”<sup>69</sup> Lacy, accepting the fact that Stone was “not just a gag in this business,” was still not persuaded that professional sports were a place for women. “You passed up a better job in kids work...for this

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<sup>66</sup> David Conrads and Buck O’Neil, *I Was Right On Time* (Simon and Schuster, 2010), 195.

<sup>67</sup> *Philadelphia Tribune*, “Clowns, Monarchs Meet,” 1954

<sup>68</sup> “Lady Ball Player,” *Ebony*, 1953

<sup>69</sup> “Beating The Gun,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, March 1954

baseball stuff,” lamented Lacy.<sup>70</sup> While Overbea and Lacy expressed dissatisfaction with the women in league, their objection was tempered by a general acceptance of women as athletes (although not professionally in Lacy’s case). The presence of women in what was considered a “male space” was more troubling for writers such as Wendell Smith. “She is a lady making a living in a profession designed strictly for men,” penned Smith, in reaction to the signing of Stone. Describing her as a “hunk of femininity” Smith argued that Stone’s presence in the NAL exemplified the “undisputed statement” that a “women’s place is in the home.”<sup>71</sup> Doc Young of the *Defender*, expressed the same sentiment a year later when he wrote “girls should be run out of men’s baseball on a softly-padded rail, for their own good and for the good of the game.”<sup>72</sup>

The presence of women within male arenas, many black journalists contended, devalued the “manliness” of the baseball diamond and emasculated Negro men. Editorial responses to Stone, Johnson, and Morgan as baseball players often degenerated into the rhetoric of humiliation, in fact. “It is, indeed, unfortunate that Negro baseball has collapsed to the extent it must tie itself to a woman’s apron strings in order to survive,” wrote Smith. Stone’s presence in the NAL indicated to Smith that the league had become “soft.” After begrudgingly admitting that Stone’s batting average was “not bad for a dame,” Smith went on to chide the players with lower averages, declaring, “any guy who can’t out hit a frauline shouldn’t be permitted to play in the little league, which is an organization for tykes and midgets.” However, it was the imagined husbands of the lady ball players who drew the most mockery. Doc Young painted a picture of a “muscle-

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<sup>70</sup> *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 25 1953

<sup>71</sup> “Sports Beat with Wendell Smith,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 1953

<sup>72</sup> “Should Girls Play Ball; No, Says Doc,” *Chicago Defender*, August 1954

bound baseball-playing wife” coming home to her husband who has dinner waiting. Upset about her day, the wife ultimately “slugs him one.” Young then asks what the man could do cry “what did I say wrong this time baaaaaabeeeeee.” Likewise, Smith invented a whole conversation between “Mrs. Stone” and Husband, which included lines like “I hope you have a good day at the plate tomorrow, honey.” To which the fictional Mrs. Stone responds “I hope you’ll have something on plate when I come home after the game.” Despite depicting the women as masculine, writers also accused them of using their femininity to manipulate men. A writer for the *Tribune* argued that such attempted manipulation was apparent “as soon as we saw Toni Stone’s head in Buster Haywood’s lap” before adding that “womanly wiles are okay everywhere but trying to get in the starting lineup.”<sup>73</sup>

Other African American women in the sporting world who were not framed as masculine were still accused of using their femininity as a tool of manipulation. While Stone was denigrated for being masculine, women such as Effa Manley, owner of the Newark Eagles, were ridiculed for displaying any femininity in a male space Manley, along with her husband Abe, owned and ran the Newark Eagles from 1936-1948. During that time the Eagles became one of the dominant franchises of the Negro Leagues and employed three future Major Leaguers.<sup>74</sup> Operating as club manager and business executive, Manley was very active in the league and very vocal about her vision for black

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<sup>73</sup> There is no evidence that I have found to substantiate this reporters claim. In probing interviews, memoirs and oral history’s that mention Toni Stone and Buster Haywood’s the consistent emphasis is on Haywood’s animosity towards Stone. Moreover, there is a pattern of negative comments towards Stone from this particular Tribune reporter. Therefore, I believe this statement was made to be inflammatory and denigrating and is not describing an actual incident. Philadelphia *Tribune*, 1954

<sup>74</sup> Larry Doby, Monte Irvin and Don Newcombe all played for the Newark Eagles under the Manley’s ownership

baseball. Most notably, Manley decried the black press's embrace of baseball integration and the subsequent decline of the Negro Leagues. Mounting vicious editorial attacks against black sportswriters and Jackie Robinson created lasting tensions with the black press that only increased the unfavorable portrayal of her. Known in the black press as "Baseball's Glamour Girl," "the beauteous boss," "Queen of Newark," "Stormy Petrel of Baseball," and "the Fair Lady from Jersey," Manley was often accused of using "feminine attacks" to attempt to manipulate the press and other Negro League owners. In a column covering an owner's meeting, Art Carter noted that "Mrs. Manley, exercising her feminine prerogative to talk as much as she wanted, gain the floor and virtually beefed out her male companions..."<sup>75</sup> Wendell Smith claimed that if Manley did not get her way she would "wrinkle up her pretty face and turn on the sprinkling system [cry]."<sup>76</sup> The representations of Stone, Morgan and Johnson echo the constructed image of Manley as an unwelcomed threat to a male space.

The black male sportswriters who denigrated the women baseball players as well as Manley demonstrate an important institutional split in the promotion of black institutions in the time of integration. While the black press by and large supported the NAL and reported their press release and scores positively, individual sportswriters had been integral part of the efforts to integrate Major League Baseball. For these men, the continued presence of the Negro League was working in opposition to their ideas about racial uplift. In this light, the role of Morgan, Stone and Johnson in sustaining the dying league as well as Manley's public advocating on its behalf, clashed with the sportswriters

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<sup>75</sup> Art Carter, "From the Bench," *Baltimore Afro-American*, February 10<sup>th</sup> 1940

<sup>76</sup> "Sports Beat," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 1948

who wanted to switch focus to support the few black payers who were now playing the major leagues. To them, the NAL represented stagnation in the fight for racial equality.<sup>77</sup>

The male dominated sporting world also attempted to control the images of the black female athletes. As illustrated by the experiences of Stone, Morgan and Johnson, representations of women athletes remained rooted in an ahistoricism about the long history of women's organized athletics and in a desire – among owners, coaches, players, and sports reporters – to reinscribe dominant concepts of femininity onto the body of black women. Men, and particularly black men, in their various capacities within professional sports, constructed “public images of well-dressed feminine composure” even as they sought to take advantage of women at play in a “man's game.”<sup>78</sup> The black press focused on creating images of a respectable black women ballplayers, by going out of their way to distance black female athletes from images of “aggressive masculinity” and to play up their “heterosexual inclinations and appeal.”<sup>79</sup>

The fact that Stone was married afforded her a certain degree of respectability. Her husband buffered any suggestions about her sexuality and reporters, such as Sam Lacy, confirmed that she “really is a nice gal.”<sup>80</sup> Stone's promotional pictures for the Monarchs staged her in uniform applying powder at a mirror. Additionally, for her *Ebony* magazine photo spread, Stone was asked to don a dress. Under one picture the caption

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<sup>77</sup> The tension between ideals of integration and the “cost of desegregation” on black institutions has been most thoroughly studied through the integration of schools. As educator John Hope once said “clashing of the souls quote”. Leroy Davis, *A Clashing of the Soul: John Hope and the Dilemma of African American Leadership and Black Higher Education in the Early Twentieth Century* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998). See also: Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*.

<sup>78</sup> Susan Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 134.

<sup>79</sup> Cindy Himes Gissendanner, “African American Women Olympians: The Impact of Race, Gender, and Class Ideologies, 1932-1968,” *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 67 (1996): 179

<sup>80</sup> Lacy, *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 25, 1953

read: “Stone is an attractive young lady who could be somebody’s secretary.” Yet another picture features her face down and topless on a bed with the description “Getting an after-workout rundown.”<sup>81</sup> The black press’s coverage of black female athletes centered on those women who embraced femininity and were visually appealing to black men. Using phrases such as “dainty fingers,” “legs of a showgirl,” “glamour girl,” and “the china doll type,” paired with frequent images of the athletes in dresses or accompanied by men, newspapers cultivated their particular image of ideal black womanhood.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *Ebony*, 1953

<sup>82</sup> “48 Olympic Women’s Team-Glamour Girls,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, July 12, 1952; “Women in Athletics-Weekly Series” *Chicago Defender*, 1941-1944



*Figure 14. Toni Stone Applies Foundation After a Kansas City Monarchs Game, 1954, Monarch Press Materials, Courtesy of the Negro League Baseball Museum*

The women were not oblivious to the calculated crafting of their image and they tried control the ways in which they were represented. When Stone caught wind of the fact that Pollock wanted her to wear a skirt and shorts set modeled after the AAGBAL's uniforms, Stone flat out refused. "I wasn't going to wear no shorts," she reflected, "this is Professional Baseball."<sup>83</sup> Pollock eventually relented and Stone was able to don a full uniform like her teammates. Stone, soon found that even a regular uniform could not

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<sup>83</sup> Toni Stone, interview with Bill Kruissink, 1991

spare her from comments about her body, with one article reporting that she wore “an oversized shirt...to accommodate her size 36 bust.”<sup>84</sup> While she felt like a “goldfish” that was being viewed and judged from all angles, Stone wasn’t the type to back away from the spotlight. She agreed to do interviews and photo shoots in an attempt to “set them straight.”<sup>85</sup> Despite Stone’s attempt to present herself on her own terms, as a ball player, the newspaper articles and photo spreads constructed an image of Stone that perpetuated the vision of her as a unique sideshow and feminine wonder. Assertive quotes from Stone such as “I am out here to play the game” and “I can take knocks as well as anyone else. Don’t worry I can take care of myself,” were featured along side pictures of her in dresses or feminine poses. One particular article featured a photograph of her washing windows with the caption “Washing windows while her husband enjoys the sun...Toni Stone is an excellent housewife and cook.”<sup>86</sup> Stone also agreed to do interviews and sign autographs for the same reason Morgan didn’t mind posing with Jackie and the gang. Understanding themselves as drawing cards allowed the women to equate correctly their popularity with their value. They were a large reason the league remained viable and their symbolic labor kept them employed and the institution of black baseball intact.

For all three women, playing professional baseball presented an opportunity to earn money playing a sport they enjoyed. The letters from Morgan and Johnson requesting try-outs demonstrates the women’s desire to play in the NAL. The economic and personal benefits of being a professional athlete included the opportunity to travel. “It was a tremendous thing to wake up and look out the [bus] window and be five hundred

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<sup>84</sup> “The Gal on Second Base,” *Our World*, Vol. 8 No. 7, July 1953

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Lady Ball Player, *Ebony* 1953, see also, “Lady Ball Player on Male Team”

miles from where you were before,” recalled Johnson.<sup>87</sup> Sightseeing “nice towns” and trips to places like Canada gave Johnson, as well as the other women, a mobility that wasn’t necessarily available to them as working-class black women. Stone used the traveling opportunities to learn about African American History. Visiting local museums, churches and schools allowed Stone to move beyond the stories of “Pocahontas and John Smith” to locate the history “that wasn’t taught”.<sup>88</sup>

Despite the opportunities professional baseball provided, Stone grew disillusioned with the business of “peddling flesh” and no longer desired to be anyone’s drawing card. At the end of the 1954 season Stone left the league, remarking in a letter to her husband, “My years in negro baseball has not meant anything. The owner has capitalized on me...that’s all.” Acknowledging at the end that “baseball is a businesses...and now I need to capitalize on myself”.<sup>89</sup> With attendance numbers once again dwindling and the NAL on the verge of disbanding, Connie Morgan decided to return to business school in Philadelphia. Pollock announced her departure in a press release that Morgan’s decision to “pursue a secretary position in a business office” was her “true calling”.<sup>90</sup> Johnson stayed on the Clowns for a few months, barnstorming independently, until 1955, when she too left the league. Aside from Pollock’s press release about Morgan, the departure of the three biggest drawing cards in the Negro American League registered barely any

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<sup>87</sup> Ackmann, 209; Mamie “Peanut” Johnson interview with Reba Goldman for the University of Baltimore Oral History Project, 1998

<sup>88</sup> Toni Stone, interview with Bill Kruissink, 1991

<sup>89</sup> Letter from Toni Stone to Aurelious Alberga, August 11, 1954. Stone family private archive. As presented in Ackmann, 194

<sup>90</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 1954

response in the black press. The Negro league was on its last leg, the women were no longer novelties, the tickets stopped selling and the papers were silent.

## **Conclusion**

In the years following their professional baseball careers, Morgan and Johnson returned to their respective education programs. Morgan completed business school and worked for the AFL-CIO in Philadelphia, while Johnson obtained her nursing degree and began a long career as a nurse at Sibley Hospital in Washington D.C. Stone spent her post-baseball days caring for her husband and working as personal care assistant in San Francisco. Yet, she had been playing baseball since she left Rondo, Minnesota as a teenager and had little desire to do anything else. Falling into depression after her exit from the league, Stone turned to the Catholic Church for solace. St. Francis Cathedral was able to offer her a position organizing and coaching a Little League team. While coaching the Isabella Hard Heads, Stone also began playing pick up games with men's teams and as well as emerging lesbian teams in the Bay Area. Often angry and disappointed that the general public had forgot her career, Stone was determined to be remembered.<sup>91</sup> Yet, by the 1960s, the careers of Stone, Morgan, and Johnson, as well the overall all existence of the Negro Leagues had faded from the public eye.

Often buried in the simplistic accounts of these women is the fact that they were professionals. Baseball was their job. Stone, Morgan and Johnson not only offer understanding of black women's athletic labor, but their symbolic labor also. Laboring symbolically as a cultural commodity, Stone, Johnson and Morgan sustained the NAL

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<sup>91</sup> Toni Stone, interview with Bill Kruissink, 1991

while simultaneously embodying the death of a masculine black institution. In both their professional and public lives, their ability to generate money was bound up in the way others symbolized their bodies and their labor.

## POSSIBILITIES

*“Let’s face it. I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name. ‘Peaches’ and ‘Brown Sugar’, ‘Sapphire’ and ‘Earth Mother’, ‘Aunty’, ‘Granny’, ‘God’s Holy Fool’, a ‘Miss Ebony First’ or ‘Black Woman at the Podium’: I describe a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth. My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented”*

*-Hortense Spiller, 1987<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 65

## Chapter 4

### **“Those Legs will Take you Places”: The Possibility of Mobility**

On a hot day in Tallahatchie County, a 112- year old woman sat by a window in her house surveying the landscape.<sup>1</sup> She lived deep in the Mississippi Delta, where cotton “stretched from horizon to horizon.” The town of Money, Mississippi stretched out before her eyes. Through the trees and down past the railroad tracks she could almost make out the roof of the courthouse where two white men sat on trial for the kidnapping and murder of 14-year-old Emmitt Till.<sup>2</sup> The woman, known to neighbors as Auntie Lou, had lived all but six months of her life in Money. The lynching of Till and the subsequent “circus” trial was just one more bullet point on a long list of reasons she was frustrated with her hometown. “<sup>3</sup> Mississippi is the meanest place,” exclaimed Auntie Lou, “Money

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<sup>1</sup> Robert H. Denley, “Aunt Lou Calls Mississippi Meanest Place In The World,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967)*, October 1, 1955. Paul Holmes, “A Way of Life Going on Trial in Till Case: A WAY OF LIFE GOING ON TRIAL IN MISSISSIPPI Till Case Defendants See Quick Acquittal,” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)*, September 18, 1955, sec. Part 1.

<sup>2</sup> On August 28<sup>th</sup> 1955, Till was kidnapped from his uncle’s home by Roy Bryant and J W. Milam, two white men who were after Till for allegedly whistling at Bryant’s wife Carolyn. The men beat and mutilated the teenager before shooting him in the head and trying him to a 70lb. cotton fan and disposing his body in the Tallahatchie River. The news of the “Chicago boy lynched in Mississippi” was amplified by Till’s mother, Mamie Bradley, deciding to have an open casket and showcasing his bloated face brutally beaten beyond recognition. This image of Till circulated nationally- lead by coverage in Jet Magazine and the Chicago Defender. MATTIE SMITH COLIN, “Mother’s Tears Greet Son Who Died A Martyr,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967)*, September 10, 1955; “NATION SHOCKED, VOW ACTION IN LYNCHING OF CHICAGO YOUTH(2): Urge Eisenhower To See That ‘Justice Is Served,’” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967)*, September 10, 1955.; Jet Magazine, September 15, 1955; William Bradford Huie, “The Shocking Case of Approved Killing in Mississippi,” *Look Magazine*, January 1956. For more on Till see: Devery S. Anderson, *Emmett Till: The Murder That Shocked the World and Propelled the Civil Rights Movement* (Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> “400 Spectators at Till Lynching Trial Acted like Mob at Circus, County Fair,” *Afro-American (1893-1988)*, October 1, 1955. Even before the trial began many African Americans were skeptical at the fairness and validity of the court proceedings. Despite the national press attention and the Governor’s assertion that “the courts would do their duty,” the defendants faced an all-white, all-male

is the wickedest place. The Lord ought to wipe it out.”<sup>4</sup> After hearing her declared disgust for where she lived, a curious reporter in town to cover the trial, asked Auntie Lou why she stayed.<sup>5</sup> Was her stasis due to economical stability or occupational opportunity like the local black businessmen who didn’t want to leave their “home grown” and “prosperous” storefronts?<sup>6</sup> Or did she heed the words of people like Dr. T.R. Howard who urged Mississippians to “stay and fight” and labeled migrants as people who “choose the path of less resistance”.<sup>7</sup> “Well,” responded Auntie Lou, “I’ve always wanted to leave- but I could never quite get the money together”.

At sixteen, Willye White had not lived in Money, Mississippi as long as Auntie Lou, but she hated it just the same. She hated the segregation and the cotton fields and she was desperate to escape. However, like Auntie Lou, her family could not afford to

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jury in spite of Money being 68% black. Indeed the jury pool reflected intentional state sanctioned discrimination. The town laws required jury members to be registered voters but none of the nearly 19,000 black residents were. Due to voter suppression through threats of violence, outright violence and illicit tactics, no black person in Money had been registered to vote since Reconstruction. “3rd Lynching of Year Shocks Nation: Witnesses Discount Motives Cited for Slaying of Boy,” *Afro-American (1893-1988)*, September 10, 1955; “Foreign Papers Call Till Trial ‘Scandalous, Monstrous, Abominable,’” *Afro-American (1893-1988)*, October 29, 1955. Holmes, “A Way of Life Going on Trial in Till Case.”

<sup>4</sup> Denley, “Aunt Lou Calls Mississippi Meanest Place In The World.”

<sup>5</sup> The reporter’s inquiry reflected a question that was circulating in newspaper’s across the country in the wake of the Till murder. The murder, which many regarded as a public display of “Dixie dangers” and “southern ways of life”, was the set against the backdrop of the continued mass exodus of blacks from the American South. As the spotlight shined on the atrocities of the Till murder, people outside of the south started to publically ask why anyone one would choose to stay in places like Mississippi. Holmes, “A Way of Life Going on Trial in Till Case”; LANGSTON Hughes, “I Feel Mississippi’s Fist In My Own Face, Says Simple,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967)*, October 15, 1955; “NATION SHOCKED, VOW ACTION IN LYNCHING OF CHICAGO YOUTH(2)”; Al Sweeney, “‘Mississippism’ Became a Naughty Word in 1955,” *Afro-American (1893-1988)*, January 7, 1956.

<sup>6</sup> Denley, “Aunt Lou Calls Mississippi Meanest Place In The World.”

<sup>7</sup> Lee Blackwell, “Howard Says Don’t Flee; Stay In Dixie And Fight,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967)*, July 9, 1955, sec. National News; “‘Dixie Lynch Lie Is so Old It Stinks’: Militant Miss. Doctor Sparks NAACP Drive Chides Dixie Men for Hiding, behind Skirts I,” *Afro-American (1893-1988)*, October 1, 1955.

migrate. Despite the decline of farmers and agriculture labor- sharecropping was still steady employment in the place where “cotton was king”. White’s grandfather, like many sharecroppers around him, did not want to leave familiar and steady employment, especially when the crop in the fall of 1955 looked so promising. In fact Emmitt Till’s uncle, facing constant death threats and dangers, refused to join his family in Chicago that fall because the potential cotton crop was just “too much to leave”.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, cotton and its profits were hardly reasons that were going to convince White to stay-she just didn’t quite know how she would ever make it out of Mississippi.<sup>9</sup>

White’s exit ticket came much sooner than she expected. That fall, as the Till trial wore on and White began high school, she caught the eye of the local track coach out of nearby Mississippi Valley College. Despite being a freshman, White was already a standout varsity athlete who excelled at both track and basketball. The local coach called his fraternity brother, Ed Temple, who was the track coach at Tennessee State University. By the end of the school year, Coach Temple had visited Money, seen White run and offered her a place in his summer track program that served as a pipeline to the University’s track team.<sup>10</sup> Suddenly faced with the prospect of leaving Mississippi to go “up south” to Tennessee and then potentially to college, White nervously reconsidered her desire to leave. Her grandfather swiftly brought this hesitation to an end, bluntly

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<sup>8</sup> Moses Newson, “Emmett’s Kin Hang On In Miss. To Harvest Crop,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967)*, September 17, 1955.

<sup>9</sup> Willye White interview with Louise Mead Tricard, August 31, 1995 as transcribed in Tricard, *American Women’s Track and Field: A History, 1895 Through 1980* (McFarland, 1996); Tracey Salisbury, “First to the Finish Line: The Tennessee State Tigerbelles 1944-1994” (University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2009), pg 130 (diss cite needed)

<sup>10</sup> Author interview with Edward Temple, Nashville, TN, July 2016. Ed Temple, B’ Lou Carter, and Wilma Rudolph, *Only the Pure in Heart Survive*, 1st edition (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980) pg. 33; White interview with Louise Mead Tricard, August 31 1995, as transcribed in Tricard, *American Women’s Track and Field*. pg. 370

telling White that she could “go to college and get out of Mississippi, or stay home, get pregnant and pick cotton for the rest of her life.”<sup>11</sup> This was all the push she needed, and by the summer of 1956 White was on a bus with Money, Mississippi in the rearview mirror. “Athletics was my flight to freedom,” White recalled, “...freedom from the delta cotton fields, bias, and the prejudice of the south. I had no other choice.”<sup>12</sup>

Between the 1940s and the 1960s, a number of young black women, like Willye White, were able to capitalize on their elite athleticism to gain college admission and financial support and travel experience. These young women, largely from the rural and metropolitan South, navigated Southern black educational institutions that provided increased opportunities for black women. The second wave of the Great Migration was causing major demographic shifts as millions of black Americans were leaving the south for the urban north and the west. Yet, White and her peers often represented the nearly 65% of black Americans who, like Auntie Lou, remained in the south.<sup>13</sup> Their athletic experiences highlight, in part, the vibrancy of black life within the South despite the massive migration north and westward. These elite athletes also demonstrate the ways in which individual young black women, often teenagers, were able to use sports to travel and gain social status, regardless of their families’ lack of physical or social mobility.

This chapter will detail elite track stars who used their athletic bodies to gain admission to and find opportunity within black southern educational institutions. These young women also discovered that maintaining their place at such institutions required more than just fast sprint times. The student aid that made it possible to attend college

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<sup>11</sup> Salisbury, “First to the Finish Line: The Tennessee State Tigerbelles 1944-1994.” pg. 131

<sup>12</sup> White interview with Tricard as transcribed in, *American Women’s Track and Field*.pg 370

<sup>13</sup> Monroe Work, *Negro year Book, 1946-1947*

required the recipient to work for school for the duration of the year. Moreover, the young track stars had to navigate the intra-racial class and gender politics that permeated these campuses. While women's athletics were tolerated and marginally supported at these schools, young women's athleticism was both protected and policed. Unlike larger societal debates that were concerned with *if* women could be feminine and athletic, the question that preoccupied most black institutions was *how* women could be feminine and athletic. Young athletic women were not excluded from dominant understandings of black femininity however their coaches and administrators greatly shaped the rules governing their conduct and appearance. Nevertheless, for these girls from poor black families in the rural south, athletics offered the change to leave, travel and get an education and earn a degree. As White noted, athletics was, in many regards, a "flight to freedom,"--track was their ticket to "an unchartered world."<sup>14</sup>

### **Southern Black Institutions and the Emergence of Women's Track and Field**

Booker T. Washington had built Tuskegee into one of the most notable Negro institutions in the county. The emphasis on "agriculture, mechanical pursuits, and homemaking" promised to churn out respectable and productive "race men and women".<sup>15</sup> Yet in 1909 Washington was faced with a new challenge to his schools viability and ideology, namely the lure of the city. "We are striving to keep our students in the country," explained Washington. "If they see pictures of New York in books then

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<sup>14</sup> White interview with Tricard as transcribed in, *American Women's Track and Field*.pg 370

<sup>15</sup> Booker T. Washington, "The Dangers of 'Book' Education," *New York Times*, August 31, 1909, pg. 12

they are apt to lose interest in the country and flee to New York.”<sup>16</sup> The trickle of migration Washington feared in 1909 picked up like a roar just a few years later in what become known as the first wave of the Great Migration.<sup>17</sup> Black Americans left the rural south less because of books and more due to economic opportunities and reprieves from Jim Crow. People were not simply going to Northern cities like New York and Chicago, but Southern ones as well. In fact black migration to the urban South had the largest numerical increase in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>18</sup>

Washington’s fears of retaining students in the event of rural to urban migration, proved to be not as pressing as he may have thought. Like Tuskegee, 90% of the colleges for black Americans existed in the South. Student bodies drew black students from all over the country. While the demographic shifts and the social, political and economic

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> The Great Migration refers to the period between 1917-1970 in which seven million black Americans left the South, particularly rural south, head north and west. Its generally understood to encompass to phases, the first 1917-1940 and the second from 1940-1970s. The study of the Great Migration and the effects of widespread influx of black Americans into urban enclaves of the north has been richly researched and well documented. See: James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (University of Chicago Press, 1989); Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2009); Marcia Chatelain, *South Side Girls: Growing Up in the Great Migration* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2015); Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940-1955* (University of Chicago Press, 2007); Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration* (Random House LLC, 2010). There is not as much literature on migration to westward cities but the following books offer compelling treatments of black westward migrations and their regional and national impact: Donna Jean Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2010); Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace*.

<sup>18</sup> Between 1930 and 1940 the number of black Americans in the urban south increased by 649,793, the urban north increased by 367,308, and the west had 42,574. By percentage, however the biggest was in the West and then the Urban North. *Negro Year Book*, Population and Population Characteristics, Urban to Rural Population Ratio, 1947 For more on rural to urban southern migration see: Bernadette Pruitt and M. Hunter Hayes, *The Other Great Migration: The Movement of Rural African Americans to Houston, 1900-1941*, First Edition (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2013).

changes it brought to southern and to a lesser extent western cities, is richly documented, the lives and changes it left on the south is less so- despite that fact that the majority of black Americans resided in the rural or growing metropolitan south. It wasn't just the institutions that brought student in to Southern Institutions, but social events as well. And the biggest one of them all was the Tuskegee relays, which annually drew a national audience to Washington's school in the heart of Alabama.

Founded in 1927, the Tuskegee Relays were the brainchild of Cleveland Abbott. A man of many nicknames, Abbott simply went by Cleve during his youth in South Dakota. The Abbotts were one of the few black families in the state and young Cleve eventually became the first (and at the time only) black undergraduate at South Dakota State University (SDSU). At SDSU, Abbott majored in agriculture and became a stand out athlete, captaining the basketball team, anchoring the relays in track and earning the title "all-state" as center on the football team.<sup>19</sup> In 1915, just prior to his graduation, he received an invitation from Booker T. Washington to come and study at Tuskegee.<sup>20</sup> Heading south after graduation, Abbott began his graduate studies in the Tuskegee's esteemed Department of Agriculture, where folks fondly called him "Duke".

His tenure at Tuskegee was short lived however. Drafted into service during the First World War, Abbott was sent to Fort Des Moines, a training facility for black soldiers. There he was reunited with Jessie Scott, a young black Iowan, he had met at the

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<sup>19</sup> Biographical Materials, Cleveland Leigh Abbott Papers, TUA

<sup>20</sup> In building Tuskegee's agriculture department, Washington routinely searched for qualified undergraduates to pursue graduate studies in agriculture. The agricultural focus of Tuskegee was rigorously backed by northern philanthropists who invested money in the institute. While Tuskegee is often associated with industrial education in contrast with liberal arts curriculum, Washington invested finances in building an agriculture department that prized expertise and research, under the direction of the notable George Washington Carver.

Drake Relays years before. The two were quickly wed before Abbott was shipped off to France to serve in the 92<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, 366th Infantry regiment, a segregated unit. Returning from the war with a new nickname, “Major,” Abbott, Jessie and their infant daughter Jessie Ellen, moved to Topeka, Kansas where he took a job training cadets and coaching various sports at Kansas Vocational College. Shortly after, Abbott received word from Tuskegee’s new president, Robert Moton, the job that the then deceased Washington had offered him, was still his if he wanted it. So, in 1923 the Abbotts moved back to Alabama where Cleve would teach agriculture chemistry and run the athletic department, where he earned his final nickname: Coach.<sup>21</sup>

Abbott’s hire came a moment when college sports were clumsily moving from being housed in ROTC programs with mandatory military-style exercise classes to being in independent athletic departments.<sup>22</sup> As both a veteran and a former star athlete, Abbott effectively navigated this transition. He established competitive athletic teams that he coached with military-like discipline. While he enjoyed early success he was dismayed to find out that “there was no outlet and no participation for young Negro men and women at all in track and other sports, except among Negro schools.”<sup>23</sup> Abbott committed to

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<sup>21</sup> Biographical Materials, Cleveland Leigh Abbott Papers, TUA; Black Women Oral History Project Interviews (*BWOHP*); A. Lillian Thompson interview with Jessie Abbott, October 11, 1977. OH-31, T-32/Jessie Abbott. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass; Ross C. Owen, “History of Athletics at Tuskegee Institute,” nd, Cleve Abbott Papers, TUA

<sup>22</sup> For more on military programs at black colleges and its relation to athletics see: Charles Johnson Jr, *African Americans and ROTC: Military, Naval and Aerospace Programs at Historically Black Colleges, 1916-1973* (McFarland, 2002); Marcus S. Cox, *Segregated Soldiers: Military Training at Historically Black Colleges in the Jim Crow South* (LSU Press, 2013); Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930* pg. 242-287.

<sup>23</sup> Abbott Interview, *BWOHP*, October 11, 1977.

providing a space for black athletes, who were often restricted by the Jim Crow policies of national sporting organizations such as the AAU and the NCAA.<sup>24</sup>

Abbott's strategy was three-fold. First, he sought to furnish Tuskegee with modern athletic facilities. Abbott appealed to northern philanthropists by echoing familiar arguments about the benefits of athletics in the development of a moral and engaged citizenry.<sup>25</sup> As white northern charitable interests were already invested in Tuskegee, procuring the funds were perhaps easier to attain. Indeed it is likely that the proximity to white patronage that bolstered Tuskegee as an academic institution also benefited its athletic programs. Additionally the ever-growing Tuskegee Alumni Association solicited funds from members towards the construction of the new football stadium and track. The fundraising efforts of the group earned the stadium the name "Alumni Bowl," in recognition. Within the first years of his tenure, Abbott had overseen the creation, renovation and expansion of several facilities. By the 1930s, Tuskegee boasted a new golf course and baseball field, an upgraded track and football stadium, and at least ten

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<sup>24</sup> The AAU and NCAA had a history of scheduling championship meets in southern cities that enforced Jim Crow laws and negatively affected black athletes. Common complaints logged against the AAU included lack of restaurants, accommodations and safety concerns. Additionally Black athletes were occasionally banned from participation all together. Fredrick Rubien, an AAU secretary, explained the policy, noting that cities like Baltimore "do not accept colored entries." As well as adding that black athletes are "barred entirely in swimming." Papers of the NAACP. Part 27, Selected Branch Files, 1956-1965. Series A, The South; Reel 15. Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1999. Group III, Box C-150. "Olympic Fair Play: Aau President, Mahoney, Resigned Because of Jim Crow Tactics," *Afro-American (1893-1988)*, June 13, 1936; "Mercury Girls Accuse AAU of Discrimination," *Afro-American (1893-1988)*, July 20, 1940; "May Sue AAU For Ban Against Negro Boxers," *The Pittsburgh Courier (1911-1950), City Edition*, December 25, 1943, sec. Sports; "Agitation Against City as AAU Site Scored," *Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005)*, February 21, 1946; "Negro Stars May Spurn Nat'l AAU Meet: 'NO BIAS,' DAN FERRIS ASSURES COURIER Head of National AAU Says Negro Athletes Will Be 'Well Taken Care Of' in San Antonio Next June," *The Pittsburgh Courier (1911-1950), City Edition*, January 12, 1946, sec. Sports.

<sup>25</sup> Abbott Interview, *BWOHP*; Owens, *History of Athletics at Fisk*

additional tennis courts, including eight clay courts and five courts with lighting for night matches.<sup>26</sup>

Secondly, Abbott looked to strengthen the competition among southern black schools. While the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference was more than a decade old, enthusiasm and organization waned some in the mid-1920s. Abbott was determined to reinvigorate it. Reaching out to coaches in the other SIAC schools as well as local high schools and colleges, Abbott implored other schools to invest in their athletic programs and recommit to regional competitions. This plea also advocated for establishing women's teams, if they had not yet done so, particularly in track and field.<sup>27</sup>

The third and final step of his plan to enhance athletics at Tuskegee's was the most important part, drawing together his first two steps. Abbott planned to host a regional relay to rival any existing ones. Unlike the notable Penn Relays, however, the Tuskegee Relays would showcase the excellence of southern black institutions. "Founded to generate interest in track and field and to promote a wholesome competitive spirit and sportsmanship among the colored schools of the south, the Tuskegee Relays have taken a commanding position among similar athletic events in the United States," boasted Abbott in one press release. "The twenty-one events on the Relay Program this year is represented by several score of athletes to Tuskegee whose efforts will be rewarded by

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<sup>26</sup> Report, Projects/Persons Requesting Aid, Tuskegee Institute, 1928-1931, Julius Rosenwald Fund Archives, Box 357, Fl. 6-8, FUA; "Cleve Abbott Releases an Interesting Bulletin on Southern Meet," *Atlanta Daily World* (1932-2003), June 23, 1932, sec. Sports; "Tuskegee Works on 'Alumni Bowl,'" *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (1921-1967), September 13, 1924; "Courts at Tuskegee Ready for Tourney," *The New York Amsterdam News* (1922-1938), August 7, 1937.

<sup>27</sup> Cleveland Abbott Letter, "Dear Sir", March 17 1930, Track and Field Papers, TUA; for more on the SIAC see: Carl Abbott, "College Athletic Conferences and American Regions," *Journal of American Studies* 24, no. 2 (August 1990): 211-21; Hasan Kwame Jeffries, "Fields of Play: The Mediums through Which Black Athletes Engaged in Sports in Jim Crow Georgia," *The Journal of Negro History* 86, no. 3 (2001): 264-75,.

handsome trophies and the distinctive medals that represent supremacy.” In inviting southern black institutions to come compete on Tuskegee’s modern athletic fields, as well as hosting the SIAC championships within the relays, Abbott’s project instantly took root.<sup>28</sup>

As competitive athletics at black colleges grew, relays or carnivals became pivotal spaces in which black schools could compete against each other as well as strengthen regional sporting networks. By the end of the 1940s, the Tuskegee Relays were attracting thousands of people to its annual athletic competitions. Each summer black Americans from all over the nation would flock to the small school in Alabama to compete in track and field, tennis and golf championships.<sup>29</sup>

The relays at Tuskegee, as well as the smaller ones hosted by Prairie View State College in Texas and Alabama State in Montgomery, facilitated the networks between black high schools and colleges throughout the rural and metropolitan South.<sup>30</sup> Many schools lacked the means to travel and organize athletic meets during the year. Athletes

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<sup>28</sup> Official Program, First Annual Tuskegee Relays, May 7 1927, Track and Field Papers, TUA; Official Program, Second Annual Tuskegee Relays, My 5 1928, Track and Field Papers, TUA; Athletic News Bureau, Tuskegee Institute, February 1929, Track and Field Papers, TUA

<sup>29</sup> J. C. Chunn, “Tuskegee Relays Afford Drama On Large Scale Again This Spring.” *Atlanta Daily World* (1932-2003). April 21, 1940; “EXPECT 1937 TUSKEGEE RELAYS TO SET RECORD: Record Entry Lists Start For Big Meet.” *Atlanta Daily World* (1932-2003); “Fans Still Talking of Great Tuskegee Relays.” *The Chicago Defender* (National Edition) (1921-1967). June 15, 1935; Marion Jackson, “Tuskegee Relays Look Back Down Memory Lane To 1927.” *Atlanta Daily World* (1932-2003). May 4, 1951; “Trophies Create Interest In Tuskegee RelayS: Carnival Set For May 10.” *The Chicago Defender* (National Edition) (1921-1967). April 26, 1941; “Tuskegee Relays Go Over The Top; South Enthused.” *Philadelphia Tribune* (1912-2001). May 14, 1927; Fay Young, “Tuskegee Relays Draw Track Stars.” *The Chicago Defender* (National Edition) (1921-1967). April 30, 1949

<sup>30</sup> Both Prairie View and Alabama State had hosted small-scale athletic carnivals since 1929. Both programs added women’s events in 1936. For more on these smaller carnivals see: Cahn, *Coming on Strong : Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women’s Sport*, 118–20.

growing up in small southern towns mostly competed against other people at their schools. Alice Coachman, the future Tuskegee standout and Olympic high jump gold medalist, said that prior to participating in the Tuskegee Relays her only high jump competition consisted of friends holding a jump rope tightly while others took turns jumping over it.<sup>31</sup> The Tuskegee relays provided ample competition- and more importantly it provided visibility.



*Figure 15. Tuskegee University's Women's Track Team, ca. 1940 Courtesy of Tuskegee University Archives*

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<sup>31</sup> Coachman quotes as featured in Nellie Gordon Roulhac “s Jumping Over the Moon: A Biography of Alice Coachman Davis (Philadelphia: Roulhac, 1993). This biography was mainly self-published by Roulhac with contributions from the Health Partners of Philadelphia. Coachman had contacted Roulhac and asked if she would help write her story. The biography features a transcribed interview of Coachman presented in italicized block quotes throughout the book. Only a few copies were printed and given to Coachman to distribute herself. This copy can be found in the Alice Coachman Papers, TUA

Within years of its inception the Tuskegee Relays had grown to be considered the “best negro carnival” there was as it showcased the “cream of the crop” in high school and collegiate athletics.<sup>32</sup> For the coaches of both men’s and women’s athletics at black schools, Tuskegee provided the opportunity to recruit and network with high school coaches to identify talent. Most schools had limited means, so the Relays were a vital tool for building their respective athletic programs. Tennessee State coach, Ed Temple, developed a tremendous partnership with Marian Perkins Morgan, the athletic director at Atlanta’s Booker T Washington High School, noting that she was his “main contact with high school girls in Georgia”. As Tennessee State would go on to dominate women’s track and field in the 1950s and 1960s, the majority of runners at the peak of their success were “Georgia girls.”<sup>33</sup>

Attending the Tuskegee meets also provided a chance to travel. For many high school girls, the trip to the Tuskegee Relays presented the rare opportunity to travel outside of their small southern towns. Wilma Rudolph described how “overwhelmed” her and her teammates were when they arrived at Tuskegee for the first time. “It was the first college campus any of us had ever saw,” said Rudolph, who grew up forty-five minutes from Nashville- the city nicknamed the “Athens of the South” due to its large amount of

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<sup>32</sup> J. C. Chunn, “Tuskegee Relays Afford Drama On Large Scale Again This Spring,” *Atlanta Daily World (1932-2003)*, April 21, 1940; Fay Young, “Tuskegee Relays Draw Track Stars,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967)*, April 30, 1949, sec. Sports; “Fans Still Talking of Great Tuskegee Relays,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967)*, June 15, 1935.

<sup>33</sup> Tigerbelle Rosters and Reports, 1950-1970, TSU Papers

institutions of higher education.<sup>34</sup> For many, Tuskegee represented a beacon of light in the dark heart of the south. The amenities, insularity and cosmopolitan nature of the school set it apart as a premiere institution. As one reporter described Tuskegee as a “watering place in a Sahara of prejudice and bigotry,” where one could “be removed from the dust of Jim Crow and reactivated as a first class citizen.” When Rudolph and other track girls ventured to the relays, they joined a long tradition of athletes who came to the “people’s college” and showcased the “beauty elegance and refinement” of southern black institutions.

These trips were heavily supervised, both by the visiting coaches but also by Tuskegee administrators. The school assigned visiting women competitors “Guest Hostesses” who served as a kind of temporarily dorm matron.<sup>35</sup> This practice reveals the continued thought that black girls and young women need to be both protected and monitored. Interestingly this persisting idea also opened up an additional opportunity for black women to work in close proximity to sports. While athletic departments were largely headed by males, schools often invested in a female assistant coach or manager to travel with the team. In the event that the school could not provide a manager, the wives of coaches often stepped in to help.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Rudolph, *Wilma*, 62–63. Nashville schools included: Vanderbilt University, Fisk University, Tennessee State University, Meherry Medical College, American Baptist College (formally Roger Williams University), and Belmont University. The city earned that nickname at the 1895 City Centennial when a replicate of Athena’s Parthenon was built. Nathan Cardon, “The South’s ‘New Negroes’ and African American Visions of Progress at the Atlanta and Nashville International Expositions, 1895-1897,” *Journal of Southern History* 80, no. 2 (May 2014): 287–326.

<sup>35</sup> Tuskegee Relays Official Programs from 1929-1940, Track and Field Papers, TUA

<sup>36</sup> Black Women Oral History Project Interviews; A. Lillian Thompson interview with Jessie Abbott, October 11, 1977. OH-31, T-32/Jessie Abbott. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass; Charlie B. Temple Interview in Temple, *Only the Strong Survive*

The perceived need to supervise women athletes along with “handling the emotions [of young women],” created space for women to enter into coaching at a highly competitive level. Often former athletes, women such as Marian Perkins Morgan, Christine Petty and Amelia Roberts found great success in establishing themselves as important figures in women’s athletics. Women coaches provided athletic guidance and training as well as matronly supervision- monitoring the girls’ behavior, appearance and movement. These coaches tapped into the long history of black women’s attempts to professionalize athletic and recreation work. Like their foremothers, they contended that their professional value was rooted in their gender thereby capitalizing on the idea that black women were the rightful leaders of women’s athletics because they could offer athletic *and* moral guidance. Although they were able to obtain positions in elite athletic departments in Southern Black schools, women coaches were often still under the direction of male athletic heads or coaches who received the bulk of the credit for their respective teams.

At Tuskegee, Jessie Abbott worked alongside her husband to run the Relays and build up competitive athletics. Mrs. Abbott supervised golf and tennis. After Coach Abbott built a golf course using the natural resources of Tuskegee’s grounds, Mrs. Abbott transformed the informal faculty golf club into a co-ed competitive golf program for Tuskegee students. She also coached women’s tennis. The Abbotts encouraged other SIAC schools to also develop intercollegiate golf and tennis teams for both men and women. In the 1930s Tuskegee hosted the SIAC golf and tennis championships at the

annual relays.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps influenced by her parent's professions, Jessie Ellen also showed a great interest in sport. After completing a master's degree in Physical Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison she aimed to follow in her mother's footsteps and obtain a job coaching women's sports.<sup>38</sup>

In 1943 Jessie Ellen received word that Tennessee State wanted to hire her to coach women's track and basketball. The college's president, Walter Davis, heavily recruited the younger Abbott, offering to drive down to Alabama personally to escort her to Nashville.<sup>39</sup> Jessie Ellen began building up the women's track and field program in the hopes of competing against Tuskegee's dominant track team. Her teams enjoyed moderate success for 3 years before she suddenly resigned. Not much is known surrounding the circumstances of her departure from the college although at the time some in the Tennessee State community speculated that she was pushed out in favor of a male coach.<sup>40</sup>

Jessie Ellen Abbott is the forgotten founder of Tennessee State Track and Field; overshadowed by the male coaches that immediately followed her. Indeed, one of her

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<sup>37</sup> See Athletic News Bulletins and Annual Relay announcements, Track and Field Papers, TUA

<sup>38</sup> Abbott wrote her thesis on the professional development of female physical educators at black colleges. Jessie Ellen Abbott, *Teacher Preparation for Physical Education Majors in Twelve Representative Accredited Negro Colleges with Special Reference to Women (a Comparative Survey)*. University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1941.

<sup>39</sup> Yevonne R. Smith, "Sociohistorical Influence on African American Elite Sportswomen" in *Racism in College Athletics: The African American Athlete's Experience*. Edited by Dana Brooks and R. Althouse, (West Virginia: Fitness Technology, Inc., 2000.) p. 179.

<sup>40</sup> Jessie Abbott Interview. Black Women Oral History Project Sponsored by the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe College (Westport, CT :: Meckler, 1991).

successors would later contend that she was “not really a coach”.<sup>41</sup> Yet the program remained a solid fixture at the school and as the college grew over the next four years, so to did the program. By 1951, President Davis had secured university incorporation for his school and Tennessee A & I State College became Tennessee State University. That same year, Davis recruited alumni and former track star, Ed Temple, who was working at the university as sociology instructor as he completed his graduate work, to take over as the head of the track and field program.

Crediting Cleve Abbott’s success and influence, Ed Temple built his track program to closely resemble Tuskegee’s in many ways. Particularly, both programs targeted southern high school talent and depended on networks and connections to find the best track girls around. Like Abbott, Ed Temple implemented summer clinics to bring high school girls to train at the university over the summer. The invited participants were required to fund their cost of travel but Tennessee State covered all of their other expenses. Earning a spot at summer clinic was an entryway into college- almost all of the athletes who would receive admission and scholarship to Tennessee State had first attended the summer clinic.<sup>42</sup> Together Tuskegee and Tennessee State became the premiere institutions of women’s track nationwide.

When Abbott started including women’s track at the Tuskegee relays he hoped that the program would develop Olympic athletes and showcase the ability and talent

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<sup>41</sup>Coach Ed Temple Interview with Tracey Salisbury, “First to the Finish Line: The Tennessee State Tigerbelles 1944-1994” (University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2009).

<sup>42</sup> Temple estimates that 95% of the track team was comprised of girls who attended the summer training sessions. Temple Interview, July 2015; Temple, *Only the Strong*, pg 33-36

residing in the black south.<sup>43</sup> While the goals may have seemed ambitious, within six years Abbott's vision was beginning to take shape. The success of the Tuskegee relays caught the attention of the AAU and in 1936 the relays were designated an official semi-final meet for the national women's track and field championship.<sup>44</sup> That year, Tuskegee fielded its first team at the national AAU championships at Brown University; with ten girls represented, they became the first all-black team to compete in a national track and field championship.<sup>45</sup> The girls put up a modest showing but few could have predicted the degree to which the new arrivals would come to dominate the field. Indeed, when Coach Abbot brought his team to the 1937 championships in Trenton, New Jersey, the Tuskegee squad ran away with the national championship, more than doubling the point total of the next closest team.<sup>46</sup> Tuskegee would go on to win 13 of the next 14 national championships. After 1952, Tennessee State took up the mantle, winning 11 of the next

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<sup>43</sup> Cleveland Abbott, Tuskegee, to "Dear Sir" ("Fourth Annual Tuskegee Relays"), 17 March 1930, Track and Field Papers, Tuskegee Institute Athletic Association, TUA

<sup>44</sup> Ada Taylor Sackett, "Women's Sports Committee Report." *Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Amateur Athletic Union*, December 1936

<sup>45</sup>"Ten Tuskegee Girls Are Entered in National AAU Championships." *Afro-American (1893-1988)*. July 4, 1936.

<sup>46</sup> "Our Girls Defeat Best In The U.S.A.: Tuskegee Placed 7th, N.Y., 6, in Girls' National AAU Games. Philly Has 2; And Boston, 1 Youngest Is 15, and Oldest, 26." *Afro-American (1893-1988)*. October 2, 1937; Levi Jolley, "Some Folks Said It Couldn't Be Done: Team Cops A.a.u Crown with 33 Points; First in History." *Afro-American (1893-1988)*. October 2, 1937; John Lake, "Tuskegee Girls' Team Wins National A.a.u. Championship." *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967)*. October 2, 1937; "Tuskegee Girls Sweep to Track Title: Tuskegee Lass Skims the Barriers to National Title." *Afro-American (1893-1988)*. October 2, 1937; "Tuskegee Girls Win Women's Track Title." *The New York Amsterdam News (1922-1938)*. October 2, 1937; "U. S. TRACK CROWN TO TUSKEGEE GIRLS: Negro Athletes From Alabama Score 33 Points to Take Team Title at Trenton." *New York Times*. September 26, 1937

12 national championships.<sup>47</sup> For over 25 years, two southern black colleges dominated the highest level of national track for women in the United States.

Their success was not limited to the national stage. Indeed, the first year Coach Abbot sent a team to the AAU championships was 1936 – an Olympic year in which only two black women were represented on the track roster. After a 12-year hiatus due to World War II, the situation for black woman runners had changed drastically. The 1948 US team featured nine black women among the 12 women on the team, leading sportswriter, Fay Young, to state, tongue-in-cheek, that “American women have been so thoroughly licked-over for so many years by the Booker T. Washington girls that they have almost given up track and field.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Women’s Track and Field Meet Programs and Results, AAU Records, National Track and Field Research Library, Butler University, Indianapolis, as compiled by Louise Tricard in *American Women’s Track and Field: A History, 1895-1980*

<sup>48</sup> Fay Young, “Negro Women Will Dominate 1948 U. S. Olympic Track Team: Tuskegee, Tenn. State National Champions Eye Trip To London.” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (1921-1967). May 22, 1948.



***Figure 16. US Women's Olympic Track Team Sails for London on the S.S. America, 1948 Courtesy of Alice Coachman Papers, Fisk University Archives***

As some black sports writers celebrated the fact that “Negro women will dominate the 1948 Olympic team,” others made sure to highlight the fact that of the nine black women on the team, four were from Tuskegee, three were from Tennessee State, and an eighth would commit to Tennessee State the following year.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, as one paper noted, that the only people who won points in track and field at the 1948 Olympics were “Negro girls from Negro colleges.”<sup>50</sup> This national and international prominence certainly made Tuskegee and Tennessee State ideal locations for girls who wanted to run track in

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid; “Negro Women Boost Hopes of U.s. in Track.” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)*. May 30, 1948, sec. PART TWO; “9 Negro Girls Named On U.S. Olympic Team: 2 Chicagoans Among Those To Make Trip Three Tuskegees Two Tenn. Staters Also Are Chosen.” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967)*. July 24, 1948; “Negro Athletes in Important Role for U.S. Olympic Teams: Three of Four Ewell Was Busy Steele Did Well.” *The Christian Science Monitor (1908-Current File)*. August 13, 1948; “Women’s AAU Meet Results Bolster U.S. Olympic Hopes.” *The Christian Science Monitor (1908-Current File)*. July 7, 1948

<sup>50</sup> “Physical Education for Girls Becoming Vast, Fertile Field: Tuskegee Pioneers Women’s Athletics; To Expand Program.” *The Pittsburgh Courier (1911-1950), City Edition*. June 4, 1949.

college. Yet perhaps the most defining feature of their similar recruitment strategies was that both Tennessee State and Tuskegee offered scholarships for their woman runners.

### **Earning Their Keep**

When Coachman traveled from Albany, Georgia to Tuskegee for the relays in 1939, she had yet to attempt to jump over an actual bar. The jump rope held by her high school teammates back in Albany had been the extent of her experience. Yet when her jump of five feet, four inches, broke the meet record for both the high school and collegiate divisions, she caught the eye of Cleve Abbott. Soon after the relays, Abbott visited Coachman's house in Albany, GA, to try to convince her parents to let her join the Tuskegee summer track program and travel with the team to the AAU championships in Waterbury, Connecticut. Echoing the sentiments of Willye White, Coachmen reasoned that she could either spend the summer picking cotton or she could spend the summer "learning [how to jump]...with a bed to sleep in by myself, and three meals a day." Since she was "tired of picking cotton" Coachman accepted coach Abbott's offer with the permission of her parents. Later she admitted that Tuskegee track school was "hard work" yet much more "fun" than picking cotton.

The women who competed for Tennessee State also benefited from the opportunity to run track in college. A survey, conducted with varsity members of the Tennessee State track team in the late 1950s and 1960s, found that 75% of the runners, indicted that without a college scholarship they would not have had the ability to further their education.<sup>51</sup> Future Olympians, Rudolph and fellow Tigerbelle, Wyomia Tyus,

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<sup>51</sup> Vivian Bernice Lee Adkins, "The Development of Negro Female Olympic Talent." P.E.D., Indiana University, 1967, pg 219-222

followed the same opportunities as Coachman to become the first in their families to go to college. Their paths to Tennessee State reflect the prototypical background of the majority of Tigerbelles.

Born June 23<sup>rd</sup> 1940 in Clarksville, Tennessee, Rudolph was the 20<sup>th</sup> of 22 children. Her father was a retired porter and her mother was a domestic worker.<sup>52</sup> While Tyus, who was born August 29<sup>th</sup>, 1945, was only the youngest of four, her family was similarly working class. Tyus grew up in Griffin, Georgia, where her father worked as a diary farmer and her mother labored as a laundress.<sup>53</sup> Of employed fathers of varsity Tigerbelles in the 1950s-1960s, all but one worked as unskilled laborers.<sup>54</sup>

While some African Americans experienced economic growth in the post war period, the expanding black middle class still excluded many families like the Rudolph and Tyus'. Indeed, the growing black middle class remained largely aspirational.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, emerging "markers of merit" such as home and business ownership, consumption practices and travel, often times came at the expense- or exploitation- of poorer black Americans.<sup>56</sup> While the pages of various black newspapers documented the

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<sup>52</sup> Rudolph, *Wilma*, 5; Brian Lanker and Maya Angelou, *I Dream a World: Portraits of Black Women Who Changed America*, 10th Anniversary Revised edition (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1999), 37.

<sup>53</sup> *I Dream a World*, 63; Lewis H. Carlson and John J. Fogarty, *Tales of Gold/an Oral History of the Summer Olympic Games Told by America's Gold Medal Winners*, First Edition (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1987), 398–399.

<sup>54</sup> ADKINS, "The Development of Negro Female Olympic Talent.", pg. 224

<sup>55</sup> For more on post-war African American income growth see a sound overview in: Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (University of Chicago Press, 2005), 124

<sup>56</sup> N. D. B. Connolly, *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the Remaking of Jim Crow South Florida* (University of Chicago Press, 2014), 237; For more on the shifting black professional class, including their relationship to the black working class, Connolly's discussion of Black landlords in *A World More Concrete* is especially informative; for more on travel as a marker of merit see Tiffany Gill's discussion of the way black beauticians used travel to solidified their class status in *Beauty*

business ventures and international trips of the black middle class, most African Americans in Clarksville and Griffin, rarely moved outside of their respective towns, dropping out of school to work as tobacco or cotton farmers and domestics. For Rudolph and Tyus and the other Tigerbelles, track provided the opportunity to leave their towns, attend college and travel. Nashville would be their gateway to the world.

While a few other schools had women's athletic programs in the mid-twentieth century, only a handful offered athletic scholarships for women. When it came to track and field, Tuskegee, Tennessee State and the University of Hawaii were the only institutions that continually offered to assist women with college on the basis of their athletic ability. Mae Faggs was one of the few Tigerbelles born in the North. Her family lived in poor areas of New Jersey, moving frequently in search of steady jobs and adequate housing. While Fagg aspired to attend New York University, who was recruiting her during high school, she soon learned that the school would offer her no aid to attend. Despite her family's objections about "going down south to a Negro college," Faggs weighed offers to run at Tuskegee and Tennessee State on a scholarship before selecting Tennessee State due to its closer proximity to New Jersey.<sup>57</sup>

Occasionally called a scholarship, what the schools really provided was work aid—a chance to earn money for tuition in exchange for labor for the school. The use of

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*Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry*, Women in American History (Urbana ; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 92; For more on black class, consumption and leisure see: Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940-1955* (University of Chicago Press, 2007); Andrew W. Kahrl, *The Land Was Ours: African American Beaches from Jim Crow to the Sunbelt South* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012).

<sup>57</sup> Vivian Adkins interview with Aeriwenatha Mae Faggs as transcribed in Adkins, "The Development of Negro Female Talent," pg. 48-62

scholarships based on athletic merit date back to the rise of commercialism in college sports. As early as the 1900s, schools began offering financial incentives for athletes to attend, remain and perform for their institutions. Alumni provided jobs, benefits, and direct payment to help attract the best players to their respective schools. The formation of the NCAA in 1905 was a direct attempt by some athletic directors and school chancellors, at the encouragement of President Theodore Roosevelt, to seize control of college athletics. The NCAA introduced the concept of “amateurism” in attempt to regulate the money generated by college athletics. For the next forty years the NCAA and college athletic departments engaged in a tug of war over regulation and profit. Finally in 1948, the NCAA attempted to pass the “sanity codes” forbidding schools from providing financial incentives for athletic participation. Just two years later, under the threat of southern schools departing the NCAA, the organization repealed the codes. Instead the NCAA now stipulated that a “limited athletic scholarship...for room, board and tuition” could be awarded on athletic merit.<sup>58</sup> The NCAA went on to invoke the term “student-athlete” in order to protect themselves from paying workers compensation to injured players. By invoking amateurism, the NCAA insisted that the student-athlete was a amateur who received no compensation as an employee of the university.<sup>59</sup> While the

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<sup>58</sup> “Dixie Coaches Hear Talk on NCAA Code.” *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*. May 21, 1949; “N. C. A. A. Is Urged To Ban 7 Colleges: ‘Sanity Code’ Violators Face Expulsion Next Month -- 23 Others Under Scrutiny ‘Sanity Code’ Group Recommends N. C. A. A. Ban 7 Member Colleges.” *New York Times*. December 4, 1949; “N.C.A.A. Drops Sanity Code Control of Financial Aid to Athletes: Amendment Wins By 3-Vote Margin Control of Aid to Athletes Is Returned to the Individual Conferences, Colleges Recruiting Ban Retained N.C.A.A. Calls for Members to Drop Live Telecasts of 1951 Football Games Held ‘Morally Binding’ Cram Against Change Code in Effect Since 1948.” *New York Times*. January 13, 1951

<sup>59</sup> For more on the NCAA and amateurism see: S. W. Pope, “Amateurism and American Sports Culture: The Invention of an Athletic Tradition in the United States, 1870–1900.” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 13, no. 3 (December 1, 1996): 290–309; Ronald A. Smith, “History of

NCAA govern male sports, the newly formed Division of Girls and Women's Sport (DGWS) from the American Association of Health Physical Education and Recreation (AAHPER), had begun to oversee intercollegiate sports for women at predominately white institutions. Insisting on offering an "educational model" of sports in juxtaposition to the NCAA's "Commercial model," the DGWS completely banned scholarships for women's athletics.<sup>60</sup>

While the NCAA and DGWS was regulating money within predominantly white college sports, the CIAA and other black sporting conferences were wrestling with the use of athletic scholarships as well. Officially the CIAA banned athletic scholarships as a way to fight commercialism within college sports. The issue was hotly contested between college presidents, athletic directors, and members of the athletic conferences.

Proponents of scholarships argued that the ban was a result of idealism on the part of college presidents who failed to see that recruitment of athletic talent through financial aid could pay "handsome and credible dividends" for black colleges.<sup>61</sup> Despite such

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Amateurism in Men's Intercollegiate Athletics: The Continuance of a 19th-Century Anachronism in America." *Quest* 45, no. 4 (November 1, 1993): 430–47; John Sayle Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy*. JHU Press, 2002; Andrew Zimbalist, *Unpaid Professionals: Commercialism and Conflict in Big-Time College Sports*. Princeton University Press, 2001.

<sup>60</sup> Ying Wu, "The Demise of the AIAW and Women's Control of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women: The Sex-Separate Policy in the Reality of the NCAA, Cold War, and Title IX." Ph.D., The Pennsylvania State University, 1997; Joan S. Hult, "NAGWS and AIAW: The Strange and Wondrous Journey to the Athletic Summit, 1950-1990." *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance* 70, no. 4 (April 1999): 24–31

<sup>61</sup> "CIAA Schools Urged To Give Sports Scholarships: HELP FOR ATHLETES URGED BY RAINEY." *The Pittsburgh Courier (1911-1950), City Edition*. December 18, 1937; "Hope For Peace Between Presidents And CIAA Football Coaches Next Yr." *Daily Defender (Daily Edition) (1956-1960)*. March 28, 1956; "Joe Rainey Approves of Athletic Scholarships." *Afro-American (1893-1988)*. December 25, 1937; Al Sweeney, "CIAA TO DEBATE SCHOLARSHIP PROBLEM: Circuit Meets in D.C., May 13 National Classic, Divisions, Top Agenda; Meeting Moved up." *Afro-American (1893-1988)*. May 15, 1954.

arguments, the CIAA bans held in place until the 1950s, when the black athletic conferences followed the actions of the NCAA and began to allow limited scholarships based on athletic merit.<sup>62</sup> Yet the CIAA's decision was aimed at men's athletics, namely football and basketball. Black women's sports were able to fly under the radar with their aid to athletes by offering them work aid in stead of a full or partial scholarship with no explicit labor obligations.

For athletes like White, Rudolph, and Tyus, who could take advantage of these work-aid scholarships, the opportunity to go to college was well worth the work they put in both on the track and around their schools. Rudolph, a favorite of Coach Temple, perhaps didn't need the reminder from her mother that "you are the first person in our family to go to college" to appreciate the education opportunities afforded by her newfound job.<sup>63</sup> Yet other athletes were stuck doing labor similar to the domestic work they had gone to college in the hopes of escaping in the first place. Girls on work aid were routinely assigned to do laundry, wash dishes, serve in the cafeteria, and occasionally carry out personal tasks for faculty members.<sup>64</sup> At Tennessee State the work aid scholarships required anywhere from 10 to 20 hours of work each week. Often times

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<sup>62</sup>"Aid To Athletes Adopted By CIAA: To Regard Athletics As Other Extra Curricula Activities." *Afro-American (1893-1988)*. December 20, 1952; PROBE AID TO ATHLETES: CIAA Group To Study Athletic Scholarships." *Afro-American (1893-1988)*. March 22, 1952.

<sup>63</sup> Rudolph, *Wilma*, 38

<sup>64</sup> Temple Interview, Jessie Abbott Interview, *BWOHP*. Black women athletes were not the only students to get work aid. In fact for many black coeds working for their colleges was a way to offset the cost of education. College faculty used the labor of college girls to get affordable maids, cooks and baby sitters. As Jessie Abbott recalls, some faculty treated these "school girls" as servants, relegating them to using the back entrance and treating them poorly. Others welcomed them to stay for the holidays and tipped them extra for their services.

star runners received the more ideal work placements in the post office that Temple ran, or as receptionists or typists around campus.<sup>65</sup>

For Coachman, this labor betrayed her class status at Tuskegee and led to difficulties on campus. Years later, she recalled feeling like a “nobody” when an assistant coach said to her “you don’t have anything” regarding the quality of her clothes and her outward appearance or well-off classmates remarked “here comes your white momma” when she wore clothing donated by well-meaning benefactors in New York.<sup>66</sup> Still, for Coachman, work and labor also had an unexpected upside. The woman athletes who were assigned to work together to mend football garb or fix meals for other students ended up forming bonds and a network within a network – an insulated space where they could feel like college students more than campus laborers.

The labor that some women athletes on working scholarships performed for the school was coupled with the physical labor of athletic practices necessary to maintain their athletic-based working scholarship. At Tennessee State, the Tigerbelles were expected to formally train at least two hours a day, six days a week. Over the summer they had “two-a-days” which constituted of both a morning and afternoon practice. In their down time, Tigerbelles were expected to watch what they ate, study and train as needed. Between work and training some athletes felt like they “missed social participation, and “could not study as much as [they] wanted to.”<sup>67</sup> Tyus recalled the

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<sup>65</sup> Adkins, “*Development of Negro Female Talent*”, 150: Temple Interview

<sup>66</sup> Coachman Interview as quoted in *Jumping For the Moon*, 69-72

<sup>67</sup> Interviews with Tennessee State Tiger belles as transcribed in Adkins, *Development of Negro Female Athletic Talent*, 151-154

training expectations to be “at times hard, unbearable, tiresome, but never dull.”<sup>68</sup>

Another Tigerbelle described running college track as a “tough job rather than pleasure”.

Olympian Barbara Jones echoed this sentiment saying that during her time at Tennessee State she found that “track and field was no longer a fun sport but a job.” Adding that “like all jobs [she] wanted to keep her position,” so she had to work “long and hard” to ensure no one else would take her spot.<sup>69</sup>

Jones fear of being replaced underscored a harsh reality faced by elite women track stars- the opportunities athletics gave them were vast but rare. With only two schools actively recruiting for track and providing support only a few women were able to capitalize on sport in this way. Unlike black male football or basketball players whose athletic achievements gave the university more notoriety and whose collective numbers gave them negotiating leverage, black women athletes were aware that they could be readily replaced.<sup>70</sup> The summer clinics held by Tuskegee and Tennessee State reinforced this point as college runners were annually treated to joint training sessions with up and coming high school talent literally running to take their spots.

This athletic and physical labor– so often associated with masculinity even when frequently performed by women – made it all the more difficult for track girls to conform or be seen as in conformity with the ideals of femininity expected of coeds. As female athletes whose bodies were constantly subject to the masculine gaze of coaches and journalists alike, these women were often held to a higher standard of feminine expression by the male curators of the sport. These coaches and sportswriters frequently

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 154

<sup>70</sup> Black male athletes occasionally fought with their respective black

acted out of fear that sport, especially track, could reinforce racist stereotypes of black women's bodies, including that they were animalistic or represented a less feminine sexuality.

Civil rights activist and author Anne Moody highlighted the indignity of this complex array of expectations and practices when she described her experience as a work aid recipient and basketball player for Natchez College in the fifties. Between being forced to wash windows and being held to what she deemed a high standard of presentation and dress, Moody explained "I had never in my entire life felt so much like a prisoner, not even when I worked for white Klan members at home."<sup>71</sup> While at Natchez, Moody sense of social pressure to conform to standards of femininity. Women at top-flight schools, such as Tennessee State, were subject to a much more explicit set of standards.

### **Performing Femininity as College Athletes**

On TSU's campus, Ed Temple was father figure, enforcer, coach, chief of fashion police and media consultant. Coach Temple was strict and paternalistic, but much adored by the women who ran for his program. He had strict dress codes and conduct requirements, all of which worked to make his runners in to presentable, media ready

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colleges over matters of food, lodging and rules. A few times black college teams even went on strike with the most famous example being Howard's football team, which demonstrated against the school in both the 1920s and 1930s. "Howard U. Students Strike: Protest Hot Dog Diet For Football Players Howard Students In Football Strike Bulletin." *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967)*. November 21, 1936; "Football Team At Howard Out On A Strike: Players Demand Free Board And Lodging During Football Season May Mean End Of Football This Year Coach Can't Build Another Team--Games May Be Cancelled." *Afro-American (1893-1988)*. October 8, 1927; "Cancel Howard-Lincoln Game: Howard's Students Strike Grid Tilt with Lincoln Off." *The New York Amsterdam News (1922-1938)*. November 21, 1936

<sup>71</sup> Coming of Age in Mississippi, 243

women. Temple was sure to emphasize the strong work ethics and effort of his tracks stars, but he made sure that everyone knew that “after practice they put on their powder and lipstick just like everyone else.” Former Tigerbelle, Martha Hudson, reflected on Temple’s “I don’t want oxes; I want foxes,” mantra, noting that her former coach didn’t just want them to be ladies but “respectable ladies.”<sup>72</sup> Respectability politics were widespread on the entire Tennessee State campus as well. Tyus recalls certain teachers who would not permit afros in class, although she laughingly admitted to sometimes wearing a hat to subvert these codes. “Ultimately you may not have liked it,” said Tyus, “but you were taught to carry yourself a certain way in public.”<sup>73</sup>

Temple, by all accounts, was authoritarian in every area subject to his control – and he claimed the students’ lives on and off the track within that purview. “Most of the girls have tried me at one time or another,” Temple admitted. “But if one person gets by with that foolishness, then discipline breaks down all down the line.”<sup>74</sup> While on the track, he demanded excellence, ran strenuous practices, and saw perfection as a duty, off the track, he asserted control over the runners’ appearance, social life, and romantic relationships.

Attempting to fight back against prevailing notions that sports made women mannish, Temple promoted a carefully-crafted image of femininity among his track stars.<sup>75</sup> He almost seemed to relish the moments when his top-flight athletes were confused with anything else. “When we travelled, they dress up. Nobody has ever

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<sup>72</sup> Bob Harding, “Temple Leads the Girls,” Temple Collection, TSU

<sup>73</sup> Wyomia Tyus Talk, University of Pennsylvania, 2013

<sup>74</sup> Temple, *Only The Pure in Heart Survive*, 46

suspected that we're a track team. In fact, the girls have often been mistaken for a choir group," Temple boasted.<sup>76</sup> As the Tigerbelles continued to garner headlines, another key component of this control of others' gaze was the way in which his athletes were captured in news pictures. "I didn't want any pictures taken of them when they were all sweaty after a race," he declared. Instead, he required his athletes to put on their sweat suits, comb their hair, and apply lipstick before meeting the press.<sup>77</sup> Temple was equally keen on his own position in such pictures, where he liked to surround himself with his young female athletes, although Temple noted that he was "very careful to avoid any appearance of hanky-panky," often showing no emotion or refusing to hug a girl after a good race.<sup>78</sup> While he perhaps avoided offending sensibilities regarding "hanky-panky," Temple's positioning in pictures conveyed more than anything else a sense of ownership, a paternalistic control over the pictures' other, younger, female subjects. The girls who ran for Temple's track program frequently referred to their coach as "a second father."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Temple, *Only The Pure in Heart Survive*, 50

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Temple, *Only The Pure in Heart Survive*, 49

<sup>79</sup> Rudolph, *Wilma*, 122



***Figure 17. Ed Temple (center) and Olympic Bound Tigerbelles, left to right: Wilma Rudolph, Isabelle Daniels, Willie White, Lucinda Williams, Mae Faggs, Margaret Matthews. 1956. Courtesy of The Tennessean***

As many girls entered the program while they were still in high school, and with the booming city of Nashville often representing the girls' first extended stay away from home, Coach Temple and his wife, Charlie B., functioned in a quasi-parental capacity for many runners. While Charlie B noted that the coach was strict, she saw it as rooted in a "fatherly concern" for the girls on his team.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, Rudolph remembered Coach Temple paying attention to details that many other male coaches might have overlooked. Believing that women could damage themselves running if their breasts were not properly secured, Temple relied on his wife to make sure that every girl was fitted with specially crafted sports bras. He asked Charlie B to craft alternate workout schedules for

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<sup>80</sup> Temple, *Only The Pure in Heart Survive*, 27

girls who were menstruating in understanding of the pain cramps could cause and the difficulty of running with a sanitary pad in the days before tampons.<sup>81</sup>

‘We’ve always taken them into our family,’ Charlie B said of their relationship with the Tigerbelles. “We have cookouts at our home...the children have grown up with Tigerbelle babysitters, and I have washed uniforms and tennis shoes by the hundreds.”<sup>82</sup> While coach Temple and Charlie B self-consciously modeled a respectable black middle class marriage, Temple worked very hard to ensure that his athletes would not marry – or even date – while in his program. “The women who will cause you the most problems [in a track program] are likely to be your married women,” he argued, notably speaking about the athlete-coach relationship in possessive terms. For Temple, married women posed a threat because they were harder to control and more prone to distractions.

Temple found himself caught in the middle of a paradox shaped by opposing stereotypes of black womanhood. On one hand, he went out of his way to assert his athletes’ heterosexual proclivities – likely a response to mid-century anxieties about heteronormativity as well as the trope of unfeminine black womanhood. On the other hand, he was also extremely conscious of the image of black women as hypersexual, and thus actively discouraged his athletes from maintaining monogamous relations, due to a fear that they would become overly invested. His answer was for his runners to maintain multiple heterosexual relationships simultaneously. “With the girls accomplishing so much on the track, some of the dates used this as an excuse to try to get the girls to ‘prove their femininity,’” he wrote. “When it gets down to just one, I tell the girl if he pays your

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<sup>81</sup> Rudolph, *Wilma*, 123

<sup>82</sup> Temple, *Only The Pure in Heart Survive*, 28

room and board, then he's better than me." For Temple, running – and romance – were both ways for women to provide for their economic security. Both of these, however, were conducted through a male middleman. But in publically emphasizing his girls' romantic desirability through multiple suitors, Temple was also investing in the future of women's athletics by asserting that elite athletes were no less sexually desirable – and indeed perhaps more so – due to their achievements.

The stakes for asserting his athletes' feminity extended well beyond their marriageability and even beyond the position of athletes within black society. As international athletic competition became a battleground for Cold War powers, allegations that teams were passing off male athletes for female ones resulted in a call to subject elite athletes to invasive gender confirmation tests.<sup>83</sup> Given the existent stereotypes regarding black gender ambiguity, black women athletes were unsurprisingly disproportionately selected for such screening. When asked if he could ensure that his athletes were "really girls," Temple rose to their defense, proclaiming that "in my seventeen years as coach here, I have yet to see any woman athlete that I have ever coached who would have the slightest difficulty passing any and all types of sex tests."<sup>84</sup> Temple, ever the tactician, countered the suggestion that his athletes' sex could be questioned by not one but two arguments. The first centered around his girls' attractiveness, saying "if you didn't know the girls personally, you'd never believe that

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<sup>83</sup> Stefan Wiederkehr, "'We Shall Never Know the Exact Number of Men Who Have Competed in the Olympics Posing as Women': Sport, Gender Verification and the Cold War." *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no. 4 (March 1, 2009): 556–72

<sup>84</sup> *Jet*, Dec. 7, 1967

they are athletes. All of them are attractive women with fine features.”<sup>85</sup> He particularly singled out sprinter Marcella Daniel, pointing out that not only was she a “very pretty girl” but that her beauty was recognized, as evidenced by her election as Miss Tennessee State in 1966. The second argument emphasized femininity as juxtaposed to professional, post-collegiate athletics. Drawing a line between the US girls and the “foreign girls,” Temple insisted that after college, his students would go on to more traditionally gendered pursuits, including marriage, family, and non-athletic professions. “After graduation, they trade in their track shoes for a housewife’s apron or seek career jobs,” Temple asserted.<sup>86</sup>

Temple may have championed his athletes’ defense against potential critics on all sides, protected them against bodily harm due to unsecured breasts, and tried to guide them to success both on and off the field, but the inverse side of his concern was his disdain for those who flaunted his rules. During the 1960 Rome Olympics, Temple instituted an across-the-board ban on dancing that was met with disdain by his athletes, none more so than Willye White, who decided to go dancing in the Olympic Village despite the ban. When Temple discovered White’s actions, he told her “they don’t give no medals for the queen of dancing,” and put her on the first available plane back home to the United States.<sup>87</sup> He also dismissed girls who “liked to run their mouth as much as their feet.”<sup>88</sup> Star status did not protect runners from Temple’s discipline. After repeated run-ins with White, he dismissed her from his team. Still at the top of her abilities, she

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<sup>85</sup> *ibid*

<sup>86</sup> *ibid*

<sup>87</sup> Temple, *Only The Pure in Heart Survive*, 50

<sup>88</sup> Temple, *Only The Pure in Heart Survive*, 48

went on to join Chicago Mayor Richard Daley's track club, and returned to the 1964 Olympics free of Temple's oversight. Most girls, however, regardless of how they may have felt about the rules, elected to conform. Not only did conformity and excellence on the track provide them with a college education, but it also afforded them the ability to travel nationally and internationally, broadening horizons and increasing their social standing. When Rudolph asked her older teammate Mae Faggs if all the training and regimentation worth it, Faggs responded by noting that she was heading to her third Olympics and that she "valued the knowledge she acquired from travelling and the friendships she had made with people from other countries more than she valued the medals that she won."<sup>89</sup> The emphasis on the opportunity to travel, made available by their work as part of an elite track program, was seen by many – not just Faggs – as a key compensation for their labor.

### **A Chance to See the World**

On the book jacket of her autobiography, Wilma Rudolph offered a short blurb designed to demonstrate "the long, hard, way" she had come en route to being an Olympic hero.<sup>90</sup> Forgoing a brief description of medal ceremonies, White House dinners or screaming fans, Rudolph instead wrote about the moment she left for her first Olympic games. "I looked down at the Pacific Ocean ...saying to myself, 'is this all one big dream,' penned Rudolph, "Here I am on this big charter get going off to another county as one of the fastest women in the whole world..."<sup>91</sup> That Rudolph selected this

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<sup>89</sup> Rudolph, *Wilma*, 88

<sup>90</sup> Rudolph, *Wilma*, Book Jacket

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

moment—on a plane, off to an unnamed country-- to encapsulate her story underscores the importance and significant of her travel experiences.<sup>92</sup>

For girls of poor southern backgrounds who had hardly traveled out of the small towns and rural areas in which they were born, the opportunity to travel with their collegiate track programs was transformative. Before travelling to the Pan-American Games and the Olympics, White thought that “the whole world was like Mississippi, segregated and ugly.” But after making friendships within the international athletic community, she considered the world “a better place to live in...it was very educational.”<sup>93</sup>

Oral testimonies from former Tigerbelles seem to confirm that “educational” was the most consistent way to described both domestic and international travel. Athletes describe learning new languages and cultural customs and meeting people from all over the world.<sup>94</sup> The European tours held a place of particular import. Describing the travel experience as “thrilling” and “rewarding, Lucinda Williams said that with “the power of [her] legs and the grace of God,” she was able to go “behind the Iron curtain” and that “all places within Europe were in reach”.<sup>95</sup> The reception of these black women in countries like France, England, and Italy was warm and at times bordered on fandom. They were asked for autographs and pictures, their presence often met with cheers and curious on lookers. The spectacle of white crowds cheering and clamoring for black

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<sup>93</sup> Willye White Interview, 1995

<sup>94</sup> Interviews with Tigerbelles as transcribed in Adkins, “The Development of Negro Female Athletic Talent”; White Interview as transcribed in Tricard, *American Women’s Track and Field*; Tyus interview as transcribed in *Tales of Gold*

<sup>95</sup> Williams interview as transcribed in Adkins, “The Development of Negro Female Athletic Talent,” pg. 185

southern girls was an irony not lost on the Olympians. Rudolph, in particular, sought to highlight the paradox as her international fame grew. The irony of being guarded by dogs amongst throngs of admirers contrasted mightily with images of dogs being turned on students like her in the American south.<sup>96</sup> “So many things one doesn’t know until you make the international trips,” said Rudolph. “One can find out- outside of America- what we are really doing in America- [it] really [makes you] more alert.”<sup>97</sup>



**Figure 18. Tigerbelles, Edith McGuire and Wyomia Tyus preparing to travel to the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo. Courtesy of Tennessee State University Archives**

<sup>96</sup> “Europe Salutes Wilma Rudolph,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (1921-1967), February 4, 1961; “World Wide Invitations Flood Wilma Rudolph,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (1921-1967), September 17, 1960; Wilma Rudolph, *Wilma*, 1977, 42

<sup>97</sup> Rudolph interview as transcribed in Adkins, “The Development of Negro Female Athletic Talent”.

While elite black women athletes described the new perspective traveling afforded them, they also learned harsher lessons while on the road. When traveling within the country for national meets, the Tigerbelles often had to pile into one car as Tennessee State lacked the resources to provide them with more comfortable transportation. Often times, teams used the “Green Book” for Negro travelers which detailed safe places to stop for accommodations, food, and relief.<sup>98</sup> Many times the local hotels were cost prohibitive or segregated. This lead teams from Tuskegee and Tennessee State to lean on their collegiate networks. The girls would spend the night in a house of an alumnus who would provide a meal and a place to sleep prior to their meet. Black recreation leaders in local YMCA and YWCA also provided lodging in their recreational centers.<sup>99</sup>

While Temple attempted to shield his runners from the indignities of segregation, National meets, especially those held in southern cities, reminded everyone that they could not out run Jim Crow. While many of these incidents were suffered in silence, interracial alliances within the track community served to bring attention to some isolated incidents of racial discrimination. The treatment of black women at the AAU meet in San Antonio garnered media attention after a white competitor spoke to the press about it.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> For more on the Negro Motorist Green Book and the challenges and importance of automobilty in the age of Jim Crow see: Cotton Seiler, “‘So That We as a Race Might Have Something Authentic to Travel By’: African American Automobility and Cold-War Liberalism.” *American Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2006): 1091–1117.

<sup>99</sup> Jessie Abbott Interview, *BWOHP*; Interview with Temple, 2015; Temple interview as transcribed in Tricard, *American Women’s Track and Field*

<sup>100</sup> “Bias Mars Girls’ AAU Meet: Connolly Airs Discrimination At AAU Meet.” *Daily Defender (Daily Edition) (1956-1960)*. July 11, 1960. This incident seems to have left a particularly negative impression on the track girls at Tennessee State as nearly half of them explicitly mentioned Texas when asked if they had ever experienced discrimination in competition. Adkins, “Development of Negro Female athletic Talent”.

Likewise white Olympic teammates occasionally spoke out about the poor treatment they witnessed towards their black counter parts, although many stopped short of calling it racism or discrimination.<sup>101</sup>

Despite the challenges of traveling in the age of Jim Crow, the athletes prized this newly acquired mobility. Physical movement, whether it be from rural towns to a college in a city, or in a jet heading to international games, was but one of the mobilities elite track women earn through their athletic labors.

## **Conclusion**

Sports, most notably track and field, created avenues of mobilities both physically and socially, for elite black women athletes. Using networks of black institutions, black girls could use their physical ability to gain access to middle class black institutions. Here they gained a college education and a path to upward mobility. Coach Temple was fond of noting that equally as important as his Tigerbelle;s Olympic success was their academic success and path from poor southern girls to members of the college educated black middle class. “We put forty girls on the Olympic team, Temple recites, “out of forty, thirty-nine graduated with their degrees and out of the thirty-nine we had twenty-

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<sup>101</sup> In one such incident, Frances Kaszubki, an American shot putter, composed a ten page letter to the IOC following the 1948 Olympic games. While most of her letter detailed the overall poor treatment of women athletes, Kaszubki took time to illustrate the exceptionally awful treatment towards Mae Faggs and other black sprinters. Frances Kaszubski to USOC, undated, Box 169, Folder 18, Avery Brundage Collection, University of Illinois Archives

five with masters and three with their Ph.D and one M.D.”<sup>102</sup> “I’m happy with that,” Temple told one interviewer, “all of them are successful and work. No one’s in jail, no one’s on welfare.”<sup>103</sup>

For girls in the rural south, the ability to earn a track scholarship to college also represented a rare opportunity for physical mobility. Traveling to college in cities like Nashville, national meets across the country and international competitions around the world, provided a measure of travel that often eluded poor black people in the Jim Crow era.

Yet it would be incomplete to simply view these mobilities as benefits given to them. Indeed the elite athletes who were able to access social and physical mobility received it as a limited form of compensation for their athletic labor. Their maintenance of such opportunities was sustained by training, working for their colleges and performing respectable forms of femininity. Moreover, their labor went beyond simply providing individual athletes opportunity. Black women’s athletic labor not only awarded their schools national prestige and their coaches professional opportunities, but it also provided the black press with ideal icons of muscular assimilation and the U.S. State Department perfect representatives for the global promotion of a multicultural capitalist democracy.

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<sup>102</sup> Interview with Temple, July 2015. Temple often repeats these statistics when being interviewed about the Tigerbelles. He also writes it in his autobiography, *Only the Pure and Heart Survive*, pg 112

<sup>103</sup> Temple interview as transcribed in Tricard, *American Women’s Track and Field*, pg. 428

## **Chapter Five:**

### **Cinderella Girls: Global Games and Political Symbolism in the Post-War Era**

For shot-putter Earlene Brown, the “story of Negro girls in the Olympics” was a frustrating and unfulfilled fairytale. “They [Negro girls] are all Cinderella girls,” Brown told reporters in 1964, “They pulled themselves up beyond where they really were supposed to be—none of them were supposed to be at London, Helsinki, Melbourne, Rome or Tokyo; or riding first class on a jet plane, eating a five course dinner and drinking champagne.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, according to Brown, a three time Olympian, the fairytale was short lived. “They come back home and at 12’ o clock their carriage turns to a pumpkin and they got bills, bills, bills,” she concluded. “They are the ones holding up the high standards of American athletics, the ones all America cheers. But how many people realize just how it really is?”<sup>2</sup>

Brown’s account of the Olympic “Cinderella Girls” is a succinct depiction of many elite black women who earned international athletic acclaim in the post-war era. For some, particularly girls in track and field, sports could provide college aid and travel opportunities. All too often, however, the end of their athletic careers left them with little compensation and few professional outlooks. Yet these “Cinderella girls” symbolized more than just the high standard of American athletics. For black male sportswriters and political leaders, the success of black women in international athletics made them valuable symbols of racial uplift and muscular civil rights. The United States’ State

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<sup>1</sup> Michael D. Davis, *Black American Women in Olympic Track and Field: A Complete Illustrated Reference*. Jefferson, N.C: Mcfarland & Co Inc Pub, 1992 pg. xvii

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

Department also saw symbolic value in their young, athletic, feminine and black bodies. Through press releases, scripted videos, advertisements and government-sponsored goodwill tours, black women athletes were presented as icons of U.S. cultural democracy.

Beyond symbolic virtue for America and personal accolades for the performed labor of athletics, sports during the Civil Rights Era have been demonstrated to be an important site for protests. Most studies however, center on black male athletes- their fight for professional integration within a larger athletic labor force, organized activism and individual protests.<sup>3</sup> The absence of women in these historical accounts renders them silent symbols or historical footnotes. This absence was compounded by the paucity of professional athletic podiums for women's sports, turning their already undervalued labor into a reinforcement of silence. Furthermore, the governing bodies of track and field competition maintained strict rules dictating the parameters of amateurism, meaning that athletes in this sport so critical for black women were forbidden from gaining monetary compensation from advertisements or appearances. While black woman track-and-field superstars could be capitalized upon, they could not capitalize on their own images.

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<sup>3</sup> Jackie Robinson and Muhammad Ali take up a central place in this historiography as both barrier breakers and rebel athletes. For more see: Elliott J. Gorn, *Muhammad Ali: The People's Champ*. University of Illinois Press, 1998; Mike Marqusee, *Redemption Song: Muhammad Ali and the Spirit of the Sixties*. Verso, 2005; Arnold Rampersad, *Jackie Robinson: A Biography*. Ballantine Books, 1998; Johnny Smith and Roberts, Randy, *Blood Brothers: The Fatal Friendship Between Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X*. New York: Basic Books, 2016; Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy*. Oxford University Press, 1997; Bass, Amy. *Not the Triumph But the Struggle: 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete*. 1 edition. Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2004.

The racialized and gendered bodies of Earlene Brown and her athletic peers were used to advance nationalist discourse on democracy and postwar racial liberalism.<sup>4</sup> But despite significant obstacles to asserting ownership over their own bodies and narratives, these women also embodied critical narratives of black resistance and liberation and simultaneously challenged --and reinforced-- hegemonic articulations of black femininity. This chapter reveals the way in which changing racial politics, civil rights strategies, and cold war anxieties created and constrained the possibilities of black women's athletic participation and value as political symbols on the world stage.

### **“Negro Womanhood on Parade”**

In the spring of 1948, Fay Young, the reputable sports editor from the *Chicago Defender*, predicted that “Negro girls [would] dominate” the upcoming U.S. Women’s track and field Olympic team. Young filled the *Defender’s* sport page with pictures of the young Olympic prospects who, by his estimation, could “run the ankles off [of]” any potential opponent. The article included brief biographies of top contenders, recounted previous accolades, sized up their competitors, and ultimately concluded that it was obvious that the “sepia girls” would win. “Try and beat them,” Young declared, “here they come.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Lui, “Sammy Lee,” 209. For more on the body, gender, race and nationalism see: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 2011); Radhika Mohanram, *Black Body: Women, Colonialism, and Space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), Rosenberg and Fitzpatrick, “Body and Nation.”

<sup>5</sup> Fay Young, “Negro Women will Dominate 1948 Olympic Track Team,” *Chicago Defender*, May 22 1948



***Figure 19. Tennessee State Tigerbelles with Trophy Collection. ca. 1960. Courtesy of Tennessee State University Archives***

Young’s bold declaration displays how Young and other black male journalists applauded the athletic success of the “bronzed stars” and used their athletic accomplishments to argue for civil rights.<sup>6</sup> Despite prevailing mainstream concerns about women’s participation in competitive sports, black women’s athletic bodies became a critical vessel for refuting ideas about black inferiority.

The black press entered the Post-War period as a highly organized institution energized around a shared vision.<sup>7</sup> The newspaper-led “Double-V Campaign” during the

<sup>6</sup> Chester L. Washington, "SMASHING RECORDS AND RACIAL BARRIERS!" *The Pittsburgh Courier (1911-1950)*, Jul 30, 1932, City Edition

<sup>7</sup> In defining the black press I follow the way my historical sources understood it to be. In particular both the *Negro Year Book* and *Opportunity*, A journal of the Urban League, conducted annual reviews of the “Negro Press” where they defined the institution and evaluated its publications and their effectiveness. The Black press includes independent newspapers, often represented by the

war had reinforced the organizing purpose of the black press and reasserted editors, writers, and managers as leaders in the fight for “full citizenship rights” for black Americans.<sup>8</sup> And sports had long been considered, by those in the black press, as means of racial advancement. Members of the black press embraced “muscular assimilation” as a strategy for racial uplift and routinely advocated for and published accounts of athletic achievement.<sup>9</sup> Black women athletes, like their male counterparts, were portrayed as positive symbols of racial advancement. Women who competed in local leagues or school- based teams enjoyed some coverage in the black sports page, but the black press reserved its top coverage for the athletes who competed against white women.<sup>10</sup> The Olympic Games provided opportunities for black sportswriters to embrace black women athletes who could “showcase the race” by performing well in an international arena.

Even as success in sports provided women with new opportunities for visibility, the male-dominated sporting world attempted to control the images of the black female athletes in much the same way that Temple had sought to manufacture a carefully sculpted image for his girls. Engaging in respectability politics constructed within

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organized under the Negro Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA), the Associated Negro Press (ANP), and black magazines such as *Ebony* and *Jet*. *Negro Year Book, 1947*, pg. 383-404

<sup>8</sup> *A Question of Sedition: The Federal Government's Investigation of the Black Press During World War II*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. For more on the Black Press see: Brian Carroll, *When to Stop the Cheering?: The Black Press, the Black Community, and the Integration of Professional Baseball*. Routledge, 2006; *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays*. Edited by Todd Vogel. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2001; James McGrath Morris, *Eye on the Struggle: Ethel Payne, the First Lady of the Black Press*. New York: Amistad, 2015.

<sup>406</sup> Patrick B. Miller. "To" Bring the Race along Rapidly": Sport, student culture, and educational mission at historically black colleges during the interwar years." *History of Education Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1995): 111-133.

<sup>10</sup> Linda Darnette Williams, “An Analysis of American Sportswomen in Two Negro Newspapers: The ‘Pittsburgh Courier’, 1924--1948 and the ‘Chicago Defender’, 1932--1948.” Ph.D., The Ohio State University, 1987.

hegemonic articulations of gender and sexuality, the black press carefully constructed “public images of well-dressed feminine composure” by going out of their way to distance black female athletes from images of “aggressive masculinity” and to play up their “heterosexual inclinations and appeal.”<sup>11</sup> Using phrases such as “dainty fingers,” “legs of a showgirl,” “glamour girl,” and “the china doll type,” paired with frequent images of the athletes in dresses or accompanied by men, newspapers cultivated their particular image of ideal black womanhood.<sup>12</sup>



**Figure 20. Tennessee State Tigerbelle, Barbara Jones, on the cover of Jet Magazine, 1958. Courtesy of JET Archives**

<sup>11</sup> Susan Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 13 and Cindy Himes Gissendanner, “African American Women Olympians: The Impact of Race, Gender, and Class Ideologies, 1932-1968,” *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 67 (1996): 179

<sup>12</sup> “48 Olympic Women's Team-Glamour Girls,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, July 12, 1952; “Women in Athletics- Weekly Series” *Chicago Defender*, 1941-1944

For black women, being celebrated by the black press was contingent on one's ability to perform middle class respectability, a respectability that centered around the athletes femininity. Athletes whose athletic achievement was heralded in black newspapers but did not completely fit into the mold of respectability presented a potential problem. These women risked getting lambasted, mocked, or completely ignored by the black press. Tennis star Ora Washington, received limited coverage and was not well known publicly because of her "refusal to emphasize her femininity" and by her inability or her decision to shed her working-class background, remaining "plain spoken and plain clothed."<sup>13</sup> In Althea Gibson's case, her refusal to wear the label of the "female Jackie Robinson of Tennis," as well as her lack of outspokenness on the issue of racial equality, sparked a continuous war with the black press. In a Philadelphia *Tribune* article, one sportswriter discusses her "snubbing" the black press by writing, "her success as the first Negro to crash big time tennis has gone to her head."<sup>14</sup>

Some athletes seemed to transcend even this critical scope. Wilma Rudolph's position as a glowing symbol of racial advancement shielded her from criticism in the black press, even when she did transgress the rigid boundaries of respectability. Instead, her high school pregnancy and status as an unwed mother was ignored completely and the less respectable parts of her life completely silenced. Despite the black press's obsession with Rudolph's romantic life and aspirations of domestic bliss, there is

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<sup>13</sup> Jennifer Lansbury, "Champions Indeed: The Emergence of African American Women Athletes in American Society, 1930-1960," (PhD. Diss, George Mason University, 2008): 42

<sup>14</sup> "Does the Negro Athlete Snub the Negro Press?" *Philadelphia Tribune*, July 11, 1964

virtually no mention of her daughter.<sup>15</sup> When she eventually married the father of her child and birthed a second baby, her marriage and pregnancy were covered in depth, without any mention of their previous child. Other athletes, with less visibility and status, endured harsher consequences for stepping outside of the respectability box.

Wilma Rudolph enjoyed a considerable amount of press through the entirety of the 1960s. However, most of the press was concerned with documenting her marriages, divorce, who she might be coupled with, birth announcements and her travels. During this same time, Rudolph was speaking out about segregation and engaging in boycotts and protests in her hometown. The black press very rarely documented her activism, choosing instead to focus on “Wonderful Wilma” and the way she “glamorized” track.<sup>16</sup> Doc Young noted that “long and leggy” Rudolph being nationally described as beautiful was “indisputable proof that things are improving for the Negro”.<sup>17</sup>

The value some sportswriters placed on Rudolph’s symbolic achievement in the early 1960s is curious when read against their pleas for politically engaged athletes. Indeed black sportswriters engaged in debates about the relative worth of high achieving athletes who nevertheless failed to be vocal about civil rights. Writers like Sam Lacy and Charles Livingston contended that now that the color line had been broken in most major

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<sup>15</sup> Coach Temple believes that occasionally reporters from the *Afro* and *Courier* would come down to Clarksville to catch Wilma with her daughter and “break the story” to gain reporting credentials. However the reporters would either find the Rudolph house overflowing with children and be unable to definitively connect one to Wilma, or their higher ups would “kill the story” before it ran in print. Interview with Temple, July 2015.

<sup>16</sup> A Sample of articles consulted include: “60 Olympic heroine likes new life as wife, mother,” Oct 13, 1964; “Wilma expecting in June; jolts US hopes in Olympics,” Feb 04, 1964; “WILMA ADMITS MARRIAGE ON ROCKS,” Feb 09, 1963; “Wilma Rudolph graduates,” May 28, 1963; “Wilma Rudolph is married,” Jul 23, 1963

<sup>17</sup> DOC YOUNG, A.S. 1964. Track for girls now 'in' (Barry help us). *The Chicago Defender* (National edition) (1921-1967), Aug 22, 1964

sports, black athletes had become “complacent” in arguing for the rights of black people.<sup>18</sup> While some people argued that “not everyone [can be] a civil rights leader” and that “athletes do their duty in their own way,” sportswriters maintained that the quest for civil rights necessitated vocal and not merely symbolic sports stars.<sup>19</sup> Yet these pronouncements seemed to have been reserved for black male athletes.

While the press celebrated her athletic achievement and obsessed over her love life and pregnancy rumors, Rudolph was using her status as a new celebrity to advocate for civil rights. Immediately following her historic Olympic performance, Rudolph juxtaposed her positive treatment in Rome with racism that existed back in the United States. “In America they push me around because I’m a Negro, here in Europe they push me to the front,” she told one reporter.<sup>20</sup> Adding that it would “all but kill her to have to go home and face being denied this, that and the other, because I am a Black American.”<sup>21</sup>

Rudolph’s fear proved to be pertinent as she soon learned that her hometown of

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<sup>18</sup> “Athletes Complacent on Rights?” *Afro-American (1893-1988)*. June 1, 1963; Charles Livingston, “Some Athletes Play Dodge Game with Civil Rights.” *Afro-American (1893-1988)*. July 27, 1963; “Rap Smugness of Stars Who Refuse to Join Crusade.” *Pittsburgh Courier (1955-1966), City Edition*. July 27, 1963; “Wendell Smith’s SPORTS BEAT: Isn’t It About Time for Negro Athletes To Be Heard From in Civil Rights Fight?” *Pittsburgh Courier (1955-1966), City Edition*. March 14, 1964.

<sup>19</sup> “A Reader’s Open Letter to Sam Lacy.” *Afro-American (1893-1988)*. August 22, 1970; Marion E. Jackson, “Sports of the World.” *Atlanta Daily World (1932-2003)*. June 2, 1963; Jackie Robinson, “The Way the Ball Bounces: Former Track Star Jesse Owens Way Off Stride on Civil Rights.” *Philadelphia Tribune (1912-2001)*. June 8, 1963.

<sup>20</sup> “‘Segregated Life Will All but Kill Me,’ Olympic Girl Dreads Coming Home,” *New York Amsterdam News*, September 10, 1960, pg 1

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

Clarksville was planning a segregated town parade to celebrate her return. “I told them I could not come to a parade that was segregated,” recalled Rudolph.<sup>22</sup> Upon learning of Rudolph’s public denouncement as well as the national media attention that she would be bringing to town, the Mayor quickly made an about face and leapt at the opportunity to demonstrate just how “welcoming” and “progressive” Clarksville, Tennessee could be. Declaring October 4<sup>th</sup> “Welcome Wilma Day” the town called on “all citizens of both races” to come out and “demonstrate to Wilma Rudolph and to people everywhere, the gratitude and admiration of her own city.”<sup>23</sup>

For Clarksville officials the celebratory parade and festivities, some of the first integrated public activities in the town, became a performance of the liberal imaginary. The newspaper hailed a prominent judge’s speech that had declared, “To get the best music out of a piano, one has to play both the white and black keys.”<sup>24</sup> Running with the metaphor, the newspaper contended that Clarksville had “long used both keys in a symphony of steady progress,” before adding that they hoped “national magazines... would reflect the spirit that has long marked relations between the two races in a community south of the Mason-Dixon line.”<sup>25</sup> A LIFE magazine feature released shortly after seemed to affirm Clarksville’s goal with a write up on the celebratory

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<sup>22</sup> Wilma Rudolph interview as transcribed in Brian Lanker’s *I Dream a World: Portraits of Black Women Who Changed America*. 10th Anniversary Revised edition. New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1999.

<sup>23</sup> “Nation-Wide Publicity; Plans Completed for Wilma Rudolph Day,” Clarksville *Leaf-Chronicle*, September 28, 1960; “Wilma Rudolph Honored,” Clarksville *Leaf-Chronicle*, October 4, 1960; W.W. Barksdale, “Proclamation,” Clarksville *Leaf-Chronicle*, October 4, 1960; For more on Clarksville and their self-imaging see Liberti and Smith, *Representing Wilma*, Pg. 18-41

<sup>24</sup> “A Program Well Planned,” Clarksville *Leaf-Chronicle*, October 6, 1960

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

interracial affair. While Clarksville celebrated its positive publicity, Rudolph regarded the event as “barrier breaking,” hoping it would “make things easier for other blacks in town.”<sup>26</sup>

Widespread integration did not seem to follow the parade however. Three years later, in the still segregated Clarksville, Rudolph and over a hundred other citizens marched to a local Shoney’s dinner and attempted a direct action protest against their discriminatory practices.<sup>27</sup> While other dining establishments had desegregated earlier that week, Shoney’s was refusing to change its policy. Rudolph and the other protestors peacefully assembled in front of the restaurant multiple times over two days. When the heckling and harassment by local white citizens seems to be increasing, Clarksville officials along with the management of Shoney’s issued a “truce” and sought to meet with a committee of civic leaders. Less than a week later Clarksville’s City Council voted to integrate Shoney’s as well as all of Clarksville’s public facilities, including parks and the local swimming pool.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> “Wilma’s HomeTown Win,” *LIFE*, October 17, 1960 pg. 110-112, 114; Rudolph interview with Lanker, *I Dream a World*

<sup>27</sup> “Wilma gets Jim Crow key,” Jun 06, 1963; *Los Angeles Sentinel*), Jet Magazine, June 1963

<sup>28</sup> “Negroes Denied Service at Shoney’s,” *Clarksville Leaf-Chronicle*, May 29, 1963; “Negroes try Integration Here Again,” *Clarksville Leaf-Chronicle*, May 30, 1963; “Athlete in Protest,” *New York Times*, May 30 1963; “Truce Reported in Local Dispute with Shoney’s,” *Clarksville Leaf-Chronicle*, May 31, 1963; Marian Jackson, “Sports of the World,” *Atlanta Daily World*, June 4, 1963; “Public Facilities in City Open to All by Council Vote,” *Clarksville Leaf-Chronicle*, June 7, 1963;



*Figure 21. Wilma Rudolph at Shoney's Protest, 1963 Courtesy of Clarksville Leaf Chronicle*

The coverage from the black press in both cases positions Rudolph as the victim of Jim Crowism in a way that diminishes her active involvement. Despite clamoring for outspoken politically engaged athletes, black sportswriters did not applaud or cast Rudolph along such lines. The slight mention that her protest received was a six-line blurb that focused on the “Jim Crow” actions of the diner against “Sweet Wilma”.<sup>29</sup> Noting that she received a “Jim Crow to [the] city,” Rudolph was cast more as a passive

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<sup>29</sup> “Wilma gets Jim Crow key,” Jun 06, 1963

victim then a civil rights protester.<sup>30</sup>

The image of “lovable Wilma” victimized by a racist town worked well a symbol for the ills of racial discrimination. The decision not to frame her as an outspoken athlete and budding civil rights leaders underscores the fact the calls for political action were geared towards male athletes. Leadership on civil rights, it would seem, was a masculine enterprise that employed black women as symbols to rally around and stand up for. Rudolph therefore was worth more to the black press as a silent, harmed symbol, than a active engaged protestor. Unlike black male athletes, Rudolph was unable to use athletic success and visibility as a platform to speak out- *and be heard*- on political issues.

Rudolph and other elite black women athletes also proved to be critical symbols for black American citizenship on an international stage. Regarding the returning black Olympic stars from the 1960 Rome games, sportswriter Marion Jackson noted, using rhetoric favored by president-elect John F. Kennedy “that they did so well is proof positive that our national vigor is firm and strong.” “We are not weaklings, and this melting-pot land of ours needs to use all of its resources,” Jackson proclaimed, implicitly making the case that segregation should not limit the pool of human capital in the midst of the Cold War. Jackson went on to recognize the unique role of athletes in this struggle for race equality. “Were it not for our bronzed ambassadors of goodwill who wear spiked shoes, where would our country be in this prestige race?” he asked.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, as black sports writers applauded the achievements of athletes in international games, they used their victories and international presence as a way to

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<sup>30</sup> “Wilma Finds Key to City Doesn’t Work,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 8, 1963

<sup>31</sup> *Sports of the World*, January 31, 1961, p. 5

advocate for issue at home. The high-achieving black women athletes were especially useful in this context. “America’s super salesman of democracy and goodwill at home and abroad are non-subsidized, non-regimented, state-free athletes who are diplomats without pouch or portfolio...so we proudly hail as ambassadors of sports the scintillating...and fabulous six of Tennessee State,” the sports columnist triumphed.<sup>32</sup> In applauding the black women track stars, he vaulted them to a vital position in shoring up racial accord, noting “their matchless talent on foreign soil have been our best ambassadors.”<sup>33</sup> The black press’ rhetorical use of the stars as ambassadors was matched by the State Department’s adoption of the female athletes as actual ambassadors, enlisting them to serve as state-sponsored goodwill ambassadors.

### **Goodwill Girls, Cold War Games**

Following the Second World War the United States embraced the 1948 Olympics as a victory celebration and ringing endorsement of democratic liberalism. Despite declaring that the games were “non political” the IOC did not invite Germany or Japan to the 1948 Olympics. With a diminished Italy the only Axis representative in the games, the Allied countries used the Olympiad as a friendly completion and reinforcement of their respective strength, vitality and values.<sup>34</sup> However in 1952, the Soviet Union sent an Olympic delegation for the first time in 40 years.

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<sup>32</sup> *Sports of the World*, February 2, 1957, p. 5

<sup>33</sup> *ibid*

<sup>34</sup> Jules Boykoff and Dave Zirin. *Power Games: A Political History of the Olympics*. London ; Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2016; Janie Hampton, *The Austerity Olympics: When the Games Came to London in 1948*. Aurum Press, 2012.

The “display of Russian Sporting Strength,” established the global sports arena as a vital space for the emerging world super powers to assert the dominance, strength and character of their respective nation. Upon this backdrop, American sporting bodies, such as the AAU, endeavored to strengthen the development and promotion of Olympic sports. Track and Field was at the top of the list.<sup>35</sup> Starting in 1958, the United State and Soviet Union scheduled dual track meets designed to showcase the speed and strength of the respective nations. Unlike the Olympic Games, there was only one heat per event, with two athletes from each country competing head to head. Over a span of nineteen years these meets functioned as important propaganda and tools of diplomacy.

In spite of the political goals of governing bodies, however, the meets claimed to remain “first and foremost an athletic completion”.<sup>36</sup> Yet the tension between the United States and the Soviet Union in the post-war years breathed a new sense of significance into the Olympic Games. The emerging superpowers squared off politically, ideologically and culturally and embraced every opportunity to assert dominance over the other.<sup>37</sup> In

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<sup>35</sup> MAX FRANKEL Special to The New York. “100,000 to See U. S.-Russian Track Meet Today: 100,000 WILL SEE TRACK IN MOSCOW.” *New York Times*. July 27, 1958

<sup>36</sup> Between 1958 and 1985 the United States and the Soviet Union competed in the following: 19 outdoor meets; 7 indoor meets; 10 junior meets; and 8 multi even competitions. J. M. Turrini, “‘It Was Communism versus the Free World’: The USA-USSR Dual Track Meet Series and the Development of Track and Field in the United States, 1958-1985,” *Journal of Sport History* 28, no. 3 (2001): 428.

<sup>37</sup> The domestic effects of Cold War foreign policy continue to command scholarly attention. For more on the sports and the Cold War see: Anthony J. Moretti, “The Cold War and the Olympics: Coverage in the ‘New York Times’ and ‘Los Angeles Times’ of the United States’ and Soviet Union’s Pursuit of Athletic Supremacy, 1948--1988.” Ph.D., Ohio University, 2004; Damion L Thomas, *Globetrotting: African American Athletes and Cold War Politics*. University of Illinois Press, 2012; Stephen Wagg and David Andrews. *East Plays West: Sport and the Cold War*. Routledge, 2012. For more on race and the Civil Rights Movement during the Cold War see: Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*. Princeton University Press, 2011. For work on black women and Cold War politics see: Mary Dudziak, “Josephine Baker, Racial Protest, and the Cold War.” *The Journal of American History* 81, no. 2 (September 1, 1994): 543–70; Erik S.

this moment, under the political pressures of a global power struggle, black women's track successes made them international symbols of America's supposed democratic values and postwar liberalism.

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McDuffie, "A 'New Freedom Movement of Negro Women': Sojourning for Truth, Justice, and Human Rights during the Early Cold War." *Radical History Review* 2008, no. 101 (2008): 81–106.

Similar to the way Jesse Owens's Olympic victories were embraced and celebrated as a symbolic defeat of Hitler and his ideology of Aryan supremacy, white Americans began to look to the competing black women to beat the Soviets and embody America's superiority. This national celebration led to a rare occasion in which black womanhood was cited as both beautiful and quintessentially American. When the US women's track team dominated the 1960 Olympics, lead by Wilma Rudolph's triple gold-winning performance, the mainstream press celebrated. Numerous articles in the weeks following the games contrasted Rudolph's femininity with the image of the "mannish" Russian athletes.<sup>38</sup> The celebration of Rudolph's beauty frequently referenced her color as well, such as *Sports Illustrated* calling her the "café au lait runner."<sup>39</sup> The elevation of Rudolph's racialized beauty was enhanced by her "slender" size, light skin and thinner features, allowing her to be highlighted as beautiful in contrast to the imagined image of Russian women as the masculine foreigners.<sup>40</sup> As *Mademoiselle* wrote Rudolph was the

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<sup>38</sup> "Wilma Proves They're Not All 'Muscle Molls'" and "Double Sprint Champion Didn't Walk until She Was 8," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 10, 1960

<sup>39</sup> "Like Nothing Else in Tennessee," *Sports Illustrated*, November 14, 1960, pg 48. Wilma's lighter skinned toned afforded her some media advantages over her darker teammates. Her features, closer to traditionally European ones, were a hegemonic ideal celebrated within black communities. For more on colorism and black women see: Audrey Elisa Kerr, *The Paper Bag Principle: Class, colorism, and rumor and the case of Black Washington*. Univ. of Tennessee Press, 2006; Treva B. Lindsey, "Black no more: Skin bleaching and the emergence of new negro womanhood beauty culture." *Journal of Pan African Studies* 4, no. 4 (2011): 97-112; Blain Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women: Race and Beauty in the Twentieth-Century South*. UNC Press Books, 2014; Allyson Hobbs, *A chosen exile: A history of racial passing in American life*. Harvard University Press, 2014. For work that explores this issue within the larger African diaspora see: Lynn Thomas's work on South Africa in *Modern Girl Around the World*; Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Yearning for lightness: Transnational circuits in the marketing and consumption of skin lighteners." *Gender & society* (2008)

<sup>40</sup> Olympic Quintessence, *LIFE*, September 19, 1960, pg. 11

“very embodiment of black grace, a beautiful, flowing, lissome sight as she bounded over the track.”<sup>41</sup>



***Figure 22. Wilma Rudolph finished first in the 200m race at the Olympic Games in 1960. Courtesy International Olympic Committee Museum Collections***

In many ways this national embrace of Rudolph’s beauty echoed what Coach Temple and other black sportswriters had always attempted to demonstrate: that black women could be athletic and beautiful. While the national press highlighted Rudolph’s beauty in order to construct a disparaging image of Russian women by contrast, the black presses’ efforts were still aimed at guarding against racial stereotypes about black women’s bodies. As the international successes of black women athletes increased their national visibility, the black press remained steadfast in presenting the athletes as

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<sup>41</sup> *Mademoiselle*, January 1961, pg. 85

“beauties” while also applauding the positive coverage they received in mainstream periodicals.

Cold War politics also created space for black women athletes who existed outside of respectable beauty norms, to earn praise and celebration. Earlene Brown a thrower (shot-put and discuss) was far from the constructed ideal of black femininity that black sport writers and coaches championed. Brown was a 200-pound, working-class, married mother and part time beautician.<sup>42</sup> From Los Angeles, Brown independently competed in the AAU trials and earned a spot on the national team. Unlike the runners who came through track programs and had their fees paid for by the USIOC, AAU and respective colleges, Brown raised the money herself. She raised funds with her church, opened up a beauty salon and completed domestic work here and there.<sup>43</sup> While she competed in the throwing events- usually dominated by the Russian women and cast as particularly masculine- her success over three Olympics and two Pan-American games won her support and admiration from the black press.<sup>44</sup> More over, because she was financially independent from the USIOC, Brown faced fewer regulations and was not under the direction of a chaperone during international meets. This independence led to Brown purportedly throwing the “best parties and poker games” in the Olympic village.<sup>45</sup> These late night romps attracted much attention with international athletes singing her praises. Due to the international goodwill she cultivated, the mainstream press and the USIOC

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<sup>42</sup> Davis, *Black American Women in Olympic Track*, Pg. 32-37

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> "Earlene Brown Wins Berth on Olympic Team." 1956. *Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005)*, Aug 30, 1; "Mrs. Earlene Brown Named 'Female Athlete of Year'." *Philadelphia Tribune*, Feb 28, 13; "Earlene Beats Olympic Champ." *Los Angeles Sentinel*, Jul 21, 1.

<sup>45</sup> Davis, *Black American Women in Olympic Track*, Pg. 35

embraced Brown and her ability to “make friends for Uncle Sam” as the “unofficial rock n’ roll instructor” for the Olympic athletes.<sup>46</sup>

While both the black and white press coverage of Brown commented consistently on her “large size” writers found other ways to assert her femininity. In the black press, articles on Brown noted that she was married and a mother, contrasting greatly with the track girls to whom motherhood and marriage was seen as a career ender.<sup>47</sup> The black press also highlighted Brown’s work as a beautician, thus positioning her athletic accomplishments as a hobby and not a profession. In the mainstream press headlines described Brown as “a 220lb Joy” or a “big bundle of good humor,” who acted as a sort of “den mother” to the entire Olympic Village.<sup>48</sup> These portrayals rhetorically coupled her unconventional size with her “good nature” and maternal qualities, conjuring images of the happy, docile and asexual black mammy caricature that still plagued representations of black womanhood.<sup>49</sup> Earlene Brown was cast as a national mammy figure-celebrated for her loyalty to the country and her ability to court goodwill for the United States abroad.

While both the black press and mainstream press lauded black women athletes, like Rudolph and Brown, as curators of goodwill for the county, the United States State

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<sup>46</sup> Earlene Brown, 220 pounds of joy, makes friends for U.S. in Moscow. *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, Jul 27, 1958; "EARLENE BROWN HAILED BY EAGER RUSSIAN FANS." 1958. *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Jul 27, 1-c4.

<sup>47</sup> Olympics' earlene brown sentinel 'mother of year'. 1957. *Los Angeles Sentinel*, May 09, 1957; "Earlene Brown Opens Beauty Salon in SLA." *Los Angeles Sentinel*, Sep 14, 1.

<sup>48</sup> Earlene Brown, 220 pounds of joy, makes friends for U.S. in Moscow. *The Washington Post and Times Herald (1954-1959)*, Jul 27, 1958; 'I was scared silly' says Earlene brown. 1956. *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Nov 23, 1956; “The Inside Track: Russ Laughs at Earlene,” *Los Angeles Mirror*, September 3, 1960, pg. 7

<sup>49</sup> For the history of the mammy caricature and its continued presence see: Micki McElya, *Clinging To Mammy*. Harvard University Press, 2007.

Department set about to formally enlist black women athletes as official goodwill ambassadors as a key component of their Cold War foreign diplomacy efforts.

The goodwill ambassador program was a function of the United States Information Agency (USIA), whose mission was “to understand, inform and influence foreign publics in promotion of the national interest.”<sup>50</sup> Created in 1953 under the presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower, the agency was intended as an arm of public diplomacy aimed at promoting American democratic values as well as monitoring attitudes towards the United States in foreign places.<sup>51</sup> Through the USIA, the State Department hoped to counter anti-American propaganda efforts from the Soviet Union. Almost half of the circulated propaganda targeted American race relations and the injustice of racial segregation.<sup>52</sup> By the late 1940s the United States found itself increasingly vulnerable to this charge as it was negatively impacting global perceptions of the nation. The focus on racial segregation was particularly harmful to the United States as they tried to build relationships with emerging countries in Africa.

Between 1956 and 1963 twenty-one newly independent African nations formed in an era of mass decolonization.<sup>53</sup> The emergence of new nations sent reverberations around

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<sup>50</sup> Reorganization Plan No. 8 of 1953, effective August 1, 1953. General Records of the USIA, 1947-78, 306.3, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, MD

<sup>51</sup> Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989*. Cambridge University Press, 2008.

<sup>52</sup> Damion Thomas, “Goodwill Ambassadors: African American Athletes and U.S. Cultural Diplomacy, 1947-1968,” in Linda Heywood, Allison Blakely, Charles Stith, and Joshua C. Yesnowitz. *African Americans in U.S. Foreign Policy: From the Era of Frederick Douglass to the Age of Obama*. University of Illinois Press, 2015, pg 134

<sup>53</sup> The countries include: Algeria (1962), Benin (1960), Burkina Faso (1960), Burundi (1962), Cameroon (1960), Central Africa Republic (1960), Chad (1960), Congo (1960), Cote d’Ivoire (1960), Democratic Republic of the Congo (1960), Gabon (1960), Ghana (1957), Guinea (1958), Kenya (1963), Madagascar (1960), Malawi (1964), Mali (1960), Mauritania (1960), Morocco (1956), Niger

the globe as traditional and developing superpowers attempted to renegotiate their relationship with former colonies while also promoting alliances and gaining a political and economic foothold in Africa along with Latin America and Asia. Aptly identifying the criticism of U.S. racism to be a barrier to foreign policy goals, the State Department invested in cultural diplomacy tours to “promote a vision of color-blind American democracy”.<sup>54</sup>

The cultural diplomacy tours began as purely artistic endeavors. As Peggy Von Eschen has shown, jazz, a uniquely black American art form served to “project an image of American nationhood that was more inclusive than the reality.”<sup>55</sup> The Jazz Tours, featuring renowned musicians such as Dizzie Gillespie and Louie Armstrong, sent musicians around the world to refute claims of racism by showcasing black American artists. Yet in the USIA’s eyes, the jazz tours became too overtly political as the musicians spoke candidly about racism and formed networks that reinforced solidarity within the African diaspora instead of for America. By the mid-1950s, Congress ceased funding for the jazz tours instead directing the USIA to support “government-aided travel for choral programs and miscellaneous sports projects.”<sup>56</sup> Thus sport also became a prominent feature of the State Department’s cultural diplomacy efforts.

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(1960), Rwanda (1962), Senegal (1960), Sierra Leone (1961), Somalia (1960), Sudan (1956), Tanzania (1961), Togo (1960), Tunisia (1956), Uganda (1962), Zambia (1964)

<sup>54</sup> Peggy Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*, Harvard University Press, 2004, pg. 4

<sup>55</sup> Von Eschen, 4

<sup>56</sup> “Biceps and Choirs: Senate Group Backs Them to Promote US Abroad,” *New York Times*, July 18, 1956. Pg. 54

Unlike music, sports were viewed by many at the State Department as a non-political space. Perhaps more importantly, athletes were known for their physical prowess rather than their voices or their politics. The first USIA sponsored sports tours were predominantly male, although the Women's Tennis Association, including Althea Gibson were sent to play exhibition matches in Asia.<sup>57</sup> Tennessee State Tigerbelle, Mae Faggs, also was include in a 1956 trip to Nigeria, Lagos, Liberia, Ghana and Monrovia. She was the only female included amongst a travel party of eight black athletes.<sup>58</sup> By the early 1960s however, even black male athletes were proving too political for the USIA.

When Bill Russell returned from a 1959 sponsored goodwill trip in West Africa, the black NBA Player spoke of the "deep emotional feeling" he experienced returning to his "homeland."<sup>59</sup> "I found a place where I was welcome because I was black instead of in spite of being black," said Russell, who later went on to develop business investments in Liberia.<sup>60</sup> The wariness of outspoken black male athletes coincided with the dominance of black women track stars at the 1959 Pan-American games and the 1960s Olympic games, prompting the USIA to begin tapping more black female athletes for the goodwill tours.

Following the success of Rudolph and other black runners at the Rome Olympics, the USIA quickly moved to sponsor a longer European exhibition trip immediately after the games. Before the runners could return home they were sent on a three-week tour of

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<sup>57</sup> Ashley Brown, "Swinging for the State Department: American Women Tennis Players in Diplomatic Goodwill Tours, 1941–59." *Journal of Sport History* 42, no. 3 (April 23, 2016): 289–309.

<sup>58</sup> Mae Faggs clipping folder, TSU archives

<sup>59</sup> Bill Russell, *Second Wind*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1980.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

Italy, Greece, England, Holland and Germany. “I desperately wanted to go back home to Tennessee after the Olympics ended,” recalled Wilma, reflecting on the State Department-mandated tour of Europe.<sup>61</sup> While serving an important role for the United States in countering Soviet narratives about race in the US, particularly in ideologically ambivalent states like Greece, Rudolph’s agency was constrained even as her mobility was drastically extended. Yet the bulk of the State Department tours sent Rudolph and other black athletes to the one of the frontlines of the United States’ Cold War fronts – West Africa.

In 1963 Rudolph was deployed to Dakar, Senegal, officially for the purpose of being a special guest at the nation’s Friendship Games.<sup>62</sup> A former French colony, Senegal was undergoing political transformation in the beginning of the 1960s and the Friendship games were a French led attempt at “postcolonial Franco-African Diplomacy”.<sup>63</sup> The games had evolved from the French supported Community Games in 1960 to an African sporting space independent from French sporting entities by 1963. This “sporting decolonization” as Pascal Charitas terms it, was implemented in a way to

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<sup>61</sup> Rudolph, *Wilma*, 138; “Like Nothing Else in Tennessee,” np

<sup>62</sup> Both the black press and mainstream press reported on Rudolph’s international travels. In particular her trip to West Africa garnered a lot of attention from the U.S. press as well as local Senegalese papers. See for example: “Wilma Rudolph To Attend African Friendship Meet.” *Chicago Daily Defender*, April 4, 1963; Friendship Games,” *Dakar Martin*, April 11, 1963. Pg 7; “Wilma is Here,” *Daily Graphic*, April 29, 1963, pg 15; “Senegal in Salute to Wilma Rudolph,” *New York Times*, April 14, 1963

<sup>63</sup> Pascal Charitas, “A More Flexible Domination: Franco-African Sport Diplomacy during Decolonization, 1947-1966,” in Heather L. Dichter, and Andrew L. Johns. *Diplomatic Games: Sport, Statecraft, and International Relations Since 1945*. University Press of Kentucky, 2014. pg. 183; For more on Decolonization in French territories see: Tony Chafer, *The End of Empire in French West Africa: France’s Successful Decolonization*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2002; Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France*. Cornell University Press, 2008.

maintain French influence and partnership with Senegal while also publicly supporting Senegal's political independence.<sup>64</sup>

Sports were a key site of nation building as newly independent countries sought to legitimize themselves in part by joining the national Olympic committee and develop robust state sponsored sporting programs.<sup>65</sup> Countries like Senegal welcomed American aid for the development of sports. It was seen by local governments as a relatively safe way to cultivate an alliance with the United States.<sup>66</sup> Along with athletic goodwill ambassadors, the United States sent Peace Corps students specializing in physical education and YMCA members to run training schools and develop sporting programs in various African countries.<sup>67</sup>

The State Department's use of goodwill ambassadors like Wilma was not simply to promote positive images of U.S. racial liberalism abroad. They were also integral to the expansion of American business interests in developing countries. The US had been

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<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Pascal Charitas and David-Claude Kemo-Keimbou. "The United States of America and the Francophone African Countries at the International Olympic Committee: Sports Aid, a Barometer of American Imperialism? (1952–1963)." *Journal of Sport History* 40, no. 1 (July 26, 2013): 69–91; Evelyne Combeau-Mari, "Sport and Decolonisation: The Community Games, April 1960." *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 28, no. 12 (August 1, 2011): 1716–26; Dichter and Johns. *Diplomatic Games: Sport, Statecraft, and International Relations Since 1945*; Terry Vaios Giteros, "The Sporting Scramble for Africa: GANEFO, the IOC and the 1965 African Games." *Sport in Society* 14, no. 5 (June 1, 2011): 645–59.

<sup>66</sup> "Request for Youth Sport Projects from the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Government of Senegal to the United States via the YMCA. Nd, YMCA International Work County Files, Y-U.SA.9.2, Box S11, Kautz Family YMCA Archives

<sup>67</sup> "30 from Peace Corps Arrive in Senegal." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 3, 1963; "Peace Corps Volunteers." *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 17, 1962; "Peace Corps Need About 50 Athletes." *Philadelphia Tribune*, August 25, 1962; Minutes of the Executive Committee of the International Committee, Assignment Africa, October 26, 1962, YMCA International Work County Files, Y-U.SA.9.2, Box S14, Kautz Family YMCA Archives

focusing much attention on Dakar as a place for developing U.S. business interests. However between local anti-American attitudes, and Chinese and Russian political presence the USIA struggled to gain footing among the local governments and African Elite. Describing the delicate situation, an USIA officer stationed in West Africa noted the importance of Rudolph to the pursuit of establishing the United States' political and economic presence in the region:

We had to be careful because the atmosphere was such that the government could just have shut us down altogether. We had to be careful. We had a lot of taped program, from the Voice of America which we played on the radio, cultural programming, music, and things like that. The main access that we had really was personal contact largely through sports programs that the State Department sent. People like Wilma Rudolph, people like that...[she was] the key to further programming, especially entertainment in the home, etc. which was virtually unimpeded.<sup>68</sup>

While it is difficult to track just how much impact Rudolph had on opening up avenues for the USIA in West Africa, its worth noting that within a few weeks of her visit to Senegal, the United States quietly announced an accord to encourage private American investment in the country and establishing financial networks with Dakar. The agreement provided the assurance that the investments approved by the Senegalese and US government will be "assumed against the prospect of expropriation."<sup>69</sup> A French embassy official visiting Dakar for the Friendship Games commented that " America had won

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<sup>68</sup> Phillip W. Pillsbury, Jr interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, February 28, 1994, Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Arlington, VA

<sup>69</sup> Senegal-U.S. Accord." *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, June 13, 1963.

more prestige from the thousand or so dollars spent for Wilma Rudolph's travel expenses than France gained after spending the \$4 Million that the games reportedly cost."<sup>70</sup>

Further capitalizing on Rudolph's symbol, the USIA also commissioned a film about her. The 10-minute film, *Wilma Rudolph; Olympic Champion*, focused on her athletic achievements and featured her on a college campus, working, training, and attending class.<sup>71</sup> Introducing her as a "twenty year old American University Student and track star," the film strategically avoids any mention of race or racial oppression.<sup>72</sup> The film circulated in exclusively in foreign markets and became a key component of the USIA's broadcasting outreach.

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<sup>70</sup> Davis, *Black American Women in Track and Field*, 127-128

<sup>71</sup> *Wilma Rudolph; Olympic Champion*, 1961, USIA Film Records, 306.0527, NARA: For more on the film see: Melinda M. Schwenck. "'Negro Stars' and the USIA's Portrait of Democracy." *Race, Gender & Class* 8, no. 4 (2001): 116-39; Liberti and Smith, *Representing Wilma*, 72-75

<sup>72</sup> Liberti and Smith, *Representing Wilma*, 72-75



*Figure 23 .Wilma Rudolph Wearing a "Boubou" in Senegal, 1963.*

*Courtesy LIFE Magazine.*

Both the USIA and the State Department made sure to reiterate that in order to comply with her amateur status, Rudolph received no financial honorarium for her work as an ambassador either in person or on film.<sup>73</sup> Even with out the AAU's amateurism regulation it is unlikely that Rudolph would have received any compensation. In fact her longest trip in 1963 came after she announced her retirement from track and therefore had no amateur status to protect. Indeed as Rudolph was used to open up business markets and promote capitalist democracy for the financial benefit of the state, she received no compensation and could generate no income off of her labor.

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<sup>73</sup> Marion E. Jackson, "Sports of the World." April 13, 1963.

By only covering expenses, the State Department could further insist on the politically innocent nature of the trip. Likewise press reports from Rudolph's numerous trips abroad to places like Guinea, Senegal, and Mali focused on how many marriage proposals she received or pictures she was asked to take, what she wore and with what dignitaries she dined.<sup>74</sup> These reports helped refine the image of the trip as apolitical. Yet Wilma also had her own ideas about her travels. Despite the management of her movement abroad, Rudolph still found ways to assert her own agency.

In Ghana, she reportedly spent time with the Young Pioneers, a controversial youth club founded by Ghanaian nationalist leader and first president Kwame Nkrumah.<sup>75</sup> In Mali, Rudolph ditched her State Department escort for the day, choosing to spend the day among locals where she could have unrestricted conversation.<sup>76</sup> Wilbert Petty, a cultural affairs officer stationed at the U.S. Embassy in Dakar, observed that Rudolph seemed to relish being around "the folks [black people]," and enjoyed being in "an area where black rather than white is the color that counts." Petty's observations seem to be

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<sup>74</sup> Kwaku Adjisan, "Wilma Would Help Train Ghana Track Prospects." May 18, 1963; "Europe Salutes Wilma Rudolph." *The Chicago Defender* February 4, 1961; "Wilma Gets Swedish Proposals." *Chicago Daily Defender*, October 29, 1962; "Wilma Getting Taste Of Fame." *Daily Defender*, September 12, 1960; "Wilma Rudolph To Attend African Friendship Meet." *Chicago Daily Defender*. April 4, 1963; "Wilma Rudolph, Mrs. Pollard Invited to Senegal Games." *New Pittsburgh Courier*, April 20, 1963; "World Wide Invitations Flood Wilma Rudolph." *The Chicago Defender*. September 17, 1960

<sup>75</sup> Davis, *Black American Sports Women in Track and Field*, 127-129. For more on Young Pioneers see: Jeffrey S Ahlman, "A New Type of Citizen: Youth, Gender, and Generation in the Ghanaian Builders Brigade." *Journal of African History* 53, no. 1 (March 2012): 87-105; "Ghana Youth Chant Rings: Membership Claim." *The Christian Science Monitor (1908-Current File)*. November 23, 1963.

<sup>76</sup> *Afro-American*, August 24, 1963, p. 10; Davis, *Black American Sports Women in Track and Field*, 127-129

accurate as Rudolph described feeling “at home” on her trip, noting that she “just went out like I belonged there, and they accepted me...”<sup>77</sup>

Rudolph was a model ambassador, but not every black female athlete asked to go on a goodwill tour was so keen on being used to promote the United States. Erosanna “Rose” Robinson, a high jumper from Chicago, publicly refused to go on the government sponsored trip saying that she would not “permit herself to be used as propaganda to convince the world that negroes are treated like equal citizens with equal rights.”<sup>78</sup> AAU officials had recommended Robinson to the State Department after a strong performance at the 1959 Pan-American Games- where she had also refused to stand for the national anthem. Her open rebuke of being used as a “political pawn” caused AAU officials and the State Department to publicly insist that the goodwill trips were merely about athletics.<sup>79</sup>

Although the sporting officials indicated that they were simply “disappointed” and “confused” by her decision, Robinson’s public opposition to the goodwill trip caught the government’s attention in a negative way.<sup>80</sup> Just a few months after she publically renounced the USIA goodwill tours, Robinson was arrested for tax evasion. Robinson had refused to pay taxes for a few years because she did not want her tax dollars to fund

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<sup>77</sup> Davis, *Black American Sports Women in Track and Field*; “Wilma: I Have Enjoyed my Stay,” *Daily Graphic*, May 2, 1963, pg. 11

<sup>78</sup> “Girl Athlete Refuses to Go to Russia,” *Jet*, July 31 1963, pg. 54-56; Charles Burrough, "The Only Step Left ." *Afro-American (1893-1988)*, Mar 19, 1960

<sup>79</sup> Baker E. Morten, "Ex-Track Star Continues Jail Fast; Pickets Protest." *Daily Defender (Daily Edition) (1956-1960)*, Feb 03, 1960; “Girl Athlete Refuses to Go to Russia,” *Jet*, July 31 1963, pg. 54-56

<sup>80</sup> *ibid*, pg. 54-56

“mass fighting, war and slaughter.”<sup>81</sup> It is not clear if her refusal to participate in the State Department’s trip influenced the sudden interest in her case. Yet supporters found it curious that the IRS suddenly decided to come after her over a mere \$380. Robinson’s resolve in the face of tax evasion charges was just as strong as it had been when she refused to be a political pawn. She told the judge her reasoning for not paying taxes and continued to refuse to pay them. The judge jailed her indefinitely and Robinson went on to stage a hunger strike while incarcerated.<sup>82</sup>

While Robinson is an anomaly when it comes to black women athletes refusal to participate in state sponsored projects, her stand is nonetheless instructive. First it provides a contrast with Rudolph who combined her elevated status with organized activism to advocate for civil rights. Robinson on the other hand engaged in individual protest, which was more intersectional in nature. Robinson’s activism- sitting for the national anthem, refusing to labor for the State Department, and being a tax resistor- garnered very little news coverage. The black press could not- and did not- make Robinson into a symbol of race advancement nor did they cast her as a vocal athletic leader. Again, the boundaries of black women athletes’ political engagement seemed to be drawn around their value as symbols and not as vocal activists. Yet, Robinson also foreshadowed the coming insurance of outspoken black male athletes, who received more coverage and platitudes from the black press.

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<sup>81</sup>. "Woman Jailed In Tax Case; Defies Court." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)*, Jan 28, 1960; "So they Carried Her Off to Jail." *Afro-American (1893-1988)*, Feb 06, 1960

<sup>82</sup> "Judge To See Tax Evader On Hunger Strike." *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)*, Feb 18, 1960; "Tax Objector Continues 2-Week Fast." *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967)*, Feb 20, 1960.

By the mid-1960s both the USIA and the black press were seemingly changing their political tactics. The USIA was beginning to phase out its cultural goodwill programs, fearing that athletes, like the artists before them, were becoming too political overseas.<sup>83</sup> The black press also started encouraging and highlighting more overt moments of athletic activism, not simply vaulting symbolic victories.

### **Beyond Raised Fists**

As the 1968 Olympics approached, talks of black athletes boycotting the games swirled around the nation. In San Jose, Professor Harry Edwards and black male athletes at the school, including Tommie Smith and Lee Evans, formed the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR). Edwards situated the OPHR within the larger increasingly radical turn in the Black freedom struggle. Disillusioned by the limitations of Civil Rights legislation such as integration, many black activists began to shed their non-violent, integrationist approach to racial equality. Instead, organizations such as the Black Panther Party, and the Student Coordinating Committee (formally known as Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) began to emerge on the West Coast and urban cities. These activists sought to address institutionalized racism as well as poverty, lack of educational and housing opportunities, and colonialism. Instead of trying to assimilate to dominant white American culture, activists critiqued American culture and sought to construct a Pan-African identity and build a humanist Third World solidarity

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<sup>83</sup> Damion Thomas, "Goodwill Ambassadors: African American Athletes and U.S. Cultural Diplomacy, 1947-1968," in Linda Heywood, Allison Blakely, Charles Stith, and Joshua C. Yesnowitz. *African Americans in U.S. Foreign Policy: From the Era of Frederick Douglass to the Age of Obama*. University of Illinois Press, 2015

movement. It is within this political atmosphere, that the OPHR emerged.<sup>84</sup>

The OPHR not only adopted the ideology of larger Black Freedom Movements, but also espoused its gendered rhetoric. Male leaders of the black freedom struggle understood racism as a direct attack on their masculinity. Thus, in decrying racism, black activists sought to re-assert their manhood, especially their ability to protect and provide for their families. While this defense of black manhood was not new, the focus on athletics, already perceived as a masculine space, only helped to further the participants' endorsement and defensive of a robust black masculinity. As John Carlos states in his autobiography, "I don't think of it as a revolt of a black athlete...it was the revolt of the black man, I raised my voice in protest as a man".<sup>85</sup> Thus, as historian Amy Bass notes, women were excluded from the collective political voice of the black athlete.<sup>86</sup>

While members of the Men's Olympic team discussed the proposed boycott, Tyus and her Olympic teammates, training under Coach Temple, waited for a call that never came. "We were never even contacted," remarked Tyus, "Even Barbara [Farrell], who was in L.A., wasn't' invited down to the meetings".<sup>87</sup> Occasionally, a reporter would call an ask Coach Temple if any of "his girls were thinking about boycotting." Temple would tell the women that while they were free to make up their own mind, they were to handle themselves like "professional ladies" and if they felt like giving a

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<sup>84</sup> For more on the OPHR see: Douglas Hartmann, *Race, culture, and the revolt of the black athlete: The 1968 Olympic protests and their aftermath*. University of Chicago Press, 2004; Amy Bass, *Not the triumph but the struggle: The 1968 Olympics and the making of the black athlete*. U of Minnesota Press, 2004; David Wiggins, "The Year of Awakening"; and Harry Edwards, *The Struggle that Must Be*; Tommie Smith, *Silent gesture: the autobiography of Tommie Smith*. Temple University Press, 2008; John Carlos and Dave Zirin, *The John Carlos Story*, Haymarket Books, 2011.

<sup>85</sup> Carlos, *The John Carlos Story*, 3

<sup>86</sup> Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle*, 189

<sup>87</sup> Wyomia Tyus, interview 2013, Philadelphia, PA

comment, they had “better make sure they knew what they were talking about.”<sup>88</sup>

Although, Tyus later revealed that she would have supported the boycott if it had not fallen through.

Upon arrival in Mexico City, the black athletes, who had all decided to participate, held meetings about potential protests. The women on the track team included themselves in these meetings. It was decided that athletes would individually protest in whatever way they saw fit. At her first event, the 100M, Tyus approached the blocks and performed the “Tighten Up” dance from a popular RnB song at the time. Wearing black shorts as her protest, Tyus flew out of the blocks and as she crossed the finish line she raised one fist. “This is how I decided I would protest,” Tyus explained.<sup>89</sup> While other athletes engaged in their own protest, the medal stand pose by Tommie Smith and John Carlo quickly overshadowed the actions of their teammates.

The press’s wide spread reaction, both good and bad, to Smith and Carlos obscured Tyus’s historic run.<sup>90</sup> In winning the gold medal in the 100m she became the first athlete ever, male or female, black or white, to be a repeat winner in that event.<sup>91</sup> A fact that previously would have been heralded as a major achievement for the black race. Similarly, teammate, and fellow Tigerbelle, Madeline Manning, won gold in the 800m, becoming the first black women to do so.<sup>92</sup> The 800m were the longest distance women

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<sup>88</sup> Wyomia Tyus, interview 2013, Philadelphia, PA

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Lacy, Sam. "Lacy Hits 'Protest' at Olympics." *Afro-American (1893-1988)*, Oct 19, 1968; "80,00 Watch Olympics Close." *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, Oct 28, 1968.

<sup>91</sup> The Official Report 1968 Produced by the Organizing Committee of the Games of the XIX Olympiad, Vol. 3, pg. 44

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*

could run at the time and it was traditionally regarded as requiring too much endurance and mental toughness for black women. As the swift and severe fall out from the recognized protest commenced, white media attempted to paint a picture of Smith and Carlos as rouge athletes; in particular they stated, “not even the black women on their team supported them”. Yet following the women’s gold in the 4 by 100m relay, Tyus immediately dedicated their medals to Smith and Carlos.<sup>93</sup> Her actions sent a clear message of support and squashed the narrative of a divided black track team.

Smith and Carlos’ protest obscured both the achievements and direct protests of black women athletes and left them virtually silenced as political participants at the 1968 Games. For premier black women athletes, the outcome of the emotionally fraught 1968 games at once demonstrated the advances and the limitations of the trajectory of black women’s collegiate athletics in the twentieth century. In the years immediately following World War One, black women had to battle for the very ability to participate in women’s athletics at any collegiate level. A half-century later, the importance of women’s athletics was thoroughly demonstrated at black colleges and universities, with administrations seeing their institutions’ names carried by their women athletes across the globe to Olympic stadiums as far as Rome and Tokyo.

But the same fifty-year journey was marked by stasis as well. Just as during the campus demonstrations in the post-World War I era, black women attempted to broadcast their voices and demands for recognition as political actors alongside black men during the Mexico City games. And just as their predecessors saw their claims

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<sup>93</sup> "Olympic Politics." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Oct 22, 1968.

come in a distant second or dismissed as mere accessories to the campus reforms advocated by their male counterparts, the acts of protest generated by the women athletes of 1968 were obscured not just by the power dynamics that they sought to protest, but also by the preferential coverage afforded to the men's protest. Black women again were caught between silence and symbol.

## Conclusion

*Afro* sportswriter, Sam Lacy penned a column admonishing Ed Temple for his opposition to the proposed 1968 Olympic Boycott. Blasting Temple's "short memory." Lacy conjures the image of a victimized Wilma Rudolph to dispute the "worn out claim that participation in the Olympics has meant anything" for black Americans. "Wilma Rudolph was given a tickertape welcome when she returned to her Clarksville, Tenn Home..." wrote Lacy. "But when she went from the parade to a downtown restaurant... 'women of the year' Wilma couldn't get in the door."<sup>94</sup>

In an attempt to drive home his point, Lacy went on to talk about another black women who could seemingly offer Temple a lesson: Rosa Parks. Lacy positioned Parks (whom he referred to as Daisy Parks) as a "lone" "tired" woman who "rocked the boat" and disrupted the status quo by sitting down and refusing to move. Applauding this action as catalyst for a "new found resistance."<sup>95</sup> Lacy then asserted that the black male athletes who wanted to protest and boycott were just "masculine Daisy Parkes."<sup>96</sup> Though Lacy's

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<sup>94</sup> Sam Lacy, "A Few Notes on an Old Subject," *Afro*, December 16, 1967 pg. 9

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*

analogy holds some water, perhaps the real athlete with likeness to Parks was the “poor girl” he had cast as helpless victim before.

Like Parks, Wilma Rudolph and other black women athletes were convenient symbols for the political aims of the black press. Cast as victims of Jim Crow, their own agency and activism was eclipsed by their constructed symbolic self. Rallying around Parks as a tired housewife gave civil rights leaders and black reporters more traction than rallying around the radical activist who had spent years investigating black women’s sexual assaults. Similarly, Rudolph worked better for blacks sports writers as a symbol of race pride who is facing the harsh realities of segregation, rather than a politically engaged activist who uses her position to be a leading athletic voice on civil rights.

Such nuances are often left out of the descriptions of the lives of black women because symbols are effective when they are simplistic and malleable. Black women athletes were symbols for black resistance against state sanctioned segregation, as well as symbols of American racial liberalism and capitalist democracy. Yet behind these seemingly juxtaposed polarities were young black women who had their own political goals and personal agendas, which all too often was silenced, ignored or even penalized by the black press and the U.S. State Department that valued them more as symbols.

## Conclusion

In the years following their track experiences, black track stars began to express similar sentiments to those of baseball player, Toni Stone a decade earlier- they felt tired and exploited. A reporter who interviewed Wyomia Tyus a year after the 1968 Olympics described the frustration the former Olympian expressed to him. “She had carried for years...a vision that she would be sought after, that some firm would like to have the world’s fastest women on its payroll, to give track clinics and generally promote its product,” wrote the reporter.<sup>1</sup> “She envisioned a lot of money, a piece of the action and the peace of mind that providing for her mother would bring.”<sup>2</sup>

What Tyus found however was a lack of professional opportunities, especially within athletics. When she attempted to apply for a job at the Los Angeles Recreation Center, Tyus learned that her three gold medals and vast Olympic experience didn’t count for much towards gaining employment.<sup>3</sup> As a woman there was no professional league or endorsement deals waiting for her.<sup>4</sup> Finally Tyus found a temporary position as a research assistant in the newly formed Afro-American Studies program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). At UCLA she was reunited with another former Tigerbelle who also was struggling to find economic opportunity: Wilma Rudolph.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bob Cohn and Steve Ball Jr, “The Elucidation of Wyomia Tyus,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 14, 1969, M25

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> James Lawrence, “Wyomia Tyus Speaks up for Female Athletes.” *Afro-American*, September 4, 1982

<sup>5</sup> “Wilma Rudolph Joins UCLA's Afro Staff.” 1969.*Los Angeles Sentinel*, Apr 24, 1.

Rudolph had spent the first seven years after her retirement moving around the country in search of a stable job. Chasing offers to do recreation work or coach athletics, Rudolph bounced to Indiana, and then Maine and finally Michigan before she ended up moving back to Tennessee after none of the offers lasted very long.<sup>6</sup> Frustrated with the lack of opportunity and still faced with children to feed, Rudolph became very depressed. “I was besieged with money problems,” Rudolph recalled, “I felt exploited both as a woman and as a black person, and this bothered me very much...”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Rudolph, *Wilma*, 154-166

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, 164-165; "Wilma Denies 'Broke' Stories." 1969.*Chicago Daily Defender*, Mar 29, 29



*Figure 24. Wilma Rudolph and Children at the Los Angeles Coliseum, 1968. Courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library*

Finally, on the suggestion of Celtic's star Bill Russell, Rudolph moved to L.A in search of a change of scenery and new opportunities. Here she found her way to UCLA's Afro-American Studies program where she eventually crossed paths with Tyus.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the dearth of athletic and recreational jobs available to Tyus and Rudolph, there was one employer that always seemed to find work for the former Olympians and goodwill ambassador: the U.S. Government. In the 1970s black athletes found themselves continually tapped to work with various elected officials who endeavored to use athletics to combat perceived urban pathologies. This mirrored the way in which athletics was

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<sup>8</sup> Rudolph, *Wilma*, 162

utilized by local city officials and black leaders in the early twentieth century. Instead of targeting black southern migrants as problem population, the work in the 1970s was aimed at the black communities located in under resourced and isolated parts of cities and reeling from the effects of white flight, job loss and continued discriminatory housing practices.

Tyus worked for the Good Neighbor Program in Atlanta, while Rudolph was tapped by Mayor Daley's Youth Foundation in Chicago as well as the Watts Community Action Committee in L.A.<sup>9</sup> Rudolph had also joined other former Olympians on Vice President Hubert Humphrey's Operation Champ Program in the late 1960s. This program sent athletes like Rudolph to Detroit, Cleveland, Chicago, Washington, Baltimore and more, to teach sports to kids and as Rudolph described it, to "calm things down in the ghetto."<sup>10</sup> Operation Champ was one the Johnson administration's attempt to address the widespread urban unrests in the wake of the assassinations of Martin Luther King and other political leaders. The same way they served as symbolic goodwill ambassadors abroad, black women athletes were now used as domestic ambassadors to under resourced black communities. Similar to their labor for the State Department, Tyus and Rudolph found themselves undercompensated and overly regulated. "the pay wasn't what I thought it would be," remarked Tyus. While Wilma said got used to hearing the phrase "no pay just expenses."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> "The Elucidation of Wyomia Tyus," *Los Angeles Times*, September 14, 1969, M25; Rudolph, *Wilma*, 154-166

<sup>10</sup> Bob Addie, "Operation Champ Starts." *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, Jul 02, 1966; Rudolph, *Wilma*, 154-166

<sup>11</sup> The Elucidation of Wyomia Tyus," *Los Angeles Times*, September 14, 1969, M25; Rudolph, *Wilma*, 168

Coach Temple, who had impressed upon the Tigerbelles the payoff of hard work and respectability politics, was particularly incensed by the challenges his former runners faced. Speaking about Tyus, Temple ranted “here’s a girl who’s done everything right. She got her degree. She’s qualified. She’s done her country proud...she’s proud to be an American. And nothing happens for her.”<sup>12</sup>

Temple’s words and Rudolph and Tyus’s experiences reflect the accuracy of Earlene Brown’s “Cinderella Girls” statement she said from 1960s. “Perhaps this is the story of Negro girls in the Olympics...they are the one holding up American ideals abroad...when they get back they have bills, bills, bills.”<sup>13</sup> The same capitalist democracy that their black athletic bodies were integral to sustaining and expanding globally, return home to find the “doors of commercial success closed of to them”.<sup>14</sup> “Fact of the matter is that black women athletes are on the bottom rung of the ladder,” Rudolph later reflected, “When their track careers are over, no matter what they have accomplished in the Olympics, there is no place for them to go. They wind up drifting back to where they began, and nobody every hears from them again.”<sup>15</sup>

It is clear that despite their post-career critiques, elite black Olympians remained steadfast in celebrating the opportunities they earned with their athletic labor. Former Tigerbelles frequently cite their travel experience and education as the top takeaways from their track career.<sup>16</sup> Indeed many of the girls who came to Nashville as poor rural kids, left Tennessee State as middle class black women, armed with degrees, middle class

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<sup>12</sup> The Elucidation of Wyomia Tyus,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 14, 1969, M25

<sup>13</sup> Davis, *Black American Women in Olympic Track and Field*, pg. xvii

<sup>14</sup> Rudolph, *Wilma*, 169

<sup>15</sup> Rudolph, *Wilma*, 167-168

<sup>16</sup> Adkins, *Development of Negro Female Athletic Talent*, Interview Transcriptions

marriage prospects and a sense of what the rest of the country and world looked like. Tyus said she simply “outgrew” her hometown of Griffin, Georgia, and choose to move to California to settle. Tyus also married a white shoe promoter she met at the Mexico City Olympics.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, Edith McGuire also moved to California where she married a black businessman. Together they owned and operated three McDonald’s in the Oakland area. McGuire would later return to Tennessee State with one million dollars, the largest donation in school history, made out to the women’s track program.<sup>18</sup>

“I was the first of twenty-two kids in my family to go to college, reflected Rudolph. “ I was the only woman in history to pack the Madison Square Garden in New York, the Forum in Los Angeles...People came to see me run.” Celebrating the benefits of her athletic career did not prevent Rudolph from identifying her exploitation as well, adding “but the promoters made all the money, no me. I was strictly amateur, in more ways than one.”<sup>19</sup>

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The passage of Title IX in 1972 also coincided with the downfall of amateurism in track and field.<sup>20</sup> While the NCAA and AAU still preached amateurism within youth and collegiate completion, the national sporting body in charge of track and field opened the sport to professionalization and commercialization, thus ushering the modern era of professional track and field. Moreover the access to athletic scholarships and collegiate

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<sup>17</sup> “The Elucidation of Wyomia Tyus,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 14, 1969, M25

<sup>18</sup> Colby Sledge, "TSU Receives First \$1M Gift." *The Tennessean*, Oct 23, 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Rudolph, *Wilma*, 165-166

<sup>20</sup> Joseph M. Turrini, *The End of Amateurism in American Track and Field*. University of Illinois Press, 2010.

programs dramatically increased the number of women athletes in the county. This insurgence led to the growth of women's professional leagues and the opportunity to obtain endorsement deals. The path to a post-college athletic career that had been closed off to athletes such as Rudolph and Tyus, were now open to the next generation of female athletes, such as Flo Jo.

While Title IX has been rightly applauded for its role in the development of modern women's sports, it is important to understand its limitations. More specifically the passage of Title IX had a brutal effect on black institutions, which had previously been the torchbearers for women's sports. Indeed following Title IX, colleges like, Tuskegee and Tennessee State, who once were the only schools to offer women athletic scholarships, now found themselves unable to financially compete against the predominantly white institutions that now offered women's athletic scholarships and athletic programs. "Title IX was the beginning of the end. Coach Temple lamented," "We can't out spend the University of Tennessee".<sup>21</sup> Women's athletic programs at black schools followed the same fate as other black institutions like the Colored Intercollegiate Athletic Association, American Tennis Association, or National Negro League, that flourished during Jim Crow and diminished, or completely disappeared under the cost of desegregation.. More over studies have documented the overall disproportional benefit Title IX gives to white girls and women over black female athletes.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Temple, *Only the Pure in Heart*, 112; Temple Interview, July 2015

<sup>22</sup> Robertha Abney, and Dorothy L. Richey. "Opportunities for minority women in sport— The impact of Title IX." *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance* 63, no. 3 (1992): 56-59; Tonya M. Evans, "In the Title IX race toward gender equity, the Black female athlete is left to finish last: The lack of access for the invisible woman." *Howard LJ* 42 (1998): 105; Pickett, Moneque Walker, Marvin P. Dawkins, and Jomills Henry Braddock. "Race and Gender Equity in Sports Have White

As amateurism fell in track in field, black women were able to start generating some money off of their athletic labor. Yet the increasing professionalism of black women athletes also coincided with the continued rise of male coaches rather than women. The professionalization efforts of black women physical educators, such as Ruth Arnett and Mary Reeves Allen, who endeavored to place black women at the head of women's athletic programs, were already greatly diminished in the post-war era and only amplified after the passage of Title IX. While one avenue for athletic labor was increasing, other professional athletic related jobs, positions such as coaches, sportswriters, owners and agents, seemed to close off the more lucrative women's' sports became.<sup>23</sup>

Black women's symbolic achievements were still celebrated after Title IX, however their athletic bodies also came to reflect the negative pathologies read onto black women's bodies in the 1970s and 1980s. The racial connotation of the "crack whore" and "welfare queen" politicalized black womanhood and made their bodies something to be policed by the state.<sup>24</sup> Simultaneously the rise of gender and drug testing in national and international athletic competition increasingly put women's bodies-

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and African American Females Benefited Equally From Title IX?." *American Behavioral Scientist* 56, no. 11 (2012): 1581-1603.

<sup>23</sup> Grace-Marie Mowery, "Creating equal opportunity for female coaches: Affirmative action under Title IX." *U. Cin. L. Rev.* 66 (1997): 283.; Warren A. Whisenant, "How women have fared as interscholastic athletic administrators since the passage of Title IX." *Sex Roles* 49, no. 3-4 (2003): 179-184.

<sup>24</sup> Ange-Marie Hancock, *The politics of disgust: The public identity of the welfare queen*. NYU Press, 2004; Tracy R. Carpenter, "Construction of the crack mother icon." *Western Journal of Black Studies* 36, no. 4 (2012): 264.

particularly black women's bodies- under surveillance and in vulnerable positions.<sup>25</sup>

Earlene Brown's death due to cocaine overdose reinforced such images.<sup>26</sup> Flo-Jo with all her successes, also invited constant speculation about drug use and biological sex. Her own sudden death at a young age only furthered the speculation.<sup>27</sup>

Black women athletes of the Jim Crow and Civil Rights Era were not adequately compensated for their athletic labor. Nor did they have a robust amount of professional opportunities to sustain their careers, Yet in the post-Title IX, post-Civil Rights world, black women athlete's symbolic value did not diminish. In fact, Flo Jo's manager's apt observation that Flo Jo was "worth more as a symbol," easily could have be said generally about black women athletes of the early to mid-twentieth century.

Starting in the 1980s black women athletes from the Civil rights era we rediscovered and celebrated widely for their athletic achievements. Their re-discovery coincided with a national effort to define, sanitize and reframe the Civil Rights Movement. Envisioned as trailblazers who resisted racism and sexism to follow their dreams to play their respective sports, the women became romanticized symbols of

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<sup>25</sup> Cahn, Susan. "Testing sex, attributing gender: What Caster Semanya means to women's sports." *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport* 4, no. 1 (2011): 38-48; Olsen-Acre, Haley K. "Use of Drug Testing to Police Sex and Gender in the Olympic Games, The." *Mich. J. Gender & L.* 13 (2006): 207.

<sup>26</sup> Doc Young, "No News was Good; the News was Bad." *Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005)*, Apr 13, 1978

<sup>27</sup> David Walsh, "The Tainted Lady." *Sunday Times*, September 27, 1998; "Flo-Jo's Death Mystifies Family, Friends; Ex-Coach Says Griffith Joyner Reported Only Fatigue Night before Death; Death of Ex-Sprint Star Raises Questions." *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Sep 23, 1998; Chaudhary, Vivek. What made Flo-Jo Go? was it God-Given Talent that Turned Her into a World-Beating Sprinter, Or was it Something More Sinister? as the World of Athletics Comes to Terms with the Sudden Death of Track Superstar Florence Griffith-Joyner, Vivek Chaudhary Wonders if the Whisperers were Right." *The Guardian*, Sep 23, 1998.

multiculturalism. Hailed a “heroines” black women athletes enjoyed a share of publicity and recognition. Lucy Diggs Slowe was voted into the Maryland Hall of fame. Wilma Rudolph had a hometown boulevard named after her, and after her death she was awarded an official postal stamp as part of the “Distinguished American Series.”<sup>28</sup>

Relatively lesser-known sporting figures, such as the black women Negro Leaguers were also recovered in this moment. Toni Stone was elected to the Women’s Sports Hall of Fame, and a baseball field in Minnesota was named after her.<sup>29</sup> Saint Paul also declared March 6<sup>th</sup> “Toni Stone Day”. Similarly, April 3<sup>rd</sup> was proclaim “Johnson Day” in Indianapolis because she represented what “hard work and determination can achieve.”<sup>30</sup> Morgan was elected to the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame.<sup>31</sup>

However, one of the most prominent ways black women athletes were portrayed was in Children’s Books.<sup>32</sup> In a genre that is mostly didactic and inspirational, African American athletes have a long history of representation. Booming as genre in the 1940s, children’s books often present moralistic stories of adventure or biographies of “great men”. There was a dearth of children’s books that contained black characters or female

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<sup>28</sup> Liberti and Smith, *Representing Willma*, 185-202

<sup>29</sup> Sandy Keegan, “Stone Had a Ball,” *Newsday*, October 5, 1993; Doug Grow, “She Wasn’t Afraid to Swing for the Fences,” Minneapolis-Saint Paul *StarTribune*, March 6, 1990; Toni Stone Stadium and Toni Stone Field located in Dunning Sports Complex, Griggs Street and Marshall Ave, Saint Paul Minnesota

<sup>30</sup> City of Indianapolis. Mayors Office, *Proclamation: Mamie “Peanut” Johnson Day*, April 3<sup>rd</sup> 1998

<sup>31</sup> “Connie Morgan in the Hall,” Negro League Baseball Museum Newsletter, 1996

<sup>32</sup> For a great discussion of Black Athletes in Children’s books see: Jennifer Lansbury, “Champions Indeed: The Emergence of African American Women Athletes in American Society, 1930-1960,” (PhD. Diss, George Mason University, 2008) 212-229; Nancy Larrick, “The All-White of Children’s Books,” *Saturday Review*, September 11, 1965, pg 63-85; David Gast, “The Dawning Age of Aquarius for Multi-Ethnic Children’s Literature,” *Elementary English*, vol. 47, 1970, pp 661-665; Jeanne Chall, Eugene Radwin, et, all, “Black’s in the World of Children’s Books,” *The Reading Teacher*, vol 32, no. 5, February 1979, pp 527-533

characters until the 1970s. African American athletes quickly became the most popular subjects of black biographies. A study in 1976 showed that of the nearly 700 books surveyed with black characters, 79 were black biographies. 50 of those biographies were focused on sports figures. While Jackie Robinson and Hank Aaron became popularized figures, black female athletes were still absent from children's literature until the late 1980s. Juvenile biographies present stories of young girls who dreamed of playing baseball or running in the Olympics, and because of hard work and bravery, were able to transcend racism and sexism to live their dream. The women are portrayed as unique in their love for sports, as well as their participation in athletics.

The narratives that were used to recall historical black women athletes of were similar to the ones that sanitized Rosa Parks and other figures of the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>33</sup> Unlike many Civil Rights era icons that were being entered into public memory, some of the athletes had been relatively obscure even at the height of their playing days. Yet it was precisely their “unknown” status that made their stories so consumable and their reductive narratives so damaging. The use of “dream” rhetoric, that obscured the structural roots of racism and sexism and focused instead on personal desire and responsibility, had political mirrors in the colorblind and value based politics of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The rise of multiculturalism in the late 1980s and 1990s seemingly employed contrasting language to that of colorblindness. Yet multiculturalism's superficial celebration of all differences also worked to depoliticize identity and obscure the very real way inequality persisted in the last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To this end,

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<sup>33</sup> Jeanne Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014), Conclusion ; Rita Liberti and Maureen M. Smith, *(Re)Presenting Wilma Rudolph* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2015), chap. 6–7.

black women athlete, *again*, became ideal cultural icons of a modern capitalist democracy that was attempting to distance its self from “racist past”.<sup>34</sup>

Peanut Johnson would directly find out the way rhetoric of inclusion and celebration can work to silence structural racism. When the Mayor of Washington D.C. held a ceremony to dedicate a baseball field to Johnson, it seemed like a moment to celebrate. However, Johnson soon found out the baseball diamond was instead a football field with artificial turf. It wasn't so much the annoyance of being a “ball player” who was given a football field that caused Johnson to feel “hurt”. Rather it was the fact that there was disproportionate number of resources allocated to building baseball fields in more affluent parts of the city. Meanwhile, the predominantly black area in which Johnson coached Little League lacked a baseball diamond all together. Johnson said that she had “never been so disappointed.”<sup>35</sup>

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Black women's athletic bodies again became ideal sites for the construction of national liberal narratives, similar to the State Department's use of goodwill ambassadors during the Cold War. The bodies of black women athletes were being put to work in efforts to shield the nation from harder questions about systemic inequality and entrenched white supremacist heteropatriarchy.

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<sup>34</sup> Nikhil Singh notes "colorblindness and multiculturalism arguably stabilized as non-antagonistic (if contradictory) poles of contemporary (racial) common sense. Both sides tend to content with each other from the baseline of a shrunken conception of polity, public, and personhood, underneath which the real axes of differentiation within orders of humanity at both local and global scales have grown increasingly obscure. "Racial Formation in an Age of Permanent War," in Daniel Martinez HoSang, Oneka LaBennett, and Laura Pulido, eds., *Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012) pg. 283

<sup>35</sup> “Negro Leagues’ Female Star Takes On D.C. Government,” *Www.nationaljournal.com*, accessed July 2, 2015, <http://www.nationaljournal.com/politics/negro-leagues-female-star-takes-on-d-c-government-20140508>.

The renewed visibility of black women's Jim Crow and Civil Rights Era athletic careers can actually render their *wholeselves* invisible. By simply serving as heroic placeholders, the longer and more nuanced history of black women's athletic participation is obscured. In its simplification we risk losing the story of black leaders and institutions that thought sport was a key site of race advancement and thus invested in organized girl athletics. We lose sight of the black women who sought to professionalize athletic and recreational work in the inter-war years. Without the necessary nuance we eclipse the athletes who challenged middle class notions of respectability, were politically engaged and who used sports as vehicle for personal mobility and social change. And we won't see the amateur athletes whose labor sustained institutions, leagues, careers, diplomacy efforts and national identity.

Understanding the symbolic value of black women's athletic bodies provides the historical context for contemporary black women athletes, whose professionalization and endorsement deals can feel disjointed from the history of black women in sport before Title IX. The long history of black women in sport reveals the ways in which their athletic bodies are continuously functioning as sites where competing ideas and politics collide. Black women's athletic bodies are a place where concepts of femininity sexuality, and respectability are contested and redefined and where black women's seemingly apolitical bodies are projected upon and made into national symbols. These seemingly silent, sweaty, symbols, provide crucial windows into the lives and labors of black women in the twentieth century. Indeed they demonstrate the ways in which black womanhood itself

has created political possibilities and sustained black institution building while also helping to maintain the structure of the modern neoliberal state.

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## Curriculum Vitae

Amira Rose Davis will be joining The Pennsylvania State University as a Postdoctoral Scholar in the George and Ann Richards Center and the Africana Research Center. Davis's most recent article "No League of Their Own: Black Women Baseball Players and the Politics of Representation" appeared in the May, 2016 issue of *Radical History Review*. She is the recipient of numerous awards and fellowships including the Clarke Chalmers Fellowship, David Robinson Prize Teaching Fellowship, Women, Gender and Sexuality Research Fellowship and the Johns Hopkins University Dean's Teaching Fellowship for her seminar entitled, "National Pastimes: Sports in American History". She has presented her work in many venues including at the annual meetings of the American Historical Association, Organization of American Historians, Association for the Study of African American Life and History, Penn State's Emerging Scholars Showcase, and The Berkshire Conference on Women's History. Davis has previously taught courses in 20th century U.S. History, African-American History, and Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies.