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From Desegregation to Integration: Race, Football, and “Dixie” at the University of Florida

by Derrick E. White

On a chilly December day in 1962 just before the New Year’s holiday, the University of Florida (UF) Gators football team played the Penn State Nittany Lions in the eighteenth annual Gator Bowl. Penn State entered the game a heavy favorite. The media and coaches ranked the Nittany Lions ninth in the country, and the Eastern College Athletic Conference awarded the team the Lambert Trophy as the best team in the East. The game was Penn State’s second consecutive Gator Bowl appearance. The Nittany Lions made history the previous season as the first desegregated team to play in the Gator Bowl, when they defeated Georgia Tech 30 - 15. Led by their All-American African American (wide receiver or tight end) Dave Derrick E. White, assistant professor of history at Florida Atlantic University, received his Ph.D from The Ohio State University. He is the author of “Blacks Who Had Not themselves Personally Suffered Illegal Discrimination: The Symbolic Incorporation of the Black Middle Class,” in Joseph Young and Jana Evans Braziel, Race and the Foundations of Knowledge: Cultural Amnesia in the Academy and “Liberated Grounds: The Institute of the Black World and Black Intellectual Space,” in “We Shall Independent Be”: African American Place Making and the Struggle to Claim Space in the United States. This essay is a product of the Julian Pleasants Visiting Scholar Award at the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program at the University of Florida. The author thanks Paul Ortiz and the staff of the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program for their support and the anonymous reviewers at the Florida Historical Quarterly for their comments.

Derrick E. White

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Robinson, Penn State looked for a repeat bowl victory over the lightly regarded Gators.1

The Gator Bowl committee’s controversial decision to invite Florida occurred because Duke University (8-2) declined an invitation to play in the game, suspecting that the Gator Bowl committee wanted the Gators all along.2 In addition, the committee ignored pleas from the Oregon State Beavers’ athletic department to play in the game. The Beavers, who featured Heisman Trophy winner Terry Baker, believed playing in the Gator Bowl would provide added publicity to the school and its star player. The Gator Bowl committee did not choose Oregon State for economic reasons, assuming an Oregon State - Penn State game would generate little interest in the southeast. The committee was aware that Baker did not finish in the top five on southern ballots for the Heisman Trophy, suggesting little regional support for him.3 Thus, the committee’s concern about profits was genuine. With the game’s economic considerations paramount, the Gator Bowl committee selected the University of Florida to play in the game.4

The committee obviously believed that the University of Florida’s proximity, rather than a stellar record, would increase the likelihood of a sell out crowd. The Gators finished the 1962 season 6 - 4 with a season-ending loss to in-state rival University of Miami. Moreover, a Florida - Penn State game played up a regional (North v. South) and racial (desegregated v. segregated teams) subplot that had worked well, evidenced by the previous year’s record crowd. The two teams played the 1962 game amid a growing civil rights movement and at a moment when southern universities began to desegregate. In addition, the game occurred on the eve of the centennial of the Civil War. The Gator Bowl committee

believed the racial turmoil added regional and national interest to an already intriguing intersectional game.

As one of the few games that featured northern and southern teams during the 1962-1963 bowl season, the Gator Bowl committee cast the University of Florida football team as a symbol for an embattled South under siege by the growing civil rights movement. As southern universities reluctantly desegregated in the months before the 1962 Gator Bowl game, students, alumni, and boosters often blurred the lines between school spirit, team support, and racist opposition to desegregation. At the University of Georgia in 1961, for example, students transformed frustrations over a basketball game loss to rival Georgia Tech into an excuse to intimidate Charlayne Hunter, one of the first black students at the school. Students returned from the game chanting “Two, four, six, eight, we don’t want to integrate ... One, two, three, four, we don’t want no nigger whore.”

School authorities turned away the student mob with fire hoses and tear gas. At the University of Mississippi, James Meredith’s attempt to register for classes sparked a student riot on campus in which two people died. Days before the riot, Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett riled up the students, alumni, and fans at a football game when he declared his love for the state and its customs. Although the University of Florida had prided itself on “integration without incident,” when the Gator Bowl cast the team as a substitute for the embattled South, the team exceeded expectations in fulfilling the role.

The University of Florida embraced the game as one for Southern honor. Coaches framed media characterization of the selection as the “lowliest bowl team of them all” as criticism of the entire region. Head coach Ray Graves also saw an opportunity to gain a psychological and emotional advantage over Penn State and its leading receiver Dave Robinson. He ordered a Confederate Battle Flag patch sewn on the team uniforms and replaced the Gators’ traditional block numbers on the helmets with a Confederate flag. On game day, the marching band played “Dixie”

5. Robert A. Pratt, We Shall Not Be Moved: The Desegregation of the University of Georgia (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002), 94.
and waved a Confederate flag as it led the team onto the field. After the Gators defeated Penn State 17–7, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* captured the game’s symbolism and outcome with a headline that read “Rebel Flag, ‘Dixie’ Music Give Gators Teeth.” Coach Graves reiterated the game’s importance to white identity in his postgame interview: “We sorta [felt] that we’re upholding the honor of southern football.” The game symbolized more than football. It was a contest between the South’s racial past and its future, and on this day it seemed that the past won.8

The Florida - Penn State game and the associated pageantry offer an opportunity to explore integration and race in 1960s college football. First, although Florida claimed to have integrated its campus, there is a substantive difference between desegregation and integration. Martin Luther King, Jr. made this point in his speech, “The Ethical Demands of Integration.” King recognized that the terms are used “interchangeably,” but suggested that there was “a great deal of difference between the two.” He described desegregation as “negative, for it simply removes [the] legal and social prohibitions [of segregation],” while integration was the “positive acceptance of desegregation,” and the “welcomed participation of Negroes into the total range of human activities.” According to the civil rights leader’s definition, the simple desegregation of a community occurred “where men are physically desegregated and spiritually segregated, where elbows are together and hearts are apart.” King’s nuanced understanding of the differences between segregation and integration is significant in examining the desegregation of southern universities.9

Second, using King’s insights as a guide, any examination of the desegregation of southern colleges must include athletics, especially football. Football was essential to developing what scholar J. Douglas Toma calls the “collegiate ideal.” Toma describes the collegiate ideal as “the combination of community and campus culture associated with the traditional American small college.”10 Toma asserts that the non-academic features of a university - landscaping, dormitories, student activities, and sports - are essential in developing a university’s identity. For Toma, “Football highlights the unique culture through which particular institutions express the collegiate idea.”11 The University of Florida, like other southern colleges, used football and its concomitant all-white teams as a representation of what historian Andrew Doyle describes as the invented tradition of the Old South, a faith in material progress, and the ideology of White supremacy. Doyle concluded that the University of Alabama’s 1926 Rose Bowl victory illuminates how

11. Ibid., 8.
southern college football "helped to ease the cultural transition to modernity by providing false reassurance that a reconciliation of progress and tradition was possible."12

Finally, the marching band plays a role similar to that of the football team in constructing the collegiate ideal. Can one imagine a University of Notre Dame football game without its band playing its fight song "The Victory March," or, the University of Michigan without thinking of "Hail to the Victors?" Bands are essential to the athletic and collegiate spirit. Therefore, the southern colleges' marching bands playing of "Dixie" and the unfurling of a Confederate flag were extensions of the collegiate ideal projected by a segregated university, its football team, and its student culture.

The scholarship on the desegregation of southern universities has illuminated the trials and tribulations of the first black students in the classrooms, on the fields, and on the courts. Nonetheless, two major flaws exist in the scholarship. First, scholars often failed to differentiate between desegregation and integration, using the terms indiscriminately. Sport historian Charles H. Martin masterfully analyzed the desegregation of college athletics, but described this process as "integration."13 Don Yaeger in his examination of the 1970 University of Alabama - University of Southern California game, which spurred desegregation at Alabama, asserts that prior to the game the "integration of the universities came in waves."14 Most sports historians have described the desegregation of athletics as integration. Scholars who have examined the student desegregation at southern colleges have been divided in their


14. Don Yaeger and with Sam Cunningham and John Papadakis, Turning of the Tide: How One Game Changed the South (New York: Center Street, 2006), 29.
descriptions of the process as desegregation or integration.15 Robert A. Pratt, for example, describes desegregation of the University of Georgia; while, Charles W. Eagles explains James Meredith’s ordeal at Ole Miss as integration.16 Most scholars have used the terms interchangeably, without tremendous consideration of the differences between the two terms.17

Second, scholars of collegiate desegregation often minimize the extracurricular activities of college life that form student and university culture. The examination of the ordeals of James Meredith at Ole Miss or Charlayne Hunter at the University of Georgia should be understood in context with the “collegiate ideal” or the image a university produces through its football team and marching band. On the other hand, sports historians have narrowly focused on the fields and courts, and have not paid enough attention to the classrooms or to the stands. This essay provides a comprehensive examination of desegregation at the University of Florida through an examination of the field, the stands, and the classrooms. This analysis reveals that black students were merely tolerated, not integrated in the initial process of desegregating southern universities.18 Integration required southern universities to desegregate football teams and alter student culture to change the Southern college ideal.


18. Pratt, We Shall Not Be Moved, 11-129. Pratt reaches a similar conclusion about black students at University of Georgia.
In order for black students to be integrated into UF, the school had to alter its collegiate identity. This required more than enrolling black students; it meant UF had to integrate black students into its community and a campus culture that centered on football. The Southern collegiate ideal was an all-white affair until the late sixties, when southern colleges moved to desegregate their football teams. At the University of Florida, the school’s athletic desegregation coincided with a debate over the marching band’s use of the song “Dixie.” An examination of how Florida approached the playing of “Dixie” reveals an intense debate between students, alumni, and the administration over the school’s identity. It was clear that the Southern collegiate ideal based on the invented tradition of the Old South, faith in material progress, and white supremacy could not withstand the sixties. The debate over “Dixie” in student and local newspapers provides a window into the moment of crisis over UF’s identity.

In many ways the song “Dixie” exemplified America’s tortured racial history from the antebellum era through the 1960s, serving as the soundtrack to America’s racism. Ohioan Daniel Decatur Emmett (1815 - 1904) claimed authorship of the song. Recently, however, scholars have challenged Emmett’s authorship of “Dixie” arguing that black performers taught him the song. Nevertheless, Emmett, a performer with the Virginia Minstrels, entertained in shows in which he blackened his skin with burnt cork and sang, danced, and joked. The minstrel performance was designed to dehumanize blacks, justify antebellum slavery, and negate the idea of black equality after the Civil War. The song, originally titled “I wish I was in the Dixie’s Land,” debuted in April 1859 and quickly became a part of minstrel stage and musical performances nationwide. Minstrel shows appealed to northern and southern audiences, and to upper and lower classes. The shows and song allowed whites to paper over cleavages surrounding class and ethnicity, thus solidifying white identity. “Dixie’s” association with white supremacy remained strong from the Civil War to the 1960s.19

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During the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the subsequent reconciliation between the white North and the white South under Jim Crow segregation, "Dixie" was transformed from a minstrel show ditty, to a white supremacist anthem. The Confederacy appropriated "Dixie" as its national anthem and battle hymn. A brass band played the song during Jefferson Davis' inauguration, as the secessionist leader approached the podium. Despite the song's use by the Confederacy, "Dixie" was also a favorite of many northern troops, signifying its vast popularity. The song was a particular favorite of President Lincoln, who declared at the war's end, "This tune is now federal property" and described it as "one of the best tunes I have ever heard." Although President Lincoln reclaimed the song for the nation, it was clear that it represented Southern pride and, implicitly, the Southern racial order. In the post Civil War landscape, "Dixie" was the song that accompanied northern and southern reconciliation at the expense of black equality. This was clearly demonstrated at the 1895 Atlanta Cotton Exposition. "Dixie" was the introductory music that preceded Booker T. Washington's speech of compromise with the Southern racial order. The Baltimore Afro-American captured the song's national association with white supremacy, noting "there is hardly a theater audience from Maine to Florida that does not applaud the orchestra when it plays 'Dixie,' and the intensity of the applause increases to an uproar as you pass the Mason and Dixon's line going South."22 Given this history, it was logical that "Dixie" was revered as part of the white southern football tradition and experience.

As Southerners grew enamored with college football in the late nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century, they merged their zeal for the game with the region's obsession with the "Lost Cause" of the Civil War. While college football began in the Northeast in the 1860s and 1870s, the game in the South quick-

ly became a passion for fans in a region lacking professional sports teams. As football grew in popularity in the South, intersectional games between northern and southern teams took on added significance. Southern victories, such as Alabama’s 1926 Rose Bowl win, raised the echoes of the Lost Cause. In 1935, the Southeastern Conference (SEC) defied amateur rules of the era and became the first athletic conference to allow athletic scholarships. Scholars viewed this disregard of the amateur rules created by northern colleges as “the white South’s way of restoring its pride so badly damaged by the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the chronic hard times that dogged much of the South well into the twentieth century.”

Southern universities’ decision to issue athletic scholarships avoided the hypocrisy surrounding amateurism that plagued northern schools, and provided a distinct advantage in intersectional contests that could reverse the outcome of the Civil War, at least on Saturday afternoons. David G. Sansing captures the interplay between football and Confederate culture: “The lost cause of the Civil War has never really gotten out of our souls... Football, with all of its battle-related language, has long been an expression of our Southern militarism. To some, football elevates war to a higher art with its marching bands and the large crowds. It’s like sitting hillside looking down on the battle of Gettysburg.” If football represents Southern militarism, as Sansing suggests, then the marching band playing “Dixie” was the battle hymn.

Although it is unclear when the University of Florida began playing “Dixie,” by the 1950s and 1960s UF and other predominately white colleges across the South had made the song an essential part of the band and football experience. When the UF band played at the Rockefeller Center in New York in 1951, its performance included “The Swanee River,” the official state song, “We Are the Boys from Old Florida,” the school’s pep song, and “Dixie.”

In commemoration of the 1958 World’s Fair in Belgium, UF band

sent a record of its renditions of "The Swanee River," "Dixie," and "The Star Spangled Banner." Given that "Dixie" was a central part of the UF band's playlist at national and international events, one can assume that it was played regularly at football games. Other southern colleges made "Dixie" a component of student and football culture, as well. At the University of Mississippi, a new mascot, Colonel Reb, the Confederate flag, and "Dixie" became integral parts of the game day experience in 1948, the school's centennial. The band's uniforms were gray, invoking the Confederate soldiers. At the University of Georgia, the band was known as the "Dixie Redcoat Band." The Citadel (South Carolina) band played "Dixie" after scoring a touchdown in a 1968 game against Army. The Alabama legislature, threatened by desegregation, passed a law requiring the University of Alabama band to play "Dixie" and to fly the Confederate flag at all home football games.

"Dixie" was one of three songs, along with "The Star Spangled Banner" and the school alma mater that students, alumni, and fans treated with respect. When "Dixie" was played at halftime or at game's end, the crowd stood at attention.

As southern universities desegregated in the 1960s, student and university reverence for "Dixie" served as a reminder to newly enrolled black students that they were not fully accepted at the schools. Between 1950 and 1970, black student enrollment at predominately white schools in the South grew from zero to nearly 100,000. The increasing black enrollment at southern white schools put black students and the schools' reverence for "Dixie" at odds. A 1966 Mademosille article about black students at Ole Miss captured the song's importance to white students, and the song's affect on blacks. "The most traumatic moment on these occasions is when the band blares out 'Dixie.' Can you imagine what its like,'

University of Florida Marching Band performance with Confederate Battle Flag in card section, circa 1950s. Courtesy of University of Florida Archives, Dept. of Special Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida.

asks Irvin [Walker], ‘to have these white people stand up around you for the song . . . ?’ ‘It’s like the alma mater here . . . it’s really the school song . . . ’”31 More often than not, the song (when played upbeat) was the unofficial fight song and evoked feelings similar to those engendered by the alma mater when played at a slower tempo. The tradition of respect for “Dixie” evinced at the University of Florida mirrored the all-white sports teams and the playing of “Dixie” elsewhere in the South and signaled a collegiate ideal that venerated the Old South and its racism.

The University of Florida football team’s use of the Confederate flag helmet emblem during the 1962 Gator Bowl visually represent-

31. Quoted in: Sacks and Sacks, Way up North in Dixie, 155.
ed the region's reaction to desegregation. By the time of the December 1962 game, legal challenges to segregated higher education had produced a number of changes at the University of Florida. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Legal Defense Fund initiated desegregation of higher education at the graduate and professional school level with three lawsuits - *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada* (1938), *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950), and *McLaurin v. Oklahoma* (1950). These three cases desegregated graduate and professional schools in states where the segregated options were patently inferior or nonexistent. In *Gaines*, the NAACP overturned Missouri's use of out-of-state tuition grants, which were used as a means to avoid desegregating graduate and professional schools. The grants covered tuition, but did not include travel and living expenses, thus creating added financial burdens for black students who left their home states. According to legal scholar, Michael J. Klarman, "*Gaines* did not challenge segregation, as it required only that blacks be segregated within, not without, state boundaries." In *Sweatt*, the NAACP challenged the University of Texas Law School's rejection of Herman Sweatt, arguing that no law school for blacks existed in the state. Although Texas established a hastily organized law school for blacks in the basement of the university and then set up a permanent one at Texas Southern University, the Supreme Court ruled both the temporary and segregated law schools were inferior. In *McLaurin*, the Supreme Court ruled that the University of Oklahoma could not segregate George McLaurin in the classroom, the library, or the cafeteria, after admitting him into the university. In *Sweatt* and *McLaurin*, the Supreme Court applied a stringent definition of equality, thus eroding legal segregation, but not ending it. Although these cases were critical in desegregating higher education, the lawsuits also reveal a flaw in the strategy. By arguing that segregated institutions were unequal, and therefore in violation of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), the NAACP was forced to win desegregation suits on a case-by-case basis. This weakness was exposed when courts determined that segregated institutions were equal. This was the case in Virgil Hawkins's lawsuit for admission into the University of Florida Law School.

Virgil Hawkins's lawsuit opened the door for desegregation in Florida's colleges and universities. On the basis of the Gaines decision, Hawkins should have been admitted when he applied to the University of Florida Law School in 1949. However, the State Board of Control, which set policy at Florida's public universities, violated the ruling by offering Hawkins out-of-state tuition in order to maintain segregation. When he refused to leave the state to attend school, the Board of Control denied Hawkins admission to the Law School. After he and five other applicants filed a lawsuit in 1949, the state, in an attempt to evade desegregating the University of Florida, agreed to build a law school at Florida A & M College (now University). While awaiting the completion of construction, the state Supreme Court ruled that Hawkins could temporarily enter the University of Florida Law School. In defiance of the ruling, the State Board of Control refused to admit Hawkins, even on a temporary basis. In theory, Hawkins should have been admitted based on Sweatt and McLaurin after 1950, but the state again refused his application. Another lawsuit ensued and the Florida Supreme Court ruled that Florida A & M's new law school was equal to the University of Florida. In 1954, the U. S. Supreme Court asked the state court to review the case in consideration of the recent ruling in Brown v. Board of Education (1954), which had declared separate education inherently unequal and overturned Plessy v. Ferguson. The state Supreme Court used Brown II (1955), which stated desegregation should occur at "all deliberate speed" and left implementation to local school districts, to again deny Hawkins entry into the law school. After another series of lawsuits, Hawkins was again denied admission. This time the state argued that he did not qualify for entry based on his Law School Aptitude Test (LSAT) score. The LSAT was not required for admission when Hawkins applied in 1949 and had only been used since February 1958. Nonetheless, the NAACP realized that it had gained considerable leverage when a district court declared that qualified black students would be admitted into the University of Florida Law School. NAACP lawyer, Constant Motley believed the "bizarre ruling" would allow black students to enroll in the law school. Hawkins agreed to drop the lawsuit. The first black student, George Allen, Jr. enrolled at the University of Florida Law School in fall 1958.34

Desegregation of graduate and professional schools did not immediately cause Florida's universities to desegregate their undergraduate programs. The University of Miami was the first school to enroll black undergraduate students in the summer and fall of 1961. According to school president, Jay F. W. Person, "We all recognized that sooner or later we would integrate. Some said it ought to begin at the graduate level, but some of us said, "Why do it in steps? If you believe it's right, you do it and get it over with." The process was somewhat easier for Miami because it had admitted students from Central and South America since the school's inception in 1926, making the exclusion of African Americans an "awkward" situation. The University of Florida and Florida State University followed Miami's lead, desegregating their undergraduate programs the next year. The decision to desegregate undergraduate students forced all southern colleges to rethink their collegiate ideal. The presence of black undergraduate students meant that southern colleges' Old South identity with its ingrained racism would be confronted on a daily basis.

The first black undergraduates at the University of Florida described their reception by white students as forbidding. When Stephan Mickle enrolled at the University of Florida in the fall of 1962, he remembered being virtually ignored by his white classmates. "It was like you were a piece of furniture, you did not exist," he explained. Confederate campus culture exacerbated black students' loneliness and exclusion. Mickle recalled that students viewed Kappa Alpha fraternity as the "Ku Klux Klan" of college life. During homecoming, fraternity members dressed as Confederate soldiers and rode horses across campus. When assessed with the


36. Ibid.
39. Charlayne Hunter at the University of Georgia offers a similar assessment of the Kappa Alpha fraternity. Pratt, We Shall Not Be Moved, 115.
football team’s use of Confederate symbols and the game-day playing of “Dixie,” fraternity activities reinforced Old South ideology as something inherent to the college experience. Mickle asserted that racism played a central role in student culture at UF and other predominantly white universities and undermined the quality of education. As a result, he believed that blacks who attended these schools had an inferior experience compared to that available at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Mickle and other black students in the first few classes at Florida in the late sixties were tolerated, but not integrated. If integration, rather than simple desegregation, was to occur black students needed be on the athletic fields and incorporated into the student culture.

Months after the Florida’s 1962 Gator Bowl victory, the barriers of segregated southern football teams began to fall. The University of Maryland announced that Daryl Hill intended to transfer from the Naval Academy to become the first black player in the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC). Wake Forest University announced that it would begin to actively recruit black football players. In Florida, there were reports that the University of Miami was recruiting a
black player. Despite these efforts, the State Board of Control simply stated, “the question [of athletic integration] is not before us at this time.”

Other schools in the SEC insisted on maintaining segregation. Vanderbilt University football coach Jack Green asserted, “We don’t anticipate any change in our recruiting.” For University of Florida, the University of Kentucky’s decision to sign two black players in 1966 meant the desegregation of SEC (South Eastern Conference) football the following year. The same year desegregation arrived in the SEC, it arrived in the state of Florida. The University of Miami’s decision to sign Ray Bellamy to an athletic scholarship pressured the University of Florida, as the state’s flagship institution, to desegregate football as well.

The University of Florida’s administration and coaches cooperated to desegregate football in 1968. UF president Dr. J. Wayne Reitz oversaw the desegregation of the law school in 1958 and the undergraduate college in 1962. Reitz was by no means a leader in desegregation in the South, having only desegregated the law school under a court order. In 1967 Reitz resigned as president. He was replaced by Stephen O’Connell, another racial conservative. O’Connell was a University of Florida graduate, class of 1940, who before being selected to lead University of Florida was a member and briefly chief of the Florida Supreme Court. Appointed to the state’s high court in 1955, O’Connell ruled against Virgil Hawkins’s admission to the law school citing his LSAT scores. In 1966 The Florida Law Review deemed O’Connell the second most conservative judge on Florida’s Supreme Court. Despite this conservatism, civil rights and desegregation had enough momentum by 1967 that no college president could stop desegregation. Thus, O’Connell encouraged the coaching staff to recruit black players.

40. “As Wake Forest, Maryland Brake Down Dixie Barrier . . . ‘Canes May Field State’s First Integrated Team,” St. Petersburg Times, 1 February 1963, 1-C.
42. Freshmen athletes were prohibited from playing per NCAA regulations until 1972.
Ray Graves, Florida’s head football coach from 1960-1969 and athletic director from 1960-1979, reversed his views on recruiting black players over the course of the sixties. Graves surely was uninterested in recruiting black players in 1962 when he placed the Confederate flag as the helmet emblem in the Gator Bowl. Ray Bellamy, who became the first black football player at a white college in Florida when he accepted a scholarship from the University of Miami in 1967, recalls that Graves stated that he would not recruit black players. Graves’s assertions about recruiting black players made Bellamy a lifelong “Gator hater.”45 Graves’s initial views on desegregating football aside, by the late sixties segregation in athletic departments and specifically on the football field was untenable. Protests erupted in athletic departments across the country from Iowa to Wyoming.46 Black athletes threatened to boycott the 1968 Olympic games in Mexico City; at the games the lasting image was Tommie Smith and John Carlos’s famous Black Power salute on the medal stand.47 In this environment, Graves’s position on segregation quickly became antiquated. The University of Florida track team led athletic desegregation in the fall 1968, signing Ron Coleman to a scholarship and including Johnnie Brown on the cross-country team.48 This was an important first step, but like the desegregation of graduate schools in the fifties, it did not address the heart of athletic segregation and the center of the collegiate ideal - football.

Soon Graves and his assistant coaches were actively seeking black football players to recruit. Assistant coaches mailed letters to high school football coaches announcing Florida’s new policy of “recruiting athletes regardless of race” and stating that the football team needed “to recruit the best athletes possible from the state.”49

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Based on the limited evidence surrounding the recruiting process, it appears that UF sought the "right" players to become racial pioneers. First, Graves wanted black players who would qualify for admission into UF and be talented enough to play in the SEC. Educational scholar R. Scott Baker argues that southern school systems, including higher education, shifted to testing as a means to counter court mandated desegregation. By using testing as the basis of admissions to state colleges, southern university officials believed that only token desegregation would occur, and the system of testing would provide a legally justifiable defense. As one member of Florida Governor Leroy Collins's committee on desegregation noted in 1956, "our sole effort and intention was to devise ways and means of preventing or slowing integration of our public schools." During the sixties, UF and FSU (Florida State University) athletic departments agreed on academic standards for football recruits that required potential student athletes to score at least 300 on the Florida placement test on their first attempt and have a C average in academic courses or score 900 on the SAT. Both schools agreed to allow two exceptions for players who scored between 275 and 300 on the Florida placement test. In a memo to Graves, Assistant coach Hobe Hooser wrote, "I had prospect questionnaires completed by Negro players in white schools but in all cases they could not meet our scholastic requirement or football ability requirement." It is unclear whether Hooser's memo was a deliberate attempt to avoid desegregation or was an honest assessment of his good faith efforts. The legacy of segregated education and the effectiveness of academic testing meant there were some black athletes who could not make the grade. However, the assistant coach's remarks hint that there were no black players with the ability to play in the SEC. This implication belied the success of Florida A & M's football team (a historically black college). Under head coach Alonzo "Jake" Gaither, Florida A & M won

more than 200 games and 7 Black College national titles between 1945 and 1969. Clearly, UF football coaches could have found black players who were academically and athletically satisfactory, because Gaither in his twenty-five year career found more than two thousand players. Hooser’s measured comments suggests that UF was looking for a black athlete with a very specific background.

Second, it appears that UF wanted to follow a Jackie Robinson model for desegregation, by seeking a black player who was middle class in background and who had prior experience on desegregated teams and in desegregated schools. Early black players were often middle class. As R. Scott Baker observes, “the standardized tests adopted to limit black access to colleges and universities . . . heightened class divisions among African Americans without reducing the significance of race.” The first two black players signed to football scholarships, Leonard George and Willie Jackson attended desegregated high schools. George graduated from Tampa Jesuit High School and Jackson attended desegregated Sarasota High School and graduated from Valley Forge Military Academy, a preparatory school in Pennsylvania.

In addition, President O’Connell took an active role in recruiting Jackson and other black players. O’Connell brought Jackson into his office and assured him that UF wanted to recruit black players. Later O’Connell suggested names of black players that new head coach Doug Dickey (1970 – 1978) should recruit. Although O’Connell and Graves were conservative on the prospects of athletic desegregation, their combined effort demonstrated that segregated sports had reached its limits.

The reaction to UF’s decision to desegregate football was mixed. Graves recalled that there was little or no opposition to the signing of George and Jackson. However, Dean Boggs, a Jacksonville lawyer, UF alum, and booster wrote two letters decrying the signing of black players. In the 1950s, Boggs had worked to keep segregation a part of the Florida state constitution. In a let-

55. Pleasants, Gator Tales, 123.
57. Julian M. Pleasants, Gator Tales, 231.
ter to Graves, Boggs was concerned that, "when the high school prospects for next year were introduced, there were several Negro high school players included." He understood that because Brown v. Board of Education (1954) was the law of the land UF had to accept qualified black applicants, however he felt it was not "wise to actively recruit them." His opposition to desegregation was rooted in a perverse reading of Latin American history, in which miscegenation had "resulted in backward nations." He paternalistically concluded that, "All this experience has taught us is that segregation is really in the best interest of both races and is really desired by both races except for a few agitators. . . . I am opposed to any active effort to recruit Negro players at the University of Florida."59 After UF announced the signing of George and Jackson, Boggs wrote a follow-up letter to President O'Connell, arguing "that there can be no doubt that Florida alumni and, in fact, people in general all over the country are opposed to integration in education."60

Boggs represented a small but vocal opposition to desegregation, although many Florida fans understood that the desegregation of athletic teams would inevitably come. By 1970, there were more than 40 black players in the SEC.61 More shocking than football desegregation was the transformation of student culture, of which the playing of "Dixie" at games was prominent. University of Florida students and alumni quietly accepted football desegregation, but there was considerable debate on whether the school's band should stop playing "Dixie."

The push toward true integration was only two-thirds complete after the University of Florida began to recruit black football players. The most difficult task facing the University was transforming student culture and its infatuation with Confederate symbols. A key representation of Confederate culture was the marching band's playing of "Dixie" during sporting events. "Dixie" served as the soundtrack to white supremacy since its initial minstrel show per-


formance in 1859 and had become an essential component of the football game day tradition at southern universities. When black students and athletes arrived on southern campuses in the mid-to-late sixties school administrations faced the difficult challenge of how to handle this racist culture in a desegregated environment. After the desegregation spectacles at the University of Alabama, the University of Georgia, and the University of Mississippi in the early sixties, the nation watched in anticipation for racial tensions to erupt on additional southern campuses. A student culture imbued with a reverence for the Old South could and did transform into white student violence toward the outnumbered black students on newly desegregated campuses. In 1967 there were sixty-one black students out of a student population of nineteen thousand students at the University of Florida. If desegregating athletics or student culture resulted in increased white violence toward black students, the university would have been hard pressed to regain control in the case of a major incident. Creating a more inclusive collegiate ideal at the University of Florida was essential in protecting black students and implementing true integration.62

Like undergraduate and athletic desegregation, the first step toward altering student culture at Florida’s universities came from the University of Miami. Days before Miami’s first football game of the 1968 season against Northwestern University, Henry King Stanford, Miami’s president, informed the marching band that it could no longer play “Dixie” at university sponsored events, including football games. During the game, a minority of Miami’s student body chanted “We want Dixie” after the team scored a touchdown against Northwestern. When the band refused the crowd’s request, they were hit with a cascade of boos and beer cans. Another student waved a large Confederate flag during the game. Stanford’s attempt to change student culture was off to a difficult start.63

Stanford’s decision to prohibit the band from playing “Dixie” was one based on paternalism, rather than principle. When the president’s decision to end the playing of the song caused a minor consternation among some in the student body, he appealed to the students

as a fellow southerner to live up to the ideal of Southern honor. "Dixie," in Stanford's opinion, violated this honorable tradition. "[M]y Southern heritage... persuades me to believe that it is not honorable to force upon a minority group the symbols of the Confederacy which, rightly or wrongly, have become so distasteful to them, symbols which are associated in their minds with slavery, discrimination, and the degradation of the human personality, all conditions that are at complete variance with that part of Southern heritage that I prize so highly." Stanford recognized that since his arrival as president at the University of Miami in 1962 the school had "developed a curious attachment to the Confederate flag and 'Dixie,'" despite having students from forty-nine states and over seventy countries. Stanford claimed that his judgement was not the result of a request by any particular individual or organization; however, black students had occupied the president's office in May, demanding an increase in black student population and the addition of Black Studies courses to the curriculum. Moreover, the game against Northwestern was the first collegiate game for Ray Bellamy, the school's first black player. Stanford argued that the decision reflected the noblesse oblige, the noble and generous obligation of those of high rank or birth. "Members of a University community," Stanford wrote, "do occupy a 'high rank.' They should constitute a cast of intellect and character, which prompts us to practice honorable and generous behavior in our dealings with each other and fellow man."64

Students expressed their opposition to the president's decision in several editorials that argued "Dixie" was a reflection of southern pride, not bigotry. More students were concerned over Stanford’s unilateral decision to ban the song. Student outrage only lasted a few weeks, because of Stanford’s firm, albeit paternalistic, decision. His decision forced the University of Miami's student culture to adapt or face reprimand from the administration. Stanford’s ability to ban the song reflected Miami’s status as a private university and its diverse student population. The University of Miami’s prohibition against playing "Dixie" highlighted the University of Florida’s continuation of the practice.65

Faced with Stanford’s ban against playing “Dixie” at the University of Miami, University of Florida president Stephen O’Connell allowed the practice to continue, setting off a storm of debate on the Florida campus. Displaying a conservatism that valued individualism over group identity, O’Connell believed that there were no racial overtones to “Dixie.” In fact, he felt students could “play it, sing it, whistle it, or hum it” if they chose. Despite the president’s position, the initial editorials in the student newspaper, The Alligator, suggested the school should eliminate the song and the associated Confederate culture. Student journalist David Miller claimed, “[T]he Confederate flag . . . [and] ‘Dixie’ are remnants of a diseased, inhumane regime.”

Miller’s article brought conversations that were occurring in classrooms, dormitories, and cafeterias on to the pages of the student newspaper. Many students supported the playing of “Dixie” arguing that the song reflected southern heritage. Others voiced their opposition to the song, including two economics professors at the university. The professors argued that the “Southern heritage” defense of “Dixie” and the Confederate flag were insufficient in 1968 America. “Other Southern traditions including lynching, disenfranchisement of blacks, and riding in the back of buses have been reevaluated and found lacking in their social merits.” As professors and alumni they believed the Confederate culture perpetuated the idea that the University of Florida was a racist institution and a “needless reminder of much that is wrong in the South.”

In the weeks after Miami’s announcement to prohibit “Dixie” and the University of Florida’s decision to continue playing the song, the debate presented in the student newspaper was remarkably balanced. However, as the fall 1968 semester continued it was clear that University of Florida students and its administration were unwilling to change student culture.

The “Dixie” controversy remained a staple in the student press for the remainder of the semester. The Alligator staff determined to collect an accurate assessment of the students’ thoughts on “Dixie.” Although the earlier articles on “Dixie” presented a bal-

ance of opinions, the staff’s research found that an overwhelming majority (83%) of Florida students wanted to continue playing the song.69 Black students were the only campus population opposed to the song. The minority opinion on the issue confirmed that they were not a part of the collegiate ideal at the university. Black students’ outsider status was reaffirmed throughout the semester. In a special playwright section of the newspaper, a four act minstrel show along with accompanying cartoons of blackface characters was advertised.70 The homecoming parade included a float with a student in blackface wearing a UF band uniform.71 At the end of the semester, emeritus band director Harold B. Bachman defended the band’s right to play “Dixie.”72 In an interview with a newspaper reporter, one black student expressed the common opinion that blacks were tolerated, but not integrated into the culture of UF: “I don’t feel anything about ‘Dixie’ being played at games. I could care less because I am not really a part of the University. I don’t do anything but go to classes.”73 With black football players not yet on the field and “Dixie” blaring from the stands, how could any black student really feel a part of the University of Florida?

O’Connell’s decision to continue “Dixie” reflected the administration’s tolerance for token desegregation, rather than integration of black students. In the late sixties and early seventies, the University of Florida did not envision black students as part of its collegiate ideal. O’Connell’s conservative approach to the “Dixie” controversy stood in contrast to Henry Stanford’s method. The University of Miami president recognized the difficulty of generating enough popular support to prohibit the band from playing “Dixie,” and made a tough administrative decision to halt the use of the song. Moreover, Stanford talked to black community leaders who told him, “The symbols of the Confederacy evoke in us the same feelings that the swastika . . . conjures up to the Jew.”74 O’Connell’s conservative principles meant he made no concerted effort to fully integrate black students. He believed that Southerners

had the right to continue their outdated traditions and he made little effort to talk to black students, faculty members, or community leaders. In contrast O'Connell’s timid efforts at fully integrating black students makes his role in recruiting black football players border on exploitation, as Florida boosters, alumni, and politicians had made winning a football title a major goal. Florida’s history of football mediocrity paled in comparison to SEC powers such as the University of Alabama, which won national titles in 1961, 1964, 1965, and 1966) and compared unfavorably to Jake Gaither’s Florida A&M University football team which won black college championships in 1947, 1953, 1957, 1959, 1961, 1962, and 1964.

By 1971, tired of waiting for substantive changes, black students took matters into their own hands. On April 15, sixty-six students burst in O’Connell’s office and presented demands that the University increase the number of black students, faculty members, and staff members. The demands were an attempt to forcibly alter the collegiate ideal at University of Florida. O’Connell had the student protesters arrested. Followup protests occurred in which eight additional students were arrested. Some black students, faculty members, and staff along with white allies withdrew from school and resigned from their jobs. Over one-hundred and twenty people left the University of Florida in May 1971, including nearly one-half of the black students enrolled. Black athletes, such as Willie Jackson, considered withdrawing, but chose to stay in school and support the protesters. The University slowly responded to the demands hiring Thomas W. Cole as Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs and founding the Institute of Black Culture. By the time O’Connell retired in 1973, the black student population had grown to nearly six hundred fifty. True integration began when black students were included in the classroom, on the football field, and in the student culture.

The University of Florida was desegregated in the late fifties, but was not integrated until the seventies. Integration required black students in classrooms, on football fields, and incorporated

75. “Warren Gives First Campaign Address,” The Palm Beach Post, 31 January 1940, 5. As part of his campaign for governor, Fuller Warren, an UF alumni, guaranteed to put the football team in the Rose Bowl in four years.

into student culture. Together these three factors constituted a change to Florida's collegiate ideal. True integration, rather than desegregation, meant the University could no longer project an image that venerated the Old South and its racist customs. Although black students appeared in the classrooms and on the athletic fields and courts at universities across the South in the late sixties and early seventies, the true shift to an integrated university required significant changes to university culture, such as the prohibition of "Dixie." Without this final and often protracted step, schools remained desegregated rather than integrated.

When did the University of Florida become an integrated institution, rather than simply a desegregated one? Evidence suggests that 1973 was the year that the University of Florida took its first major steps towards becoming an integrated institution. Florida's decision to stop playing "Dixie" was met with decidedly less fanfare or media coverage. Frank B. Wickes, former UF Band Director (1973 - 1980) recalled that "Dixie" was too controversial to play when he took over as director of the band in 1973. In fall of 1973, Don Gaffney became the first starting black quarterback at Florida and in the SEC. Head coach Doug Dickey named Gaffney the starter after the team started the season 2 - 4. In Gaffney's first two starts, he broke a 14 game losing streak at Auburn's Jordan-Hare Stadium and he led an 11 - 10 come from behind victory over arch-rival University of Georgia. Gaffney won five consecutive games in 1973, before losing to Miami University of Ohio in the Tangerine Bowl. In terms of student culture, during the University's annual homecoming celebration, the school voted Cynthia Mays as the first black Homecoming Queen. Although Florida's campus was not a racial utopia, by 1973 the school took its first steps in projecting an integrated collegiate ideal.

Other southern universities did not make the shift from desegregation to integration as quickly. The University of Georgia did not stop playing "Dixie" until 1975. Other schools struggled to shed their Confederate culture well into the twenty-first century. In 1997, the University of Mississippi head football coach Tommy Tuberville

77. Email correspondence between Frank B. Wickes and author. 11 November 2009.
asked students not to bring Confederate flags to a game. The students showed up at the game with thousands of flags. In 2007 Steve Spurrier, 1966 Heisman Trophy winner and former head coach at University of Florida (1990 – 2001), said he was, as the new head coach of the University of South Carolina, embarrassed by the Confederate flag over the state capitol and by fans waving it at games, especially behind the set of an ESPN pre-game show in 2007. In November 2009, one year after the election of Barack Obama as the first black president of the United States, new University of Mississippi chancellor, Dan Jones, prohibited the university’s band from playing of “From Dixie With Love.” Chancellor Jones wrote in a letter to the campus community, “We cannot even appear to support those outside our community who advocate a revival of racial segregation. We cannot fail to respond.” These recent examples demonstrate that the shift to integration requires a change in the collegiate ideal that includes integrated classes, athletics, and student culture. Without this change, schools such as the University of Mississippi are perhaps best described as desegregated rather than integrated.79

The examination of UF’s shift from desegregation to integration suggests careful use of language when examining university desegregation in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. By locating the transition from desegregation to integration in colleges, scholars can provide a more nuanced understanding of the process. Moreover, this detailed examination weakens the idea that integration has been achieved, and indicates that there is more work to be done in integrating students on some southern campuses. As evidenced by the contemporary crises at University of Mississippi and at the University of South Carolina, many schools have what Martin Luther King, Jr. described as “physical proximity without spiritual affinity.”80 We as scholars must comprehensively assess desegregation and integration by examining the classrooms, the athletic fields, and the student culture. University integration requires that all three be desegregated.


80. King, “The Ethical Demands of Integration,” 118