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Desexigration and Desegregation: Gender, Race, and Women's Basketball at the University of Texas in the 1970s

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Desexigration and Desegregation: Gender, Race, and Women's Basketball at the University of Texas in the 1970s

by

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Dedication

To all the women, and some men, who paved the way.

Abstract

Desexigration and Desegregation: Gender, Race, and Women's Basketball at the University of Texas in the 1970s

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"Desexigration and Desegregation: Gender, Race, and Women's Basketball at the University of Texas in the 1970s" examines the ways in which the University of Texas addressed gender and racial discrimination following the passage of major civil rights legislation and during the early years of the women's intercollegiate athletics department through the lens of its most high-profile team, the women's basketball team. Desegregation efforts demanded that marginalized people assimilate into the white populace while desexigration efforts required separation and isolation for female athletes from the larger men's athletics infrastructure. In athletics specifically, the intense fight to carve out and maintain any space for women caused many administrators and coaches, who were often white, to focus solely on gender discrimination with little concern for the impact of race. For example, Rodney Page, a Black man hired to coach the UT women's basketball team from 1973 to 1976, was the first Black head coach at Texas and another would not be hired until 1992. He is still one of only seven Black head coaches in the school's history and, until very recently, he was largely forgotten by women's athletics.

Caught in the middle of these policies were Black female athletes like Retha Swindell, the first Black female varsity athlete at UT, who were navigating multiple institutional structures that were hostile to their presence. By evaluating desexigration alongside desegregation instead of as two separate phenomena, this dissertation argues that attempts to end gender and racial discrimination in athletics were not linear and were often uneven. Many white women, like Donna Lopiano, the first women's athletic director at Texas, and Jody Conradt, the legendary basketball coach who was hired in 1976, found new, if not challenging, avenues open to them while many people of color, especially Black women, were overlooked or ignored in yet another arena of their lives. By studying desexigration and desegregation's effects on a single team and in a single women's athletics department, it becomes clear how these two forces corrected some historical discriminatory trends and perpetuated others.

Through the extensive use of primary sources and interviews with people involved in women's basketball and women's athletics in the 1970s at Texas, "Desexigration and Desegregation" captures how people in women's athletics like Lopiano, Conradt, Page, Swindell, and many others built one of the most successful women's athletic departments in the country despite the constraints under which they operated, and how their decisions, both good and bad, set women's athletics on a path it is still on, many decades later.

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

Athletic Organizations

ACACW: Athletic Conference of American College Women

AIAW: Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women

AAU: Amateur Athletic Union

CFA: College Football Association

CIAW: Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (became the AIAW)

DGWS: Division for Girls and Women's Sports

HSGBL: High School Girls Basketball League

IAW: Intercollegiate Athletics for Women

NAIA: National Association for Intercollegiate Athletics

NCAA: National Collegiate Athletic Association

NSWA: National Section on Women's Athletic

PVIL: Prairie View Interscholastic League

SWC: Southwest Conference

TAAF: Texas Amateur Athletic Federation

TAIAW: Texas Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women

TCIAW: Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (became the TAIAW)

TILCS: Texas Interscholastic League of Colored Students

TRFCW: Texas Recreation Federation for College Women

UTSA: University of Texas Sports Association

UTSAM: the men's University of Texas Sports Association

WAA: Women's Athletic Association (became the UTSA)

WDNAAF: Women's Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation

UIL: University Interscholastic League

All Other Abbreviations

AABL: African Americans for Black Liberation

AD: athletic director

CSWM: Council on the Status of Women and Minorities

EEOO: Equal Employment Opportunity Officer

HEW: Department of Health, Education, and Welfare

HPER: Department of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation

IM: intramurals

NAACP: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

NAP: Negros Association for Progress

NASA: National Aeronautics and Space Administration

NEA: National Education Association

NOW: National Organization for Women

SEC: Special Events Center, opened at the University of Texas in 1977

SID: Sports Information Director

USARAT: United Students Against Racism at Texas

YWCA: Young Women's Christian Association

Introduction

On March 20, 2022, the University of Texas women's basketball team played their final game in the Frank Erwin Center, a large, round arena on the southern edge of campus. The Erwin Center, named after a former UT regent, had been the home of Texas basketball since 1977. It had not, though, been built with women athletes or teams in mind. It took women in athletics requesting and then reviewing the blueprints for the project and the intervention of the university president, Lorene Rogers, the only female president UT has ever had, to make sure that there was space in the arena for women's basketball, too. In November 1977, when the first tipoff happened in the Center, standing in the center of the circle for the University of Texas was Retha Swindell, a defensive juggernaut and scoring machine. On the sideline was Jody Conradt. It was her second season as head coach.

Women's intercollegiate athletics at the university was in its infancy in 1977, having officially been established in 1974. It had been slowly forming, though, since at least 1968, when women students began to push for varsity athletics. In 1971, the basketball team played its first intercollegiate game as part of a tournament at Southwest Texas State University. Betty Thompson, who oversaw women's athletics between 1968–1974, hired Rodney Page, a graduate student at the University of Houston, to teach physical instruction in 1972 and the following year put him in charge of the women's basketball team. Page was a Black man who grew up in segregated New Orleans and Houston and knew that the University of Texas had a poor reputation with the state's Black population because it had been a school solely for white faculty and students in its first seventy five years.[1] When Page arrived, sixteen years into the university's desegregation

[1] I will be capitalizing the word "Black" throughout this dissertation whenever referring to a population of people, though I will not be doing the same for "white." This follows the Associated Press

efforts, he was one of a dozen Black faculty members and one of a few Black faculty or staff in physical instruction and all of athletics.

In 1975, Page recruited Swindell from a small east Texas town based on what he had seen of her on the court at the girl's state basketball championship and doing the triple jump, for which she held the national record while in high school. She received an academic scholarship to attend UT and when she arrived, she officially became the first Black athlete as part of the new women's athletics department. She would be the only Black basketball player until the 1977–1978 season, when she was joined by Rene Rochester. The following year, Evwella Munn and Hattie Browning arrived, the four of them the only Black women basketball players at UT in the 1970s. For her freshman year, though, Swindell at least had Page as her coach.

Arriving at the same time as Swindell was Donna Lopiano, the first women's athletic director, who started her tenure in the summer of 1975. Lopiano was a brash Yankee from the east coast who arrived with big goals for the department, including getting each team into the top ten nationally and hiring the very best coaches she could find. She was also an active member in the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW), which oversaw women's collegiate athletics across the nation, and a staunch defender of Title IX, the 1972 federal legislation that outlawed gendered discrimination in education, including in athletics. As soon as Lopiano arrived

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style guide, the *New York Times*, and the *Columbia Journalism Review* among many others. The AP states that this decision aligns "with long-standing capitalization of distinct racial and ethnic identifiers such as Latino, Asian American and Native American." A *New York Times* editor said the difference between "black" and "Black" was "the difference between a color and a culture." Most, though not all, outlets chose to leave "white" not capitalized because many white supremacist groups write the word "white" with a capital "W." "Explaining AP style on Black and white," AP News, https://apnews.com/article/archive-race-and-ethnicity-9105661462. "Why we will lowercase white," AP News, https://www.ap.org/the-definitive-source/announcements/why-we-will-lowercase-white/. "A new style choice: Capitalizing Black," *The New York Times*, July 5, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/05/insider/capitalized-black.html. "Why we capitalize 'Black' (and not 'white')," *Columbia Journalism Review*, https://www.cjr.org/analysis/capital-b-black-styleguide.php. All accessed on January 29, 2025.

at UT, she immediately went up against Darrell Royal, the school's famed head football coach and men's athletic director, and J. Neils Thompson, the outspoken chair of the Athletic Council for Men, both of whom said they supported women's sports but did little in terms of action to prove it. In her most public act of defiance against the patriarchal forces within college sports, UT, and the halls of Congress, Lopiano testified at the Senate Subcommittee on Education's hearing on a proposed amendment to Title IX that would have exempted men's revenue-producing sports from the law's jurisdiction, essentially neutering it. The amendment failed, angering powerful men in sports and at UT.

While the desegregation of athletics at Texas brought Page and Swindell together, the creation of the women's intercollegiate athletics program and the hiring of Lopiano is what ultimately separated them. In order to go after the caliber of coaches she wanted, Lopiano dismissed Page at the end of the 1975–1976 season, as well as the volleyball coach, replacing both positions with a single coach who would handle both sports. Jody Conradt, a native Texan who spent her whole life in the state, was running the University of Texas at Arlington's women's program and coaching their basketball and volleyball teams when Lopiano came knocking. Conradt was highly recommended and thoroughly knew women's basketball in Texas.

Conradt's hiring, though ultimately a success, brought to the fore important tensions within women's sports. Page was beloved by his team. The *Daily Texan* reported that the players were "disenchanted with the decision" to let Page go and at the timing of the announcement during the season, just before a tournament. Page himself told the *Texan* that he was "not extremely pleased, but not bitter" about the decision.[2] He wrote a long letter to administrators at the

[2] Ronnie Zamora, "Page's Dismissal Discussed at Meeting with Lopiano," *The Daily Texan*, March 3, 1976.

university, including the president, to address his concerns with how his dismissal happened and to draw attention to the racial implications of replacing one of the few Black people in athletics with a white woman. The Equal Employment Opportunity Officer (EEOO) investigated and determined that Lopiano did not racially discriminate in her firing and hiring process, but her decision was larger, Page felt, than his singular case. He was drawing attention to longstanding concerns within UT and Austin's Black communities regarding how the university handled race. Looking back on that moment nearly half a century later, Page says, "Donna was probably the right kind of person for the program. She wasn't the right person for me."[3]

Only two players from Page's final season continued on under Conradt, one of them being Retha Swindell. Conradt and Lopiano ended up having legendary careers at UT. Rodney Page was largely forgotten until recent years. Swindell, who holds an important position in the history of Black and female athletics at UT, put up major rebounding and shooting statistics during her four years as a Longhorn. Like Page, until the 2020s, she was mostly an afterthought in the story of one of the powerhouse teams in women's college basketball. That has changed, though. When the Moody Center opened in April 2022, replacing the Frank Erwin Center as the home of Texas basketball, it was decorated throughout with art and murals from local Austin artists.[4] Of the 17 murals in the Moody, two feature Longhorn basketball stars. One is of Kevin Durant, who won the John R. Wooden Award and the Naismith College Player of the Year Award in 2007 for his single season of dominant basketball at UT. The other is of Swindell, an image of her playing

[3] Rodney Page in discussion with the author, September 29, 2021, 53:41–54:16.
[4] "Tempo: A Walking Exhibition of Austin Music and Culture," The Moody Center, https://moodycenteratx.com/tempo/, accessed on March 11, 2025.

basketball in the 1970s, dressed in her burnt orange and white uniform, two-stories tall in full color.[5]

This dissertation, "Desexigration and Desegregation: Gender, Race, and Women's Basketball at the University of Texas in the 1970s," examines the ways in which the University of Texas addressed gender and racial discrimination following the passage of major civil rights legislation and during the early years of the women's intercollegiate athletics department through the lens of its most high-profile team, the women's basketball team. While administrators at UT were fearful of students or faculty of color having their own, separate spaces within the larger university, they purposefully splintered women's athletics from men's, forcing the women to operate on their own. Desegregation efforts demanded that marginalized people assimilate into the white populace while desexigration efforts required separation and isolation for female athletes. In athletics specifically, the intense fight to carve out and maintain any space for women caused many administrators and coaches, who were often white, to focus solely on gender discrimination with little concern for the impact of race. Caught in the middle of these policies were Black female athletes like Swindell, who were navigating multiple institutional structures that were hostile to their presence. Through the extensive use of primary sources and interviews with people involved in women's basketball and women's athletics in the 1970s at Texas, "Desexigration and Desegregation" captures how Donna Lopiano, Jody Conradt, Betty Thompson, Rodney Page, Retha Swindell, and many others built one of the most successful women's athletic departments in the country despite the constraints under which they operated and how their decisions, both good and bad, set women's athletics on a path it is still on, many decades later.

[5] "Muralist J Muzacz," Moody Center, https://moodycenteratx.com/mural-jmuzacz/, accessed on March 11, 2025.

The terms "desexigration" and "desegregation" were chosen purposefully.[6] As segregationist policies and laws began to fall or be overturned during the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s in the United States, the result was desegregation, a slow process that was not linear and often looked very different in different locations. The word "integration" is often used interchangeably with "desegregation," but I have chosen to specifically call the efforts to diversify the University of Texas in the 1970s the latter because of how little was accomplished in regard to racial discrimination during the decade. There is a finality to the word "integration," implying that the effort to full rectify the vestiges of segregation has been completed. "Desegregation" makes more clear that the effort is still underway.

"Desexigration," as a term, became more common in feminist circles in the late 1960s and the first half of the 1970s. In 1969, Nancy Sharp of the *Oakland Tribune*, in describing the work of the National Organization for Women (NOW), wrote that NOW "has been busy stirring things up in the name of 'desexigration.'"[7] Sharp did not define the word as its play on "desegregation" most likely would have been enough to inform readers of its meaning. In 1971, NOW sponsored Women's Rights Day events in New York City, which included a protest where the crowd chanted, "We can't bear any more bull. Desexegrate Wall Street now."[8] The word appeared in the *Austin American-Statesman* in 1973, in an article about the historic three-day National Women's Political Caucus that took place in Houston that February. Congresswoman Pat Schroeder told the crowd at the convention, "'Desexigration is running into some of the same

[6] "Desexigration" was also spelled "desexegration," but there was not one dominant form of the word. Since I am using the word as UT's Equal Employment Opportunity Officer did in a letter in 1973, I have adopted her spelling of the word. Mary Teague to Lorene Rogers, December 4, 1973, UT President's Office Records, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

[7] Nancy Sharp, "NOW: Fighting the War for 'Desexigration,'" *Oakland Tribune*, August 26, 1969.

[8] "Women Harass Wall Street; 'Desexegration' Is Demanded," *Chicago Tribune*, August 27, 1971.

snags as desegregation. But the time is ripe for change because the American public is tired of pap, tired of crap."[9]

These changes — desexigration and desegregation — were both massive disruptions in long-standing cultural structures. At the University of Texas and plenty of other educational institutions, desexigration was a fundamentally different enterprise than racial desegregation, though, because the former was built on the idea that men's and women's sports were two separate categories and the latter's entire purpose was to collapse students and faculty of different races into a single body. There's a way that race, then, was erased as a primary issue within women's sports because the overarching organizational principle was forming a bloc of women athletes and their supporters to stand up to men's athletics. Also, since the initial desegregation efforts had already happened in most athletic departments before Title IX passed in 1972, women's integration of athletic departments was a footnote rather than as part of the main narrative. In yet another way, women were simply following men's lead. Women of color, though, knew that erasing race would just paper over racism within women's athletics and said as much as early as 1976, if not before.[10]

Stories of women's sports are often told as one-way progressive successes: what comes after is always better than what was before. By evaluating desexigration alongside desegregation instead of as two separate phenomena, this dissertation argues that attempts to end gender and racial discrimination in athletics were not linear and were often uneven. Many white women, like Lopiano and Conradt, found new, if not challenging, avenues open to them while many women of

[9] Dixie Shipp, "Women Unite to Organize National Political Caucus," *Austin American-Statesman*, February 10, 1973.

[10] In her thesis about minority women in the AIAW, Alpha Alexander wrote, "After a research conference at Temple University in 1976 entitled 'Black Women in Sport', the main concern emerging from the conference was the lack of information available on the Black woman in sports." Alexander, "Status of Minority Women in the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women" (Thesis, Temple University, 1978), 1.

color, especially Black women, were overlooked or ignored in yet another arena of their lives. These trends have continued for decades, especially the higher up the coaching or administrative ladder you travel. Historian Amira Rose Davis wrote in 2021, "While Black women have a robust history in the game as players, they are underrepresented on the sidelines, especially as head coaches. Despite Black women making up nearly 50 percent of players in the so-called 'Power Five' conferences, they account for less than 15 percent of the head coaches in those same conferences."[11] Before 2017, no Black woman had ever been the athletic director at a school in one of the five biggest collegiate sport conferences. The Global Sport Institute found that between 2010 and 2019, there were "385 athletic director changes across 248 Division I athletic departments," and despite that much turnover, "just 11 hired as athletic directors during that time period."[12] By studying desexigration and desegregation's effects on a single team and in a single women's athletics department, it becomes clear how these two forces corrected some historical discriminatory trends and perpetuated others.

There are concrete reasons for studying women's basketball in Texas in the 1970s. First, the 1970s was an important moment of political and civic expansion in the United States. Historians have long written about the "Second Reconstruction" as the period stretching from roughly the 1950s through to the 1980s, most often referring to the Black civil rights movement that saw such legislative milestones as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of

[11] Amira Rose Davis, "'It Means a Lot': Why Black Women Basketball Coaches Are Thriving in the SEC," Global Sport Matters, November 24, 2021, https://live-global-sport-matter.ws.asu.edu/culture/2021/11/24/why-black-women-basketball-coaches-are-thriving-sec/, accessed on March 11, 2025.

[12] "Power Five" refers to the biggest, most powerful collegiate sport conferences: Atlantic Coast Conference, Big Ten Conference, Big 12 Conference, Southeastern Conference, and Pac-12 Conference. Amira Rose Davis, "Chutes and Ladders: Black Women ADs' Long Journey to the Top," Global Sport Matters, May 24, 2021, https://live-global-sport-matter.ws.asu.edu/culture/2021/05/24/nina-king-duke-tradition-black-women-ads-journey/, accessed on March 11, 2025.

1965. Manning Marable defined it more broadly as "a series of massive confrontations concerning the status of the African American and other national minorities (e.g., Indians, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Asians) in the nation's economic, social and political institutions."[13] These shifts were happening alongside and in conjunction with anti-war protests that questioned violent American intervention overseas, the rise of Second Wave Feminism, and a burgeoning LGBTQ+ civil rights movement. This moment held such possibilities and offered up radical re-imaginings of what society–and sport–could be.

Second, Texas and the University of Texas are places worth exploring in depth during the Second Reconstruction. As Frank Guridy has argued, the state of Texas "was at the center of the South's movement from the rural society of the Cotton Belt to the new suburban Sunbelt."[14] Amilcar Shabazz has noted that Texas is unique because it is both southern and western, containing within it the institutional discriminatory practices and laws of the Jim Crow south and also the expansive framework of a state once controlled by Mexico and with a large population of Latin American, particularly Mexican, migrants and their descendants (what Shabazz refers to as a "a Trojan horse within the fortress of white supremacy").[15] Dwonna Goldstone, in *Integrating the 40 Acres: The Fifty-Year Struggle for Racial Equality at the University of Texas*, explains it this way: "UT's struggle to integrate constituted both a southern and western experience—southern in the sense that the state resisted integration, western in the sense that it did not resist too hard."[16]

[13] Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945-2006*, 3rd ed. (University Press of Mississippi, 2007), Kindle edition, locations 53–54.

[14] Frank A. Guridy, *The Sports Revolution: How Texas Changed the Culture of American Athletics* (University of Texas Press, 2021), 5.

[15] Amilcar Shabazz, *Advancing Democracy: African Americans and the Struggle for Access and Equity in Higher Education in Texas* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 5.

[16] Dwonna Goldstone, *Integrating the 40 Acres: The Fifty-Year Struggle for Racial Equality at the University of Texas* (University of Georgia Press, 2012), 12.

It's also important to note that the University of Texas was the site of one of the most important legal rulings for integration before *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. In 1950, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of Heman Sweatt, a Black man who wanted to attend law school at UT, and against Theophilus Painter in his position as the president of the university. The ruling set a precedent for *Brown* and forced UT to desegregate its graduate and professional programs years before *Brown* would force desegregation throughout all educational institutions.[17]

UT has a long history with gender inclusion (to a point) on its campus. Female students attended Texas since it opened its doors in 1883, though none of those women were Black until the 1950s.[18] In 1974, Lorene Rogers became president of UT when her predecessor was fired and she was appointed to the interim position. She is believed to be the first woman to lead a major university in the United States. She held the position for six years and is still the only woman to have ever done so at Texas.[19]

Third, the changes from the Second Reconstruction extended into sports and the state of Texas often played a prominent role. As Guridy writes about extensively in *The Sports Revolution: How Texas Changed the Culture of American Athletics*, Houston was home to both the launch of the first women's professional tournament in the United State in 1970 and the site of one of the most famous events of in gender and sports history, The Battle of the Sexes, in 1973.[20] Feminist sports icon Billie Jean King beat outspoken misogynist Bobby Riggs in a tennis match whose cultural reverberations still echo fifty years later. King returned to Houston in 1977 for the National Women's Conference, which was funded by the United States Congress, sponsored by

[17] Goldstone, *Integrating the 40 Acres*, 14 - 35.
[18] Avrel Seale, "Ladies' First," UT News, March 8, 2019, https://news.utexas.edu/2019/03/08/ladies-first/, accessed on March 11, 2025.
[19] "Lorene Lane Rogers," University of Texas at Austin, Office of the President, https://president.utexas.edu/past-presidents/lorene-lane-rogers, accessed on March 11, 2025.
[20] Guridy, *The Sports Revolution*, chapter 4.

the United Nations, and attended by two thousand delegates and over fifteen thousand spectators. Representative Patsy Mink, the first woman of color in the U.S. House of Representatives and one of the Congressional leaders behind the passage of Title IX, helped create the commission that hosted the conference. King was one of thousands of people who participated in a torch relay that had started in Seneca Falls, New York and was carried to Houston, mimicking the Olympic torch relay[21].

In Austin, students at the University of Texas protested extensively during the 1960s, successfully ending segregated housing, challenging the school's censorship of student-created materials including the school paper, and marching against the Vietnam War.[22] Petitions and protests eventually led the Board of Regents in 1963 to desegregate all activities at the school, including athletics.[23] UT was part of the Southwest Conference (SWC), the precursor to today's Big 12 Conference, which had a so-called "gentleman's agreement" between schools to not integrate sports. UT and the University of Arkansas both held off the longest for classroom integration and the integration of their football teams.[24] They were also the best football programs in the SWC. *The New York Times* reported that Texas' position within the conference was so important that "most schools were believed to be waiting for a move by Texas before taking

[21] Dianna Wray, "The 1977 National Women's Conference in Houston Was Supposed to Change the World. What Went Wrong?," *Houstonia Magazine*, February 2018, https://www.houstoniamag.com/news-and-city-life/2018/01/1977-national-womens-conference-houston. Debbie Mauldin Cottrell, "National Women's Conference, 1977," Texas State Historical Association, December 1, 1995 (updated June 30, 2023), https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/national-womens-conference-1977. Both accessed on March 11, 2025.

[22] Beverly Burr, "History of Student Activism at the University of Texas at Austin (1960-1988)" (Master's thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1988), 6–50.

[23] Goldstone, *Integrating the 40 Acres*, 129 - 130. Guridy, *The Sports Revolution*, 97.

[24] Goldstone, *Integrating the 40 Acres*, 113. Guridy, *The Sports Revolution*, 86.

action" on integrating athletics.[25] Eventually, all men's sports would be desegregated by 1970 and women's sports finally in 1975 when Retha Swindell joined the basketball team.

UT was also an important place for women's sports on a national level. The Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW), which formed in 1971 and was the major governing body for women's collegiate athletics (similarly to how the National Collegiate Athletics Association oversaw men's collegiate athletics), had a Texas chapter, the TAIAW. Corye Perez Beene, in a dissertation about the TAIAW, has argued that "Texas added a significant dimension to female sport governance and greatly influenced the direction and scope of women's intercollegiate athletics nationally."[26] This was in large part because of Donna Lopiano, who was a major supporter of the AIAW until it's very end in 1982, when it was subsumed by the NCAA. Lopiano was the AIAW's penultimate president.[27] As discussed earlier, in her capacity as a supporter of women's sports and her position as the new athletic director for women's sports at UT, Lopiano also helped to successfully thwart the attempt by Texas Senator John Tower, and his supporters like Darrell Royal and J. Neils Thompson from UT, to exempt revenue-producing men's sports from Title IX compliance.

This is all to say that studying sports at the University of Texas in the 1970s reveals a lot about what was happening within women's sports, the desegregation of collegiate sports, and the intersection of both.

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[25] "Sports Integration at U. of Texas Endorsed by Board of Regents," *New York Times*, November 10, 1963, https://www.nytimes.com/1963/11/10/archives/sports-integration-at-u-of-texas-endorsed-by-board-of-regents.html.

[26] Corye Perez Beene "Deep in the Sports of Texas: TAIAW, Title IX and Women's Intercollegiate Athletics in the 1970s" (PhD diss., University of North Texas, 2013), 5.

[27] The first two words of Ying Wushanley's monograph about the AIAW are "Donna Lopiano." Ying Wushanley, *Playing Nice and Losing: The Struggle for Control of Women's Intercollegiate Athletics, 1960-2000* (Syracuse University Press, 2004), 1. Pamela Grundy and Susan Shackelford, *Shattering the Glass: The Remarkable History of Women's Basketball* (University of North Carolina Press, 2025), 180.

While this project is built most heavily on primary sources, it does owe a large debt of gratitude to different areas of scholarship including sports in the 1970s, gender equity in sport, integration at the University of Texas and in Austin, the history of race and sport in the United States, Black women in sport, and the history of women's basketball.

Sports in the 1970s has been a hot topic as of late. Michael MacCambridge's *The Big Time: How the 1970s Transformed Sports in America,* which was published in 2023, is extensive in its scope but has some dedicated space to telling the story of the UT women's basketball and athletics program during that decade. It primarily focuses on Lopiano and Conradt, and does not engage with race in the department. It offers some insights and details about the early years of the program that were useful to filling out the narrative in this dissertation.[28]

Perhaps more than any other book, Frank Guridy's *The Sports Revolution: How Texas Changed the Culture of American Athletics* comes closest to doing the work that this project set out to do. *The Sports Revolution* is about sports in Texas during the 1960s and '70s. Guridy tells the stories of specific moments or teams — collegiate, amateur, and professional — to show how the Second Restoration opened up sporting spaces for people previously excluded and how power reasserted itself in the wake of that expansion. Guridy argues that "sport simultaneously catalyzed new visions of belonging and shut off other possibilities for more substantial forms of change and inclusion."[29] Guridy finds that even after a massive societal change in terms of inclusion in sport, progress was (and remains) not linear. *The Sports Revolution* provides a rich context in which to understand UT athletics in the 1970s.

[28] Michael MacCambridge, *The Big Time: How the 1970s Transformed Sports in America* (Grand Central Publishing, 2023).

[29] Guridy, *The Sports Revolution*, 4 - 5, 348 - 349. For more on Texas and Texans in the 1970s more generally, see Jason Mellard, *Progressive country: how the 1970s transformed the Texan in popular culture* (University of Texas Press, 2013).

Amira Rose Davis' article, "Sporting Revolutions: The 1970s and the Making of Modern College Athletics," is a masterclass in depth and brevity. Davis manages to connect the lines between the financial crisis of college football and how the sport coped, the Black freedom struggle, Title IX, and gender, in order to show how "the 1970s was a pivotal decade that altered the form and function of intercollegiate athletics." Davis' call to see the ways that integration was gendered and Title IX was racialized deeply influenced how I thought about and analyzed my sources and the world from which they came.[30]

As Davis addressed in "Sporting Revolutions," the scholarship around women's college athletics is primarily focused on gender equity in sport. Two of the most useful for this project are Mary Jo Festle's *Playing Nice: Politics and Apologies in Women's Sports*, which combines history and sociology to study the gendered and restrictive ways women have participated in sport since 1950, and Susan Cahn's *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Women's Sports*, which traces how women's sports were marginalized throughout the 20th century and shows how studying women's sport with rigor leads to "critical insights into the history of gender relations in American society."[31] Title IX — it's passage, implementation, and impact — has received the bulk of scholarly attention within this subfield. Linda Jean Carpenter and R. Vivian Acosta's *Title IX* and Sherry Boschert's recent *37 Words: Title IX and Fifty Years of Fighting Sex Discrimination*

[30] Amira Rose Davis, "Sporting Revolutions: The 1970s and the Making of Modern College Athletics," *Modern American History* 7, no. 2 (2024): 283–289.

[31] Mary Jo Festle, *Playing Nice: Politics and Apologies in Women's Sports* (Columbia University Press, 1996). Susan K. Cahn, *Coming On Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Women's Sport* (Harvard University Press, 1994), 6. Jaime Schultz's *Qualifying Times: Points of Change in U.S. Women's Sport* (University of Illinois Press, 2014) covers a similar time period to Cahn and with a similar purpose, to show how the "complex matrix of gender differentiation" in sport has marked "the female athletic body as different from -- as less than," 13. For more on gender and sport, see Susan Ware, Game, *Set, Match: Billie Jean King and the Revolution in Women's Sports* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Susan J. Bandy, "Gender and the 'cultural turn' in the study of sport and physical cultures," *Sport in Society* 19, no. 5 (2016): 726 - 735; and Joan Steidinger, *Stand up and Shout out : Women's Fight for Equal Pay, Equal Rights, and Equal Opportunities in Sports* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2020).

both provide an exhaustive overview of the law's history.[32] I found Deborah Brake's *Getting in the Game: Title IX and the Women's Sports Revolution*, which offers a legal history analysis, Susan Ware's *Title IX: A Brief History with Documents*, and Ying Wushanley's *Playing Nice and Losing: The Struggle for Control of Women's Intercollegiate Athletics, 1960 - 2000*, which is a critical look at the AIAW that traces the organization's slow demise at the hands of the NCAA across the 1970s, particularly relevant for this project.[33]

While a fair amount of scholarship on Title IX and its implementation suggests ever-evolving progress in women's sports around gender equity, there is a robust scholastic critique of the law.[34] One large area of criticism and interrogation regarding Title IX is in the way it separates men's and women's sports into two distinct categories. Title IX, unlike almost any other civil rights law and specifically in terms of athletics, segregates the group (women) whose discrimination it is attempting to mitigate. That segregation is based on the idea that biological differences between men and women are clear cut, obvious, and natural, despite the messiness of

[32] Linda Jean Carpenter and R. Vivian Acosta, *Title IX* (Human Kinetics, 2005). Sherry Boschert, *37 Words: Title IX and Fifty Years of Fighting Sex Discrimination* (The New Press, 2022). For other general works on Title IX, see Jessica Gavora, *Tilting the Playing Field : Schools, Sports, Sex, and Title IX* (Encounter Books, 2002); Nancy Hogshead-Makar and Andrew S. Zimbalist, *Equal Play : Title IX and Social Change* (Temple University Press, 2007); Rachel M. La Croix, "'You've Come Part of the Way, Baby': The Status of Women and Women's Sports in Intercollegiate Athletics 28 Years after Title IX" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2007); and Victoria Jackson, "Title IX and the Big Time: Women's Intercollegiate Athletics at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1950-1992" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 2015).

[33] See also Diane LeBlanc and Allys Swanson's *Playing for Equality: Oral Histories of Women Leaders in the Early Years of Title IX* (McFarland, 2016), which provides eight first-person accounts of women whose lives were directly affected by the passage of Title IX. For more on the AIAW, see Dale E. Plyley, "The AIAW vs. the NCAA: A Struggle for Power to Govern Women's Athletics in American Institutions of Higher Education, 1972–1982" (Master's thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1997); Robert Scott Russell, "What If They Were Right? Title IX and the AIAW's Philosophy of Coaching and Athletic Administration" (PhD diss., Purdue University, 2015); and Diane Lynn Williams, "Inside the AIAW: The Philosophy, People, and Power of the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW)" (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 2020).

[34] Welch Suggs' *A Place on the Team: The Triumph and Tragedy of Title IX* (Princeton University Press, 2006) is particularly good at highlighting the success and limits of the law. See also Jaime Schultz, "IX at 50: A critical celebration," *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal* 30, no. 2 (2022): 97-108, and Carole Oglesby, "IX and the Expectation of Equity," *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal* 30, no. 2 (2022): 85-88.

biology and ever-changing ideas around gender. Eileen L. McDonagh and Laura Pappano, in 2008, wrote a book advocating against the current model of separating girls from boys in sports. They argued that this separation "reflects antiquated social patterns and false beliefs. And what's more, it enforces, sometimes baldly, sometimes subtly, the notion that men's activities and men's power are the real thing and women's are not. Women's sports, like women's power, are second-class."[35] Scholars have continued to interrogate this tension in the implementation of Title IX between real worries over women's sports being subsumed fully by men's sports if women's sports is not given its own discrete space and the concern, as McDonagh and Pappano write, that inherent in the current setup is the disparagement of women's sports.[36]

For this project, the work of Elizabeth A. Sharrow was central to how I thought about Title IX. In two articles – "Female athlete politic: Title IX and the naturalization of sex difference in public policy" and "Sex segregation as policy problem: A gendered policy paradox"– Sharrow focuses on foundational questions around Title IX, civil rights, and, in the parlance of this project, desexigration. Sharrow examines our cultural assumptions about bodily difference and their role within sports, and questions the validity of those assumptions by looking at the consequences of relying on separation to achieve equality. Her work traces these debates back to the 1970s and

[35] Eileen L. McDonagh and Laura Pappano, *Playing with the Boys: Why Separate Is Not Equal in Sports* (Oxford University Press, 2008), x.

[36] For more on the debate over and consequences of separating men's and women's sports, see Suzanne Sangree, "Title IX and the Contact Sports Exemption: Gender Stereotypes in a Civil Rights Statute," *Connecticut Law Review* 32, no. 2 (Winter 2000): 381-450; Lindsay Parks Pieper, *Sex Testing: Gender Policing in Women's Sports* (University of Illinois Press, 2016); Adrienne N. Milner and Jommills Henry Braddock II, ex *Segregation in Sports : Why Separate Is Not Equal* (Praeger, 2016); Jaime Schultz, "Sex Segregation in Elite Sport: What's the Problem?" in *Gender Diversity and Sport*, eds. Gemma Whitcomb and Elizabeth Peel (Routledge, 2022), 13-33; James N. Druckman and Elizabeth A. Sharrow, *Equality Unfulfilled: How Title IX's Policy Design Undermines Change to College Sports* (Cambridge University Press, 2023); Katie Barnes, *Fair Play: How Sports Shape the Gender Debates* (St. Martin's Press, 2023); Michael Burke and Matthew Klugman, "Trans* Athletes in Sport: Not Ceding to the Sex/Gender Binary of Gender Critical Feminism" 1, *Sociology of Sport Journal* 1 (2024): 1-10; and Anna Posbergh, Anna Baeth, Sheree Bekker, and Roc Rochon, "Sports and the Limits of the Binary: An Introduction," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 1 (2024): 1-7.

forces scholars to consider how natural or obvious they are and how much they are a product of the time and place.[37]

There has been very good work done on race and racial discrimination at the University of Texas and I relied heavily on it while putting together this project. *Integrating the 40 Acres: The Fifty-Year Struggle for Racial Equality at the University of Texas* by Dwonna Goldstone is a comprehensive look at how Black students and allies pressured (and sometimes forced) the administration to finally overturn its racist, exclusionary policies, not only around attending class but in dormitories and athletics. It is also a study of the ways in which white administrators and their supporters attempted to "limit integration as much as they legally could." Thomas Russell's article "'Keep Negroes Out of Most Classes Where There Are a Large Number of Girls': The Unseen Power of the Ku Klux Klan and Standardized Testing at the University of Texas, 1899–1999," is an example of how to use sources across large swaths of time in order to explain specific choices that historical actors have made. It also provided a lot of context for the white supremacist underpinnings during the University of Texas' first decades. Brendan James Render's recent piece in the *Journal of Civil and Human Rights* on how Black students at the University of Texas demanded racial quotas and were denied them helped me formulate my understanding of desegregation as assimilationist and desexigration as separatist. Beverly Burr's 1988 thesis about student activism at UT and Martin Kulhman's article on direct student action were both thorough and detailed.[38] I also found Amilcar Shabazz's monograph *Advancing Democracy: African*

[37] Elizabeth A. Sharrow, "Female athlete politic: Title IX and the naturalization of sex difference in public policy," *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 5, no. 1 (2017): 55–68. Elizabeth A. Sharrow, "Sex segregation as policy problem: A gendered policy paradox," *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 9, no. 2 (2021): 55. Elizabeth A. Sharrow, "Title IX's interpretation has reshaped athletics in good and bad ways," *Washington Post*, June 20, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2022/06/20/title-ixs-interpretation-has-reshaped-athletics-good-bad-ways/, accessed on March 10, 2025.

[38] Goldstone, *Integrating the 40 Acres*, ix. Thomas D. Russell, "'Keep Negroes Out of Most Classes

Americans and the Struggle for Access and Equity in Higher Education in Texas very useful in understanding UT's place in higher education within the state and the way in which race and desegregation affected all of Texas.[39]

As We Saw It: The Story of Integration at the University of Texas at Austin is an edited volume that profiles individual Black students who attended UT in the first decades of integration. *As We Saw It* built on Almetris Duren and Louise Iscoe's *Overcoming: A History of Black Integration at the University of Texas*, which was published in 1979. Duren ran a co-op for Black female students before they were allowed to live on campus and then, once the dorms were desegregated, worked for the university and helped Black students acclimate. She kept newspaper clippings and university documents pertaining to Black students and staff, and, using her personal

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Where There Are a Large Number of Girls': The Unseen Power of the Ku Klux Klan and Standardized Testing at the University of Texas, 1899 - 1999," *South Texas Law Review* 52, no. 1 (Fall 2010), 1–36. Brandon James Render, "'We Want a Quota': Black Student Enrollment at the University of Texas at Austin, 1969-78," *The Journal of Civil and Human Rights* 8, no. 1 (2022), 28–50. Beverly Burr, "History of Student Activism." Martin Kuhlman, "Direct Action at the University of Texas during the Civil Rights Movement, 1960-1965," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 98, no. 4 (April 1995): 550–566. Asher Price published an article at *The Atlantic* in 2019 that was heavily indebted to the work of Russell and Goldstone, but provided some additional context that was helpful. Asher Price, "How UT Used Standardized Testing to Slow Integration," *The Atlantic*, September 19, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/09/how-ut-used-standardized-testing-to-slow-integration/597814/. For more on integration at the University of Texas, see Julian Vasquez Heilig, Laurel Dietz, and Michael Volonnino, "From Jim Crow to the top 10% plan: A historical analysis of Latina/o access to a selective flagship university," *Enrollment Management Journal: Student Access, Finance, and Success in Higher Education* 5, no. 3 (2011): 83–109; Julian Vasquez Heilig, Richard J. Reddick, Choquette Hamilton, and Laurel Dietz, "Actuating equity?: Historical and contemporary analyses of African American access to selective higher education from Sweatt to the top 10 percent law," *Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy* 27, no. 1 (2011): 11-27; and Alexis Allen, "You Belong Here: An Analysis of Belonging In The Black Student Population at The University Of Texas at Austin" (Master's thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 2019).

[39] Shabazz, *Advancing Democracy*. For more on integration in education in Texas, see James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935* (University of North Carolina Press, 1988); D. Keith Luberto, "The Integration Movement: Texas High School Athletic and Academic Contests," *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 18, no. 2 (2004): 147–165; Nedra Kristina Lee, "Freedom's Paradox: Negotiating Race and Class in Jim Crow Texas" (PhD diss., University of Texas, 2014); Michael Hurd, *Thursday Night Lights: The Story of Black High School Football in Texas* (University of Texas Press, 2017); Alwyn Barr, "The Civil Rights Movement in Texas," in *Black Americans and the Civil Rights Movement in the West*, eds. Bruce A. Glasrud and Cary D. Wintz (University of Oklahoma Press, 2019), 236–251.

experiences and her collection of documents, co-wrote the first monograph on Texas' integration efforts.[40]

The history of race and desegregation at UT is impossible to unravel without connecting it to the city of Austin and its own history of racial discrimination. Andrew M. Busch's *City in a Garden: Environmental Transformations and Racial Justice in Twentieth-Century Austin, Texas* delves deeply into how race intersects with both the natural and built environment in the city, arguing that city officials and residents used their desire to maintain green spaces as a justification for discrimination. Eliot Tretter's *Shadows of a Sunbelt City: The Environment, Racism, and the Knowledge Economy in Austin* covers similar ground but is more interested in how urban policy decisions, including those of the University of Texas, crafted segregated spaces in the city. Both were critical for this dissertation.[41]

To tell the story of desegregation at the University of Texas, it's necessary to address sports. To this end, "Desexigration and Desegregation" draws on the field of race and sport, which is too large to cover in full.[42] The edited volume *In the Game: Race, Identity, and Sports in the*

[40] Gregory J. Vincent, Virginia A. Cumberbatch, and Leslie A. Blair, *As We Saw It: The Story of Integration at the University of Texas at Austin* (University of Texas Press, 2018). Almetris Marsh Duren and Louise Iscoe, *Overcoming: A History of Black Integration at the University of Texas at Austin* (University Printing Division, University of Texas at Austin, 1979).

[41] Andrew M. Busch, *City in a Garden: Environmental Transformations and Racial Justice in Twentieth-Century Austin, Texas* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017). Eliot M. Tretter, *Shadows of a Sunbelt City: The Environment, Racism, and the Knowledge Economy in Austin* (University of Georgia Press, 2016). For more on race and the city of Austin, see Jason McDonald, *Racial Dynamics in Early Twentieth-Century Austin, Texas* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2012); Javier Auyero, ed., *Invisible in Austin: Life and Labor in an American City* (University of Texas Press, 2015); and John A. Moretta, "Political hippies and hip politicos: Counterculture alliance and cultural radicalism in 1960s Austin, Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 123, no. 3 (2020): 266-291.

[42] For a more comprehensive look, see David Kenneth Wiggins and Patrick B. Miller, *The Unlevel Playing Field : A Documentary History of the African American Experience in Sport* (University of Illinois Press, 2003); Michael E. Lomax, ed., *Sports and the Racial Divide : African American and Latino Experience in an Era of Change* (University Press of Mississippi, 2008); Ben Carrington, "The critical sociology of race and sport: The first fifty years," *Annual Review of Sociology* 39, no. 1 (2013): 379-398; Amy Bass, "State of the field: Sports history and the "cultural turn"," *The Journal of American History* 101, no. 1 (2014): 148-172; and Amira Rose Davis, "New Directions in African American Sports History: A Field of One's Own," *The*

Twentieth Century and Charles Ross' *Race and Sport: The Struggle for Equality on and off the Field* are more extensive studies of this intersection. Kevin Hylton's *'Race' and Sport: Critical Race Theory* and the collection of essays in *Sport, Race, and Ethnicity: Narratives of Difference and Diversity* push scholars to think through how they study and frame race within sports. Works like C. Richard King and Charles Springwood's *Beyond the Cheers: Race as Spectacle in College Sport* and Dana Brooks and Ronald Althouse's *Racism in College Athletics* tackle the issue within the sphere of collegiate sports.[43] For UT in particular, Goldstone has a chapter on men's sports and *As We Saw It*'s chapter on athletes includes a profile of Retha Swindell. Asher Price's biography of Earl Campbell, one of the most successful running backs in UT history who played on the football team in the mid-1970s, covers similar ground to this project, but uses Campbell as the through line. Price's book was particularly useful for sketching out race on the Texas football team both before and during Campbell's time. I also found Grant Abston's thesis, which focused on the first Black players who desegregated the men's basketball team at UT, useful.[44]

The University of Texas often shows up in scholarship on the integration of sports in higher education. Charles Martin's *Benching Jim Crow: The Rise and Fall of the Color Line in Southern College Sports, 1890 - 1980*, Lane Demas' *Integrating the Gridiron: Black Civil Rights*

Journal of African American History 106, no. 2 (2021): 182-195.

[43] Amy Bass, ed., *In The Game: Race, Identity, and Sports in the Twentieth Century* (Macmillan, 2005). Charles Ross, ed., *Race and Sport: The Struggle for Equality on and off the Field* (University Press of Mississippi, 2006). Kevin Hylton, *'Race' and Sport: Critical Race Theory* (Routledge, 2009). Daryl Adair, ed., *Sport, Race, and Ethnicity: Narratives of Difference and Diversity* (Fitness Information Technology, 2011). C. Richard King and Charles Springwood, *Beyond the Cheers: Race as Spectacle in College Sport* (State University of New York Press, 2001). Dana D. Brooks and Ronald C. Althouse, eds., *Racism in College Athletics* (1999).

[44] Goldstone, *Integrating the 40 Acres*, 112–134. Vincent, Cumberbatch, and Blair, *As We Saw It*, 73–77. Asher Price, *Earl Campbell: Yards After Contact* (University of Texas Press, 2019). Grant David Abston, "Integrating Texas Athletics: The Forgotten Story of the First Black Basketball Players" (Master's thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 2011). For more on the integration of the UT football team, see Darren D. Kelly, "Paying the price for 'slow integration': A history of race and football at The University of Texas at Austin from 1954 to 1972 (Master's thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 2009).

and American College Football, and Michael Hurd's *Black College Football, 1892-1992: One Hundred Years of History, Education, & Pride* are good examples of work on this monumental shift in collegiate sports, all of which include UT's history in some capacity.[45] Most of this work on sports and integration, though, is about men.

In an overarching look at the field of African American sports history, Amira Rose Davis writes that, "one clear line of continuity in assessments of the field … is the glaring absence of Black women in the scholarship."[46] One must hunt to find them. As Davis makes clear, though, the acknowledgement of this particular hole in the scholarship is not new. In 1981, Tina Sloan, Carole Oglesby, Alpha Alexander, and Nikki Franke published *Black Women in Sport*, which is a collection of essays that interrogates the absence of Black women in sports narratives and writes some of them back in.[47] In 2005, Jennifer Bruening asked of scholars of sport, "are all the women white and all the Blacks men?" Bruening continued, "Historically in sport, African American women have been rendered nearly invisible…. When African American women are included, typically it is either as women or as African Americans. Rarely are they given their own category, simultaneously belonging to both groups."[48]

There are scholars who have focused on Black women in sport, of course. Amira Rose Davis' dissertation, "'Watch What We Do': The Politics and Possibilities of Black Women's

[45] Charles H. Martin, *Benching Jim Crow: The Rise and Fall of the Color Line in Southern College Sports, 1890-1980* (University of Illinois Press, 2010). Lane Demas, *Integrating the Gridiron: Black Civil Rights and American College Football* (Rutgers University Press, 2010). Michael Hurd, *Black College Football, 1892-1992: One Hundred Years of History, Education, & Pride* (Schiffer, 2000). See also Jeff Miller, *The Game Changers: Abner Haynes, Leon King, and the Fall of Major College Football's Color Barrier in Texas* (Sports Publishing, 2016).

[46] Davis, "New Directions in African American Sports History: A Field of One's Own," 189.

[47] Tina Sloan, Carole Oglesby, Alpha Alexander, and Nikki Franke, eds., *Black Women in Sport* (American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, 1981). See also Margaret Dianne Murphy, "The involvement of Blacks in women's athletics in member institutions of the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 1980).

[48] Jennifer E. Bruening, "Gender and racial analysis in sport: Are all the women White and all the Blacks men?," *Quest* 57, no. 3 (2005): 334.

Athletics, 1910-1970," is perhaps the most comprehensive look at Black female athletes in the United States in the twentieth century.[49] Jennifer Bruening, along with her colleagues Ketra L. Armstrong and Donna L. Pastore, has advocated for listening to and better understanding the experiences of Black female student athletes.[50] Scholars have also studied the impact of race and gender on opportunities for women of color in sports leadership roles.[51] Sometimes, as in the case of Susan Cahn's *Coming on Strong*, it is a chapter in a larger book on gender in sport.[52] There has also been a concerted effort to understand the impact of Title IX's implementation on Black women athletes and coaches, which is often a less rosy picture than when the focus is on women athletes in general or only on white female athletes.[53] There is plenty of work left to be done.

The scholarship on women's basketball is mighty but small. There are wide-ranging looks at women's basketball history like the edited volume *A Century of Women's Basketball:*

[49] Amira Rose Davis, "'Watch What We Do'": The Politics and Possibilities of Black Women's Athletics, 1910-1970" (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2016).

[50] Jennifer E. Bruening, Ketra L. Armstrong, and Donna L. Pastore, "Listening to the Voices: The Experiences of African American Female Student Athletes," *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport* 76, no. 1 (2005): 82-100.

[51] John F. Borland, "The under-representation of Black females in NCAA Division I women's basketball head coaching positions" (PhD diss., University of Connecticut, 2008). 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.

[52] Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 110–139. Her chapter focuses on Black female track and field athletes.

[53] 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 Law Journal* 42, no. 1 (1998): 105–128. Patricia A. Cain, "Women, Race, and Sports: Life before Title IX," *Journal of Gender, Race, & Justice* 4, no. 2 (2000): 337–352. Jerome A. Dees, "Access or Interest: Why Brown Has Benefited African-American Women More than Title IX," University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law Review 76, no. 3 (2008): 625–642. Sarah K. Fields, "Title IX and African American Female Athletes," in *Sports and the Racial Divide: African American and Latino Experience in an Era of Change*, ed. Michael E. Lomax and Kenneth L. Shropshire (University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 126–145. Moneque Walker Pickett, Marvin P. Dawkins, and Jomills Henry Braddock," Race and Gender Equity in Sports: Have White and African American Females Benefited Equally from Title IX?," *American Behavioral Scientist* 56, no. 11 (2012): 1581–1603. Erin Whiteside and Amber Roessner, "Forgotten and left behind: Political apathy and privilege at Title IX's 40th anniversary," *Communication & Sport* 6, no. 1 (2018): 3-24. Evelyn M. Simien, Nneka Arinze, and Jennier McGarry, "A Portrait of Marginality in Sport and Education: Toward a Theory of Intersectionality and Raced-Gendered Experiences for Black Female College Athletes," *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 40, no. 3 (2019): 409–427. Felecia Theune, "Brown, Title IX and the impact of race and sex segregation on sports participation for Black females," *Sociology Compass* 13, no. 1 (2019): e12661. Cordelia Hope Brazile, "Before and After Title IX: The Persistent Entanglement of Race and Gender in Women's Collegiate Sport, 1892-1992" (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2023).

From Frailty to Final Four, Pamela Grundy and Susan Shackleford's *Shattering the Glass: The Remarkable History of Women's Basketball*, and Joanne Lannin's *Finding a Way to Play: The Pioneering Spirit of Women's Basketball*.[54] Scholars have focused significant attention on girls' and women's basketball in the state of Iowa because the sport had such a stronghold there.[55] Robert W. Ikard's *Just for Fun: The Story of AAU Women's Basketball* is the most complete look at the Amateur Athletic Union's impact on women's basketball.[56] There has been some limited work on the intersection of women's basketball and race.[57]

Pamela Grundy's *Learning to Win: Sports, Education, and Social Change in Twentieth-Century North Carolina* marshals an impressive number of sources in order to tell a social and cultural history of how sport, education, race, gender, and labor converged in North Carolina. It does have a fair amount about women's basketball, but it goes beyond that since she is interested in sport more generally in education. *Learning to Win* does, though, offer a model for how to use

[54] Joan S. Hult and Marianna Trekell, eds., *A Century of Women's Basketball: From Frailty to Final Four* (American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, 1991). Pamela Grundy and Susan Shackelford, *Shattering the Glass: The Remarkable History of Women's Basketball* (University of North Carolina Press, 2025). Joanne Lannin, *Finding a Way to Play: The Pioneering Spirit of Women in Basketball* (Portlandia Press, 2015). See also Joanne Lannin, *A History of Basketball for Girls and Women: From Bloomers to Big Leagues* (Lerner Pub Group, 2000); Linda Ford, *Lady Hipsters: A History of Women's Basketball in America* (Half Moon Books, 2000); and Kate Fagan and Seimone Augustus, *Hoop Muses: An Insider's Guide to Pop Culture and the (Women's) Game* (Twelve, 2023). For more on professional women's basketball, see Karra J. Porter, *Mad Seasons: The Story of the First Women's Professional Basketball League* (University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

[55] Janice A. Beran, *From Six-on-Six to Full Court Press: A Century of Iowa Girls' Basketball* (Iowa State University Press, 1993). Shelley Lucas, "Courting controversy: Gender and power in Iowa girls' basketball," *Journal of Sport History* 30, no. 3 (2003): 281-308. Max McElwain, *The Only Dance in Iowa: A History of Six-Player Girls' Basketball* (University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

[56] Robert W. Ikard, *Just for Fun: The Story of AAU Women's Basketball* (University of Arkansas Press, 2005).

[57] 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): 579. Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith, "World Champions: The 1904 Girls' Basketball Team from Fort Shaw Indian Boarding School," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* (Winter 2001): 2–25. Perhaps the most robust work on Black women in basketball are biographies and memoirs about Black basketball players and coaches. For example, Brittney Griner, *In My Skin: My Life On and Off the Basketball Court* (It Books, 2014) and Dawn Staley, *Uncommon Favor: Basketball, North Philly, My Mother, and the Life Lessons I Learned from All Three* (Atria/Black Privilege Publishing, 2025).

sport to analyze the culture and politics of a particular place.[58] Kelly Belanger's *Invisible Seasons: Title IX and the Fight for Equity in College Sports* concentrates on the 1978 Michigan State women's basketball team suing their school for non-compliance under Title IX. Belanger is mostly interested in rhetoric as the site of interrogation, using language as the primary cultural product. Still, her use of a team to tell a specific story about the impact of Title IX and how women fought for equity in the early years of the law is in the spirit of my own work.[59]

In the last few years, as the popularity of women's basketball has increased, there have been a series of monographs about the sport, including Andrew Maraniss's *Inaugural Ballers: The True Story of the First US Women's Olympic Basketball Team* about the 1976 women's basketball team that competed in Montreal and Howard Megdal's look at the impact of girls' and women's basketball in Minnesota, *Rare Gems: How Four Generations of Women Paved the Way For the WNBA*.[60] These are more popular volumes but they are attempting to fill in some of the historical holes that are too numerous in regards to women's basketball.

One final note. The most thorough work on women's basketball at the University of Texas is the last quarter of Richard Pennington's *Longhorn Hoops: The History of Texas Basketball*.[61] While this a useful reference, there are no citations in this work, so it is not possible to know from where Pennington gathered all of his information. For that reason, I chose not to use it as a cited source for this project, though I did use the section on the first few decades of

[58] Pamela Grundy, *Learning to Win: Sports, Education, and Social Change in Twentieth-Century North Carolina* (University of North Carolina Press, 2001). See also Pamela Grundy, "From Amazons to Glamazons: The Rise and Fall of North Carolina Women's Basketball, 1920-1960", *The Journal of American History* 87, no. 1 (2000): 112–46.

[59] Kelly Belanger, *Invisible Seasons: Title IX and the Fight for Equity in College Sports* (Syracuse University Press, 2017).

[60] Andrew Maraniss, *Inaugural Ballers: The True Story of the First US Women's Olympic Basketball Team* (Viking Books for Young Readers, 2022). Howard Megdal, *Rare Gems: How Four Generations of Women Paved the Way For the WNBA* (Triumph Books, 2024). Howard Megdal,

[61] Richard Pennington, *Longhorn Hoops: The History of Texas Basketball* (University of Texas Press, 1998).

basketball to help get a rough idea of the state of women's basketball at the university in order to help locate potential sources.

My research exists then at the nexus of these gaps in all of this research. What no one has done is look specifically at how one team, across a handful of years, was changed by the same forces that brought about Title IX. While there is good scholarship on the integration of athletic programs, including at the University of Texas, Rodney Page's story has only been told in pieces. It's also rare to find work that puts Black women athletes at its center, especially from the 1970s. Retha Swindell seldomly shows up in stories about the early years of UT's women's basketball. Like with MacCambridge's book, most of the attention, when it is paid, goes to Donna Lopiano and Jody Conradt. My dissertation fills in this hole.

"Desexigration and Desegregation" is divided into eight roughly chronological chapters. Chapter 1, "Women's Basketball in Texas and at the University of Texas Before 1968," traces the long history of girls' and women's basketball that existed in the state and on campus well before Title IX was passed in 1972. The first-ever basketball game on UT's campus was between two women's teams. Women played basketball for years before men ever took it up. No matter how hard female physical educators in the state and across the country tried to stifle competitive sports for girls and women, basketball remained a popular sport in Texas, especially in rural communities, throughout the twentieth century. By the time the women's intercollegiate athletics department was created at the University of Texas in the mid-1970s, there were already strong roots for it stretching back many decades.

Chapter 2, "Women Demand Varsity Athletics at the University of Texas, 1968–1973," looks at the very beginning of women's varsity and intercollegiate sports at Texas in the interim

years between when students began to demand more intercollegiate sporting opportunities and when administrators started formulating how they would structure the new department. It chronicles the creation of the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW), the national organization that oversaw rules and competition for women's collegiate sports, its Texas subsidiary, the Texas Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (TAIAW), and the passage of the federal legislation in 1972 that demanded equality between men's and women's athletics, Title IX. The struggle within the AIAW over whether female athletes should receive scholarships and the pushback from students who wanted them caused the University of Texas to lose a prized prospective golfer to their rival, Texas A&M University. This loss helped spur UT administrators to get serious about starting a women's athletics department.

Chapter 3, "Separate and Unequal: The Desexigration of Intercollegiate Athletics at the University of Texas, 1973–1974," compares how men in UT athletics approached the formation of the women's athletics department, which they often saw as a looming financial burden, especially to their beloved men's football program, with how women at Texas imagined what this new department, created from scratch, could be. In a short span of time, November 1973 to March 1974, stakeholders at the university wrote up three separate reports with recommendations for the establishment of women's athletics and submitted them to the president of the university, Stephen Spurr, to help him decide how what to do. Men wanted the women to build a separate department without any financial help from men's athletics, while the women wanted both athletic departments under the same administrative and financial umbrella. Spurr's decision to segregate the women into their own department would have long-lasting effects. In the meantime, the new women's basketball, Rodney Page, shepherded his team through its first intercollegiate season.

Chapter 4, "Together but Unequal: Desegregation at the University of Texas," is about race in Texas, Austin, and at the University of Texas, from the sixteenth century through the Republic of Texas and the Civil War, all the way to the desegregation of the university in the 1950s and the reluctance of administrators to admit and support students of color or to hire Black faculty. This chapter introduces Rodney Page, the first head basketball coach for the women's team in the era of intercollegiate athletics. Page was a Black man who grew up under Jim Crow segregationist laws and was only one of roughly a dozen Black faculty when he arrived at UT in 1972. It contextualizes what the experience was for Black people in Austin and at UT through the mid-century and in the 1970s in order to show how Page, despite the sometimes-hostile atmosphere at Texas, made a place for himself and was able to be a bridge between men's and women's athletics. It also highlights the differences in how administrators at UT responded to desegregation, expecting students and faculty of color to assimilate into the already-built white infrastructure, and to desexigration, specifically in athletics, which isolated and separated women from men and made them build anew.

Chapter 5, "The First Year of Women's Basketball at the University of Texas, 1974," zeroes in on a single year to highlight how pressure from the top down and the bottom up converged around civil rights on campus. The federal Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) was investigating UT for racial discrimination while students were protesting for a more inclusive environment. HEW also released the first draft of their guidelines for Title IX as the women's athletic department was getting off the ground at UT. Rodney Page and his team serve as an example of how female student athletes had to manage with less but still were able to thrive.

Chapter 6, "Donna Lopiano and the Defense of Title IX, 1975," focuses on the fall of 1975, which was the first semester that Donna Lopiano, the new and first women's athletic director at UT, served in her role. As soon as she arrived, she was thrust into the national fight over Title IX. Darrell Royal, the men's athletic director and head football coach, was leading the public charge to get football exempt from the jurisdiction of the law, which would have taken most of the teeth out of it. He was backing an amendment from a Texas senator, John Tower. Lopiano, as a vocal supporter of the AIAW and women's sports, testified to Congress against the Tower Amendment weeks after starting her job. The amendment failed and men at UT were angry with her. The end of the chapter examines how Lopiano talked about her personal philosophies on sport, the ways those philosophies were influenced by fears over losing Title IX, and how those fears made advocates of women's sports much more focused on gender than on race.

Chapter 7, "Retha Swindell Enters and Rodney Page Exits, 1976," traces Page's final year as head basketball coach and Retha Swindell's freshman year on the team, when she broke the color barrier for female athletes at UT. At the end of the season, as the team was preparing to play in a post-season tournament, Lopiano told Page that he would not be returning the next year, causing angst among the basketball players and leading Page to address what it meant for him, one of the few Black people in athletics and at UT, to be replaced by a white woman after three years of success. This chapter explores in more depth how gender eclipsed race in women's athletics and what that meant for Black female athletes like Retha Swindell.

Chapter 8, "The End of the Beginning for Women's Sports at the University of Texas, 1976–1979," covers a lot of ground. Jody Conradt was hired to replace Page and her first three seasons as head coach put into practice many of the things that would make her three-decades-long

tenure so successful: traveling to play the best teams in the nation, recruiting top players from around the country but especially in Texas, diversifying the squad, establishing a booster club that would become a model for other programs, and always pushing for more and better for her athletes. Lopiano continued to make her mark as athletic director, focusing on fundraising, taking big swings in hopes of big pay offs, demanding better coverage from the media, and navigating the changing landscape as Title IX guidelines became more rigid and the AIAW was being threatened by the NCAA.

The conclusion to "Desexigration and Desegregation" looks at how much women were able to accomplish in athletics at the University of Texas in the 1970s and the lasting legacies of their decisions, both good and bad. UT went on to win many championships during the 1980s but the women were never able to convince the men to merge the athletic departments. That would not happen until 2017. In assessing what went right in establishing the women's athletics department at UT, though, both Lopiano and Conradt believe, in an ironic twist, that remaining separate from the men was instrumental in their success. They never had to ask permission. While some teams in the department saw their teams diversify over the years, Lopiano regrets never hiring a Black head coach while at UT. Even after her tenure, most of the coaches and administrators in athletics have been white, a common occurrence across women's athletics in the United States. Focusing on gender at the expense of race has had long legs at UT and beyond.

To cover this much ground, this dissertation is built on a large number of sources, most of them primary. I interviewed fifteen former basketball players from the 1970s, including Retha Swindell, Rene Rochester, and Evwella Munn, three of the four Black women who were on the team that decade. I also spoke with Rodney Page, Donna Lopiano, Jody Conradt, and Waneen

Spirduso, the chair of the Department of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation in the 1970s. I interviewed Joette Moffett, Laura Tuma, and Lynne Flocke, who were all reporters at either the local paper, the *Austin American-Statesman*, or the student paper, the *Daily Texan*, or both. Flocke was also the second Sports Information Director for the women's athletics department from 1978–1981.

I read thousands of newspaper articles, mainly in the *Statesman* and the *Texan*, but also the *Capital City Argus*, one the main Black newspapers in Austin, which is available at the Austin History Center. I also collected articles from many papers around the state and the nation, such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. I downloaded and read, at least in part, every edition of the University of Texas yearbook, the *Cactus*, between 1898 and 1979. I also looked at the high school yearbooks for many of the basketball players, for Jody Conradt, and Rodney Page. I collected audio from the local public radio station, KUT, which still has some programs from the 1970s available to listen to. Magazine articles from *The Texas Observer*, *Harper's Magazine*, *Sports Illustrated*, and UT's alumni publication, the *Alcade*, provided additional context.

I consulted manuscripts at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, especially Betty Thompson's Papers and the University President's Office Records. For the latter, there were files that were restricted when I first requested them and then after review, were made unrestricted, and most likely have gone unseen for decades. At the H.J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, the University of Texas Women's Basketball and Intercollegiate Athletics Collection was useful, especially for the 1976–1979 seasons. I also collected personal documents from Rodney Page, Retha Swindell, and Jody Thorne, who played for Page.

I tracked down an unpublished student documentary by Jasmine Baker that includes an extensive interview with Page and a shorter one with Lopiano. I have used it with the permission of Baker. The Longhorn Network produced multiple short film features about Page and/or Swindell. There are videos on YouTube of panels that Lopiano, Swindell, and Conradt have participated in over the last few years and one of Rodney Page giving a presentation about his father's career as a promoter for the Negro Leagues. Jan Todd provided me with the audio of interview that another student, Ariel Caraway, did with Page in 2017. I found podcast interviews with Lopiano, Conradt, Page, and Nell Fortner, who played at UT under Conradt.

Using this robust amount of sources to tell the story of the beginning of women's athletics at UT and the first seasons of intercollegiate play for the women's basketball team was like putting together a 5,000-piece puzzle. The image it has produced is a familiar narrative of women athletes triumphing against the odds and in spaces that were not built for them, but also one less studied, of how complicated the story becomes when race is taken seriously in conjunction with gender and Title IX. The women's basketball team at the University of Texas in the 1970s is a microcosm of many of the ways that women's sports have succeeded and failed. It is, in short, the story of women's sports.

Conclusion

At the end of 1979, the *Statesman*'s Brad Buchholz looked back over the first four years of Lopiano's tenure as athletic director. In the piece, Lopiano described to Buchholz the instance when "she witnessed the dream" of a successful women's program come to life. It was a basketball game. "It was during this game with Stephen F. Austin at the Special Events Center this spring," she said. "And there were no cheerleaders, no band, no nothing. Not a thing to inspire any kind of real school identity between the fans and the team." It was a close game, but UT pulled it out. She told the *Statesman*, "Suddenly, at the end of the game, everyone stood in unison and began singing the 'Eyes of Texas.' Here they are, five thousand, six thousand fans, singing the school song with no leads, no band. It was stirring. Incredibly stirring."[1]

In Buchholz's recap of what Lopiano had done to get the program to that point, he included, "hirings, firings, 18-hour workdays and endless promotion," "kissing Bevo in front of local photographers," and "firing a 'favorite' coach in favor of one she felt was better." He did not say it, but one can easily read Rodney Page and Jody Conradt in that final example, the sting of that moment still reverberating years later. It was Lopiano's tough choices that "pushed seven UT teams into the national rankings," with "Jody Conradt's basketball team" being the "most visible of the seven." He mentioned Linda Waggoner being a finalist for the Margaret Wade trophy and Jackie Swaim being a starter on the team the United States sent to the 1979 Pan American Games, which won a silver medal.

"Yes, the 70s can be characterized as the decade in which 'we got the ball rolling,'" Lopiano told the *Statesman*. "Obviously, before 1975, there was nothing. And by 1978, we were

[1] Brad Buchholz, "UT women rose under Lopiano," *Austin American-Statesman*, December 26, 1979.

supposedly halfway. Now, the 1980s will reap the fruits of the efforts of people who worked so hard in the 70s." Lopiano was wrong about there being nothing before 1975. The women's athletics department got off the ground in 1974. It was a year old when Lopiano arrived, and women had been asking for varsity athletics since at least 1968. Before that, there were decades of history of women playing sports at UT, with basketball going back into the 19th century. She was right, though, that starting in 1975, the department really kicked into gear and then each successive year it slipped into a higher one.

Despite everything that had gone well in the first years of the department's existence, there was still a lot left wanting. In 1978, the *Texan* reported that the Athletics Council subcommittee in 1974 had recommendations that included "a single athletics council to govern both [men's and women's] programs, single funding methods, distribution of profits from football to less lucrative sports and single varsity teams in non-contact sports such as swimming, golf, track and tennis." Four years later, at the time of the *Texan*'s reporting, "none of those recommendations have taken even a single step toward reality since the report was completed nearly two years ago." Betty Thompson was still pushing the single department for both men's and women's athletics at the time, saying she believed it was the best way for the university to be in compliance under Title IX. Still, she said, "they are free to remain separate."[2] And remain separate they did.

Other than failing to merge the men's and women's athletics department, the other main goal not yet reached in 1979 for women's athletics at UT was a national championship. Lopiano was right, though, to predict that UT's investment in women's athletics in the 1970s would pay off in the 1980s. Championships were around the corner. Swimming and diving won the AIAW championship in 1981. The next year, track and field won the AIAW outdoor title, volleyball got

[2] Laura Tuma, "Betty Thompson: 'Sex Matters Not'," *The Daily Texan*, February 22, 1978.

their first national championship, swimming and diving repeated, and basketball were runners up. Swimming and diving also won in 1984 and 1985, now in the NCAA.

1986 was a banner year for the department. The track and field team won both the indoor and outdoor titles, and swimming and diving got its third championship in a row and fifth overall in six years. And basketball won, too.[3] Everything Lopiano hoped for when she passed on Page and went after Conradt came to fruition. The team won every single game they played, all the way through the 1986 NCAA championship tournament, taking the title at the end of an undefeated season. The front of the *Austin American-Statesman* sports page on Monday, March 31, featured the large title, "Longhorns' long wait ends," with a big picture of UT point guard Kamie Ethridge driving and shooting over a University of Southern California player. UT had not only won the title, but they had beat the mighty two-time national champions of Southern Cal anchored by the formidable Cheryl Miller, 97–81. Fran Harris told the paper, "If we had to break every bone in our bodies, we were going to win it."[4] When the team landed in Austin after the game, they were driven in limousines to the Special Events Center, now named the Frank Erwin Center after the former regent. 3,300 people gathered to welcome them home, including U.S. Representative Barbara Jordan, a frequent guest court side for their home games. The crowd chanted "34 and O," the team's record that season. In reference to Texas keeping Cheryl Miller at bay and playing on the love of a local Texas beer, Conradt held a banner reading, "Miller time is over. We want Lone Star."[5]

[3] "National Championships," Texas Athletics, https://texaslonghorns.com/sports/2013/7/29/GEN_0729130655.aspx, accessed on March 6, 2025.
[4] Mark Wangrin, "Longhorns' long wait ends," *Austin American-Statesman*, March 31, 1986.
[5] Mark Rosner, "3,300 hail champion Horns," *Austin American-Statesman*, March 31, 1986.

There were more titles in other sports later in the decade. Cross country picked up one, swimming and diving won two more (seven in total), and volleyball won the crown once more. The evidence was in. Lopiano had built her Top 10 program.

The Merger

In December 2017, the University of Texas became the final school to combine their men's and women's athletic programs under a single athletic director. President Gregory L. Fenves hired Chris Del Conte to be the athletic director and moved the women's athletic director, Chris Plonsky, under Del Conte in the program's hierarchy. According to the *Statesman*, "Fenves wanted to stack the athletic department's leadership structure in the same way he does other departments on campus. 'I want to have single lines of decision-making and accountability at the president's level,' Fenves said."[6] This echoed what Lorene Rogers told the chancellor of the UT System back in 1975 when she was arguing for a single department, saying it would be easier if there was "a director of Athletics appointed by the President and responsible to him, who is responsible for the entire athletics program for all students" (see Chapter 6).[7]

Over the decades, the men's and women's programs had slowly been braided together. By the time Del Conte was hired, Plonsky was not only overseeing women's athletics, but also "UT's revenue generation, marketing and licensing and the school's partnership with TV and radio networks; she was instrumental in the 2011 Texas/ESPN venture that created the Longhorn Network." Plonsky told the paper that working for Del Conte would not be strange because she'd

[6] Brian Davis, "As Chris Del Conte takes over, how will Texas women's athletics be impacted?," *Austin American-Statesman*, December 11, 2017, https://www.statesman.com/story/sports/2017/12/12/as-chris-del-conte-takes-over-how-will-texas-womens-athletics-be-impacted/10132301007/, accessed on March 10, 2025.

[7] Lorene L. Rogers to Charles A. LeMaistre, July 1, 1975, UT President's Office Records, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

long reported to the men's AD for these other parts of her job. She would, simply, no longer report to the president directly about women's athletics.[8]

The women's athletics department stood on its own for over forty years. By 1994, they were one of only four major standalone women's athletic programs left in the country.[9] In assessing what the University of Texas got right when setting up women's athletics, Donna Lopiano says it was, ironically, not getting the very thing the women had asked for starting in 1973. "They got right separate athletic departments," Lopiano says. "Even though it was a forced decision, they got it right and I think they did the best they could when you consider the cultural change. The budget kept going up. It was never enough, obviously. It's never enough always. But there's no question that was the secret sauce, because we could never have done what we did if somebody else had to say yes." Women's athletics being on their own meant "you weren't second to anybody. During football season, you were into volleyball and nobody was gonna tell you otherwise. During basketball season, it was all about women's sports. It was all about you doing this for women's sports," she says. "There was not a conflict in priorities. Starting all the things we started, I don't think it would've ever happened under men's athletics."[10]

Lopiano is not alone in believing this. Jody Conradt says, "the fact that we had a separate department was huge, because we were able to do things that showcased women's sports a little bit differently. We were able to build a fanbase that was not necessarily the same fanbase. And we were able to show that women could be really, really good and accomplished." Women's athletics got to have "totally our own agenda."[11]

[8] Davis, "As Chris Del Conte takes over."
[9] Helen Thompson, "A Whole New Ball Game," *Texas Monthly*, March 1994.
[10] Lopiano, interview, 42:35–43:14, 20:00–21:24.
[11] Conradt, interview, 53:27–54:35.

Lynne Flocke credits Lopiano's skill as an athletic director. "Donna just went first class all the way with who she hired, her coaches. And then the coaches recruited the players. It wasn't an overnight thing. I think it took five or six years to get to a good point."[12] Joette Moffett, who covered women's sports for the *Statesman* in the 1970s, agrees. "Even though the money wasn't equitable, there was so much of it. And women do a lot more with less than men do," she says, laughing. "And so, the women were able to take whatever money they were given and maximize the benefit. And I think Dr. Lopiano had a lot to do with that. She stretched the money she had. They did the best they could."[13] Laura Tuma, who covered women's sports as a student working for the *Daily Texan* says it simply: "I think the timing broke in their favor. I think the position of UT broke in their favor. I think there was a bit of lightning in a bottle. Things came together, and then the right people were on the job."[14]

Legacies

Donna Lopiano left Texas in March 1992. That final year of her time at Texas, the football team had more athletes than all of women's athletics. On her way out the door, Lopiano encouraged the women's rowing club to contact a Title IX lawyer, and they did. According to the *Washington Post* in 1997, three months after Lopiano's departure, "seven female athletes at Texas–organized by the rowing club coach and represented by the lawyer to whom Lopiano referred him–sued the university in U.S. District Court," charging that UT was failing to comply with Title IX.[15] It was Conradt who dealt with that storm, as she took over as the women's athletic

[12] Flocke, interview, 39:36–42:21.
[13] Moffett, interview, 28:59–31:52.
[14] Tuma, interview, 34:12–35:13.
[15] Amy Shipley, "Playing Field Levels at Texas," *The Washington Post*, July 5, 1997, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1997/07/06/playing-field-levels-at-texas/f571d66e-e905-4034-8751-722c7aa6c76d/, accessed on March 1, 2025.

director after Lopiano. Conradt said this lawsuit and Texas' response "had a major national impact" because their women's program had been so successful between 1975 and 1992, winning seventeen national championships in five sports. S. C. Gwynne at *Texas Monthly* wrote that "no school had done more for women's athletics than UT" at that point.[16] And yet it wasn't enough, not under Title IX. The school settled and ended up starting three new women's athletic teams (soccer, softball, and, of course, rowing), increasing both roster spots and scholarships for women, and building two stadiums.

For all the great things that got started in the 1970s at UT, the women's program also had its faults. In terms of both desexigration and desegregation, the program struggled. In all aspects of education other than athletics, desexigration led to women infiltrating spaces that were built by and for men. In sports, though, women remained separate. At UT, the men refused to fold them into the existing athletic infrastructure, instead forcing them to build their own as a distinct entity. Given the constraints on women in athletics, even with the force of civil rights law behind them, women's sports administrators had little choice or room to maneuver. Therefore, they created a space where women's athletics could thrive. In doing so, though, they acquiesced to the separatist framing championed by administrators in men's athletics, a framing that often reifies the idea that men and women (and, by extension, men's and women's athletics) are different. It foregrounds difference and makes it appear natural and permanent rather than constantly coerced and manufactured. The implication of this seemingly fixed belief, at least in some circumstances, was that women were less than or inferior to their male counterparts, not worthy of a collective and shared athletic experience.

[16] S. C. Gwynne, "Come Early. Be Loud. Cash In.," *Texas Monthly*, November 2008.

In terms of desegregation, much of women's athletics at UT, especially in coaching and administration, remained a white space. Part of this was Title IX's fault, since it was not created to consider race in conjunction with gender. "Title IX was based on gender. It should have also included based on race," says Alpha Alexander, who has studied the intersection of race and gender in women's sports since the late 1970s. "But if you look in the context of the history of that in 1972, it was rolling off of the whole civil rights movement. And so, they were not willing in Washington, D.C., to…consider race in this law because of the Civil Rights Act and things of that sort. But I still say today it needed to really emphasize that."[17]

A lack of emphasis on race and diversity in women's athletics at the University of Texas has meant that the vast majority of upper administration, including all athletic directors and most head coaches, have been white in the more than five decades that the program has been in operation. Rodney Page was the first Black head coach at the university, hired in 1973. Women's athletics did not hire a second Black head coach for another twenty years and men's athletics did not have its first Black head coach until 2014 (see Chapter 8). For all of athletics at UT, there have only been seven total Black head coaches as of March 2025, three in track and field (Beverly Kearney, Tonja Buford-Bailey, Edrick Floréal), two in men's basketball (Shaka Smart, Rodney Terry), one in football (Charlie Strong), and Page. Five of the seven were hired in 2014 or later.

Page's historic role was largely forgotten after he was fired in 1976. He remained in the physical education department at UT for three more years before transitioning to a career as an elementary, middle, and high school teacher and coach in Austin.[18] In 1993, the *Austin American-Statesman* described Beverly Kearney, the new head coach for women's track and field, as "the

[17] Alpha Alexander in discussion with the author, February 8, 2023, 8:33–9:19.
[18] Rodney Page in discussion with Ariel Caraway, November 20, 2017, 59:09–59:19, 1:20:04–1:22:34.

first black head coach in University of Texas history." When Shaka Smart was hired to coach the men's team in 2015, the *Daily Texan* wrote that Smart was "the first African-American coach of the basketball program."[19] Perhaps the *Texan* oversight was more about ignoring the women's basketball program altogether, but either way, one could forgive these reporters since people within women's athletics knew little of Page until 2016.

On January 27, 2016, the University of Texas women's basketball team hit 1,000 wins. According to a Longhorn Network documentary, "In order to commemorate the feat, women's athletic director Chris Plonsky," who had been with women's athletics at UT in some capacity since 1982, "wanted to honor every former Texas head coach. She had never talked to or even met Rodney Page." Plonsky says that when she reached Page, he asked, "what year is it?" and "how long has it been since I really had contact with UT?" It had been four decades. On February 21, 2016, Page returned to center court for the first time in 40 years. Page wasn't sure he even wanted to attend the halftime ceremony after all that time, but ultimately, he went and felt validated.[20]

Jody Conradt retired in 2007 with 900 wins under her belt and was, at the time, the second winningest coach in Division I college basketball behind Tennessee coaching legend Pat Summitt.[21] She continues to be present in stands for Longhorn basketball games, including bookending the Special Events Center/Frank Erwin Center's existence by attending the final-ever basketball game, played by the women, there in April 2022. Conradt is also invested in keeping the

[19] Randy Riggs, "Kearney's track philosophy crosses racial lines," *Austin American-Statesman*, March 28, 1993. Garrett Callahan, "History paved the way for UT's first African-American basketball coach," *The Daily Texan*, May 6, 2015, https://thedailytexan.com/2015/05/06/history-paved-the-way-for-uts-first-african-american-basketball-coach/, accessed on March 10, 2025.

[20] "Longhorn Extra - Rodney Page," Texas Longhorns, YouTube, February 23, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEnlHzsUVTw.

[21] "Second winningest coach Conradt retires from Texas," ESPN, March 12, 2007, https://www.espn.com/womens-college-basketball/news/story?id=2796477, accessed on March 10, 2025.

players in touch with each other and celebrating their basketball careers at UT. Every year, she helps bring together women's basketball alumni in order to acknowledge the foundation they built and everything they accomplished at UT. The women watch a Longhorn basketball game together and are honored on court at halftime.[22] Jackie Swaim, who played from 1978–1981 and is in the Longhorn Hall of Honor, says that the legacy of the athletes from the first years of women's athletics is often forgotten and it should not be. "We were like the pioneers, …and I think that people don't realize what we really did." She now lives in Connecticut so is often not able to attend the annual alumni meetups. She is grateful that they happen, though. "Coach Conradt keeps it alive by having the alumni games. …. To see them and see the pictures on Facebook, all of them that are pulled together and that are brought back because of her and because of Texas, that I think is the greatest thing."[23]

Retha Swindell played basketball all four years she was UT, graduating in 1979. During her time on the team, she scored 1,795 points and pulled down 1,759 rebounds, the latter a record she still holds at Texas.[24] She was the first All-American in women's basketball from UT, was named to the USA Basketball national team in 1978, and played professionally for two years in the Women's Professional Basketball League. She went on to coach high school basketball, including coaching future Women's National Basketball Association great and basketball hall of famer

[22] Multiple former players talked to the author about these annual alumni meetups and the author attended the 2025 luncheon on February 16 before the Texas/LSU basketball game at the Moody Center on the campus of the University of Texas.

[23] Swaim, interview, 50:53–55:06.

[24] Danny Davis, "This date in Texas history: Retha Swindell establishes long-standing rebound record," *Austin American-Statesman*, March 3, 2025, https://www.statesman.com/story/sports/college/longhorns/womens-basketball/2025/03/03/texas-basketball-rebounding-record-owned-by-retha-swindell/81111799007/, accessed on March 10, 2025.

Theresa Weatherspoon.[25] In 2001, she was inducted into the University of Texas' Hall of Honor and into the Texas Black Sports Hall of Fame in 2024.[26]

In the Moody Center, which was built to replace the Special Events Center, there is a large mural featuring Swindell. The image is from the 1970s. Swindell is in motion, passing a ball back past an opposing player. She's probably twenty-feet tall. The artist, J Muzacz, says he was inspired to paint Swindell because "I wanted to highlight and pay homage to Swindell's academic prowess alongside her record-setting bball performance, I think that aspect of athletes is often overshadowed merely by their physical performance. And of course the fact that she was the very first black woman to play UT ball, breaking down barriers and paving the way."[27] In 2023, Swindell told a local Austin television station, "My thought process has always been pretty simple. It's not trying to be a trailblazer. Your best becomes the foundation for somebody else."[28]

[25] Retha Swindell in discussion with the author, January 11, 2023, 33:38–36:32.

[26] Isa Almeida, "Former Texas women's basketball star Retha Swindell to be inducted into the Texas Black Sports Hall of Fame, *The Daily Texan*, February 21, 2024, https://thedailytexan.com/2024/02/20/former-texas-womens-basketball-star-retha-swindell-to-be-inducted-into-the-texas-black-sports-hall-of-fame, accessed on March 10, 2025.

[27] J Muzacz, email message to author, February 26, 2025.

[28] Victor Jaymes, "Black Texans lay foundation for the future of sports," Spectrum Local News, March 2, 2023, https://spectrumlocalnews.com/tx/south-texas-el-paso/news/2023/03/02/black-texans-lay-foundation-for-the-future-of-sports, accessed on March 10, 2025.