



the adult generation by the 1960s in Texas, while disappointed by forced changes, had no real political will to make their state a spectacle. Texans bowed to the new realities, and shrugged their shoulders to the inevitable, but wanted at the same time to convey their own independence in the movement. Throughout the crisis, Texans tried to uphold their nickname, "The Lone Star State."<sup>2</sup>

Only another great power in the case of Texas could overcome the power of the state's resistance toward desegregation. In this case, that power was sports. In 1951, Texas became the first state in America to have its own Sports Hall of Fame. Later backed by the oil-made fortune of Lamar Hunt, and moved to Waco, the Hall of Fame, which includes tributes to High School football, remains a testimony to the importance of sports, and to local high school sports. In 1965, Texans constructed the "Eighth Wonder of the World," the Astrodome, the first covered stadium of its kind in history. Awash with prosperity, interested in the possibilities of entertainment, and seeking diversions in the Cold War, Texans developed a special crush on high school sports, football in particular. This fascination, in turn, opened the door to an influence that could counter segregation. On the national sports scene, Jackie Robinson had already become part of what was referred to as "The Noble Experiment" as early as 1947 when he was selected as the first major league baseball player of color. His autobiography *I Never Had It Made* chronicles the seemingly insurmountable injustices Robinson faced as he broke the racial barrier and helped integrate America's favorite pastime. But the important point about Robinson was that he quickly became Rookie of the Year, and that his case pointed to a dynamic that could break segregation. In Texas, thousands of teenage Jackie Robinsons were available to break the color barrier. The question was, would local Texas

Independent School Districts (ISDs), in their mad rush to win, take advantage of these Jackie Robinsons?<sup>3</sup>

Northeast Texas, defined during post-Civil War Reconstruction as one of the most un-reconstructed areas of the state, seemed unlikely to be so beguiled. In the years after the Civil War, Confederate irredentists like Ben Bickerstaff and Cullen Baker terrorized counties between the Red and Sabine rivers, including Bowie, Titus, Red, and Cass. In 1954, the Supreme Court case, *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka* provoked an angry reaction among Texans who for years had been absorbing the influences and people of the nearby states of Arkansas and Louisiana. A prominent billboard on what is today Route 67 cried "Impeach Earl Warren!" a sentiment shared by many who resented the liberal California justice who has presided over the "Brown" case. Young African-American men knew at this time that to merely look at, or "ogle" a white girl was an offense that could lead to dire consequences. The Brown decision declared that "separate was unequal,"

with desegregation on their own timetable, embracing “auto-integration.” Texas Governor Allan Shivers encouraged the Lone Star state’s schools to resist national pressures.<sup>7</sup> Many interpreted this as “not in my lifetime.”<sup>8</sup> In an interview with the *Austin American*, Shiver’s explained: “It will take years to comply with the order for integration of schools . . . Sometimes those who seek reforms go so far that the evils of the reform movements are more onerous than the evils they’re trying to remedy . . . just saying we abolish segregation doesn’t cure it. It doesn’t accomplish anything. What is done about enforcing it is the real thing.”<sup>9</sup>

Texans were particularly creative at dodging integration in the early years, and just as successful in avoiding TV cameras. Historical accounts across the country focus on highly volatile situations when schools began to deal with the original ruling of *Brown* in 1954, and the Supreme Court’s re-visitation of *Brown* in 1955 where the court added the words, “with all deliberate speed.” In 1956, Tennessee’s governor, Frank Clement called out the National Guard when white mobs attempted to block the desegregation of Clinton High School. In this case, despite disturbances, twelve African-American students entered the all-white high school.<sup>10</sup> Clinton became one of the first high schools of the south to permanently desegregate. One of the most notorious integration situations occurred in 1957 when 1,000 paratroopers stood at the ready while nine black students enrolled at Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas.<sup>11</sup> With national journalists on hand to describe record degrees of harassment, federal troops milling around, and daily news coverage of Presidential decisions streaming from the White House, Arkansas became both a national showcase, and a test case for why desegregation would proceed.<sup>12</sup>

The Little Rock Nine Integration Of Central High School  
Photo: [theatlantic.com](http://theatlantic.com)

Texas was different. Its Attorney General, John Ben Shepherd, was one of the most determined, youthful, and patient of the anti-integration southerners. Born and raised in Gregg County in northeast Texas, Shepherd along with future president Gerald Ford had been voted one of the "Outstanding Young Men of America" in 1949. By 1955, he was working around the clock with southerners from other states to find legal



black athletes. Though at first this codicil was a deal breaker, the president of the University reconsidered his school's priorities and agreed to participate in something similar to the "Noble Experiment" of Jackie Robinson's day. There were stipulations for selecting this first athlete: he had to be talented enough to be a starter, an academic standout, of good character, and prepared for possible problems arising from his addition to the team.<sup>16</sup> Jerry LeVias of Beaumont fit the criteria and signed to

better opportunities to his athletes. Stewart went from having the top team in the all-black league to not even being able to win a game in 1969. "Freedom of Choice" became a windfall for the white high school in the 1960s. Though later ordered in the 1970s to maintain a 70-30 ratio of whites to blacks in each of its schools, during the 1960s, the white high school remained almost all white except for the football team. There, James

accommodate the African-American athletes. East Texas native and U.I.L. employee Bobby Hawthorne later compiled a publication to commemorate the first one hundred years of the organization. Through interviews with significant players in the educational world at the time of integration as well as researching the archives of the league, Hawthorne painted a clearer picture of the statewide integration project. He concluded that sports and other interscholastic activities “greased the skids” of what could have been a bumpy ride for African-American athletes.<sup>22</sup>

For the most part, it appears that the older generation worried more than their younger counterparts about the possible consequences of integration. In terms of upper-level classes and honors societies like the one at Longview High, integration cr

When Pittsburg schools adopted black athletes, Turner Odell Ladd, athletic director at the all-black Douglas High School, was offered an assistant coach's position at the white high school. His situation became much like Longview's Clifford Stewart. He assumed a step down in title and responsibility. Turner served in that role for two years before leaving the education profession to work at Lone Star Steel. In an interview, Turner explains that several years prior to integration, some of the Douglas athletes began attending Pittsburg High School voluntarily. He credits the coaches as key to the smooth transition. While most area high school students attended the former white schools, the Pittsburg High School building did not have the capacity to hold the students from both

of the school get along during the transition. “I was able to work with some wonderful fellow coaches and the principal Mr. Harold Edwards.”<sup>28</sup>

The 1970 Daingerfield High School Tigers  
Photo: Daingerfield-Lone Star High School Yearbook

One of Singleton’s players, Windell Doddy, transferred into Daingerfield High School as a senior when the black school in Cason closed under a desegregation order. In a recent interview, Doddy admitted to being frightened of the unknown prior to the start of the school year, but was willing to try. Doddy says, “Typically, students are open to change. It was the older people who were more against desegregation.”<sup>29</sup>

A sociology instructor today, Doddy compared young people of 2015 to teenagers





Karnack hit a snag when players walked off the football field when there were no black cheerleaders. Before basketball season, black cheerleaders were procured, and the boys were ready to play. "Once again, I felt athletics smoothed the way. All of the kids were

such as the one compiled by Humanities Texas. Like the pioneers who settled the west, athletic teams in Northeast Texas forged a path for integration. As separate identities merged into one, new responsibilities and roles were accepted. Over time, new traditions helped solidify these communities which chose auto-integration as the answer.

<sup>1</sup> David Minutaglio, and Steven L. Davis, *Dallas 1963* (New York: Twelve, 2013), 7.

<sup>2</sup> There are other views on how integration occurred in the South. Davison Douglas has argued that some school districts adopted a policy of moderation to escape punitive desegregation. In other words, some whites appeared to adopt integration in the hope they would only have to endure “tokenism.” Davison M. Douglas, “The Rhetoric of Moderation: Desegregating the South during the Decade after ‘Brown’”



<sup>35</sup> Ibid. On the importance of relationships developed through sports, see Gerelds, Todd, et. All. *Woodlawn: One Hope. One Dream. One Way.* (New York: Howard Books, 2015); Dent, Jim. *The Kids Got it Right. How the Texas All-Stars Kicked Down Rac s* (05.9NKew93.5(Y-.2(o)43.4(r)-5.9(k)162.9(Ss)-2.