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Maroon and White and Read All Over Newspaper Coverage of Desegregation of Mississippi State Football, 1970-1973

Benjamin Joseph Downs

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Maroon and white and read all over: newspaper coverage of desegregation of
Mississippi State football, 1970-1973

By

Benjamin Joseph Downs

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Science
in Kinesiology
in the Department of Kinesiology

Mississippi State, Mississippi

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Maroon and white and read all over: newspaper coverage of desegregation of
Mississippi State football, 1970-1973

By

Benjamin Joseph Downs

Approved:

Adam W. Love
(Major Professor/Graduate Coordinator)

Gregg Twietmeyer
(Committee Member)

Marsha E. Barrett
(Committee Member)

Richard L. Blackburn
Dean
College of Education

Name: Benjamin Joseph Downs

Date of Degree: August 12, 2016

Institution: Mississippi State University

Major Field: Kinesiology

Major Professor: Dr. Adam W. Love

Title of Study: Maroon and white and read all over: newspaper coverage of
desegregation of Mississippi State football, 1970-1973

Pages in Study 73

Candidate for Degree of Master of Science

This content analysis was designed to investigate newspaper coverage of the desegregation of Mississippi State varsity football through the media coverage of the first Black football players at Mississippi State University, Robert Bell and Frank Dowsing. Two hundred and three articles from three newspapers (*The Starkville Daily News*, *Mississippi State Reflector*, and *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*) were examined using a three-tiered qualitative analysis. That analysis resulted in 426 frame instances and 686 theme instances, or a total of 1,112 codes. The resulting data were then interpreted using Critical Race Theory (CRT) to generate understanding of the desegregation of the football program. The CRT guided interpretation of the results of the content analysis contradicted the popular narrative regarding Mississippi State University desegregation and athletic desegregation, indicating that the varsity football team and the careers of Bell and Dowsing were reported in a way that supported the existing MSU power structure.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my wife Danielle, without her love, support, and encouragement I would likely not have pursued graduate school. I could not imagine a better person and friend to share in this experience and all that the future holds in store for us.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the waning minutes of the Mississippi State (MSU) Bulldogs' September 12, 1970 football season opening game, MSU led the visiting Oklahoma State (OSU) Cowboys 14-13.¹ OSU looked to move the ball into position for a potential winning score until, as *Starkville Daily News* sports writer Don Foster described, "young gladiator Frank Dowsing crashed into Okies surest hands... killing any reasonable hopes OSU had of a comeback" (1970, p. 2). As important as that play was, Frank Dowsing and teammate Robert Bell's most significant impact on MSU football that Saturday afternoon was that the sophomore football players desegregated the Mississippi State varsity football program. The arrival of Bell and Dowsing in Starkville coincided with the conclusion of a decade of mostly subpar football performances by the Bulldogs. With the exception of the 1963 Liberty Bowl Champion squad, MSU failed to achieve a winning record in any other season during the 1960s.² During the 1967 season, *Newsweek* ranked MSU as one of the ten worst college football programs in the United States (Wilson, 1970).

¹ The first MSU football game in 1970 took place at Jackson Memorial Stadium. From 1953-1990 the Bulldogs played their home contests at both Scott Field in Starkville and Jackson Memorial Stadium in Jackson.

² Under the coaching of Wade Walker (1960-1), Paul Davis (1962-66), and Charles Shira (1967-1969), the Bulldogs accumulated a record of 31 wins, 63 losses, and 5 ties.

In contrast to MSU's on-field difficulties during much of the 1960s, the Bulldogs' in-state archrival, the University of Mississippi Rebels (Ole Miss), did not experience a losing season during the decade. Under the leadership of College Football Hall of Fame Head Coach John Vaught, the Rebels won 77 games and appeared in a postseason bowl game each year. In the Egg Bowl rivalry game between the two schools, the Rebels bested the Bulldogs seven out of ten tries in the decade, losing one contest and tying two others. In the first Egg Bowl of the 1970s, the still-segregated Ole Miss Rebels lost to the Bulldogs 19-14. Frank Dowsing intercepted Ole Miss quarterback Shug Chumbler's would be go ahead touchdown pass in the end zone with four and a half minutes remaining in the fourth quarter to preserve the Bulldog win (Reflector, 1970). Ole Miss would desegregate its varsity football program two years later in 1972.

The differences between Mississippi State University and the University of Mississippi, as well as other public universities in the state, extended beyond the football field. As the Bulldogs struggled for success on the field, the Civil Rights Movement in the state pushed for an end to segregation, including the segregation of the state's all-White universities. White resistance to desegregation of public universities in the state of Mississippi was notoriously violent. For example, the night before James Meredith enrolled in the University of Mississippi, violent rioting on the campus resulted in the deaths of two civilians. The Ole Miss rioting reached a level that caused then President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, to send federal troops to the Oxford campus to quell the violence and treat the injured. Students subjected Meredith to racial slurs and torment throughout his time on campus (Billman & Mitchell, 2012). Resistance to desegregation also occurred at Southern Mississippi College. Several years prior to

Meredith's successful enrollment in Ole Miss, the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission framed Clyde Kennard for several crimes, resulting in his incarceration, after he sought admission into Southern Mississippi College in the late 1950s (Minchin & Salmond, 2009).³

Unlike the infamous rioting at Ole Miss and the miscarriage of justice related to Southern Mississippi College desegregation, MSU's reaction to campus desegregation is often framed as being much more amicable. The official narrative presented by MSU often recounts the transition to integration on the campus as relatively more peaceful than what occurred at Ole Miss and Southern Mississippi (Salter, 2015). However, when considering that desegregation on those campuses involved murder and false imprisonment, respectively, the relative tranquility of the process at MSU may have been tumultuous nonetheless. For example, the experiences of many first generation Black students and student athletes on the campus appear to contradict the "official" narrative of amicable transition at MSU. The only certainty regarding desegregation at Mississippi State is that it first occurred in July 1965 when Starkville resident Richard Holmes enrolled during the July term after spending two years at Wiley College in Marshall, Texas (Starkville Civil Rights, 2015). Although Holmes's enrollment officially desegregated the campus, the university had actually challenged Mississippi's concept of separate societies two years earlier.

³ The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, under the direction of the governor's office, attempted to promote and maintain the segregationist system in Mississippi and across the South.

Official Mississippi State Narrative

The desegregation narrative presented by MSU is tied directly to its athletic history through the 1963 “Game of Change”. Between 1959 and 1963 the Mississippi State men’s basketball team won four Southeastern Conference (SEC) basketball championships. However, in 1959, 1961, and 1962 the Maroons (1959) and Bulldogs (1961; 1962) refused their automatic bid into the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) championship tournament because of the mere possibility they may eventually have to play an integrated team in the tournament, which would violate Mississippi’s “unwritten law.” The “unwritten law” threatened to revoke and withhold future state funding if public universities, whether White or historically Black, participated in integrated athletic competition (Henderson, 1997). If they participated in the 1963 tournament, the Bulldogs faced a possible second round game in East Lansing, MI with the integrated Loyola University of Chicago basketball team (Ballard, 2008). Unlike previous championship teams, and with the support of MSU President Dean Colvard, MSU successfully challenged Mississippi’s “unwritten law” on this occasion (Ballard 2008; Henderson, 1997).

One week after the Bulldogs clinched the SEC championship, President Colvard, buoyed by student support for and an expressed desire to play by the back-to-back-to-back conference champions, publicly stated that the team had the university’s support to attend the NCAA tournament (Ballard, 2008). Colvard’s declaration split supporters of Bulldog basketball and Mississippi’s tradition of segregation into two camps: those in

favor of participating and those opposed.⁴ Despite the wishes of the team and the apparent support of numerous members of the student body, the decision to allow the team to play Loyola was not welcomed universally (Henderson, 1997).

Resistance to participation, first from some members of the state legislature and then from the Rankin County court system threatened the team's travel plans (Ballard, 2008). Fans opposed to the integrated game gathered enough support to produce a travel injunction that, if served, would have prevented the team from leaving Mississippi. Through the use of decoys and fortunate travel planning by MSU administrators, the players, coaches, and President Colvard avoided law enforcement officials attempting to halt the team's departure.⁵ Consequently, the MSU men's basketball team became the first four-year Mississippi collegiate team to compete against an integrated opponent when they played the Loyola University Ramblers on March 15, 1963 (Henderson, 1997).

Slightly more than two years after MSU lost the "Game of Change" to the eventual NCAA champion Ramblers 61-51, the MSU student body officially desegregated on July 19, 1965 with the enrollment of Richard Holmes. Originally from Chicago, Holmes moved to Starkville at the age of 3, raised by his grandmother, Holmes recalled her instilling a strong moral foundation in him (Mississippi State University, 2014). After two years at Wiley College, the 21 year old Holmes enrolled in summer

⁴ The nature of the individuals motivated to support or denounce participation in the game likely varied wildly. It has been suggested that supporters of NCAA tournament participation saw the game as an opportunity to reward the senior class for its career accomplishments, whether or not they supported segregation (Henderson, 1997). Similarly, those Mississippians who sought to prevent the team from playing may not have had any interest in MSU basketball. Rather they may have been motivated by a desire to maintain Mississippi's segregationist society.

⁵ For more information on the measures taken by the basketball team, its coaches, and university administrators to avoid law enforcement, consult Ballard (2008) and Henderson (1997).

classes at MSU. Richard Holmes, in a recorded interview with Mississippi State History Professor Judith A. Ridner for the Starkville Civil Rights Project, described his experiences as the first Black MSU student. He insisted that the “faculty, administration, student body treated me with dignity and respect, 90% of them” (Starkville Civil Rights, 2015). Holmes also acknowledged that he was never kicked, spit on, or otherwise harassed by White students. In a MSU press release commemorating the 50th anniversary of his enrollment, Holmes was quoted saying, “Only a university dedicated to fairness and excellence could have carried out such an orderly transition and such a quiet burial of past practices” (Steinberg, 2015, para. 14). Holmes attributed his experience to the progressive nature of Mississippi State and Starkville, especially when compared to the University of Mississippi (Starkville Civil Rights, 2015).

Following his time at MSU (both undergraduate and graduate) Richard Holmes earned a medical degree from Michigan State University. In the 50 years since desegregating the campus, Holmes has been honored by Mississippi State on several occasions. In 1991 the university renamed the Office of Minority Affairs the Richard E. Holmes Cultural Diversity Center. He also received an honorary doctor of science from MSU in 2011. Dr. Holmes has also given back to MSU, endowing a scholarship for minority MSU students in 1991 and serving as a staff physician at the student health center. MSU commemorated Dr. Richard Holmes’s accomplishments on July 19, 2015, the 50th anniversary of university desegregation, with a two hour honorary open house (Steinberg, 2015).

Despite the positive moments espoused by MSU regarding specific aspects of desegregation, those moments largely reflect the actions of the White MSU population

challenging the prevailing social and cultural expectations in the state. Statements provided by Richard Holmes place the actions of the university as different and exceptional compared to its peers in Mississippi (Starkville Civil Rights, 2015). However, by Holmes's own account, approximately 10% of the faculty, administration, and student body did not treat him with dignity and respect. How those 10% interacted with Black students on the campus has been less publicized since desegregation. Fortunately, the experiences of several individuals in the period just after desegregation have been documented. The behavior by some members of the White Mississippi State community towards Black students, whether their peers at MSU or visiting student athletes, reveals a less welcoming image than that presented in official university accounts.

Contrasting Narratives

Similar to the "Game of Change's" place in MSU's narrative and discourse on campus desegregation, the broader student narrative on university desegregation also has roots within the MSU athletic department. Just as was the case with Loyola University, Black athletes from outside MSU and the state became the focus of segments of the population unready or unwilling to accept desegregation. Unlike the Loyola basketball team, some other post-desegregation athletes personally experienced that resistance on the MSU campus. The experiences of the first Black student athletes to play against MSU in Starkville sharply contrast with the narrative promoted by the university. The fact that their experiences took place concurrently with Richard Holmes's period of enrollment sheds some light on the portion of the campus community that may not have been interested in treating Black students with dignity and respect.

Godfrey Dillard and Perry Wallace, two freshman basketball players for Vanderbilt University, became the first Black student athletes to play a competitive college contest against MSU in Starkville on February 27, 1967.⁶ Dillard, Wallace, and the rest of the freshman Commodores were welcomed to what is now called McCarthy Gymnasium on MSU's campus with a locker room left in disarray and toilets overflowing with human waste (Maraniss, 2014). While Dillard and Wallace were subjected to an abusive environment in Starkville, Maraniss does acknowledge that the conditions faced by all basketball teams visiting MSU may have been similarly unwelcoming. When the Commodores took the court to warm-up for the game, Dillard and Wallace were greeted with a barrage of racial slurs and death threats. Leading the chorus of bigoted cheers were many members of the football team. Beyond the verbal assault, the players were also spat upon and, on occasion, had beverages poured onto them as well. The scene at the basketball game was so outrageous that Mack Finley, a White MSU student who grew up in the South and attended the game, was quoted describing the event as "the ugliest thing I have ever seen in my life" (Maraniss, 2014, p, 163). Following the freshman game, Dillard and Wallace watched the varsity game from the stands, where they faced further fan abuse, until the action of the varsity game or exhaustion eventually caused the mistreatment to subside (Maraniss, 2014).⁷

⁶ Neither Dillard nor Wallace was the first Black athlete to play a contest as a visitor to MSU. That distinction belongs to Steve Martin, an unheralded baseball recruit at Tulane University. However, Martin visited MSU during the 1966 season, the second of two seasons the Bulldogs played their home contests at Redbird Park in Columbus, MS. While Maraniss (2014) reported spectators verbally abused Martin, the negative experience could not have taken place on the MSU campus. As a result, Martin's experience was not included in the broader student narrative on campus response to desegregation.

⁷ Joe Dan Gold, captain of the 1962-63 MSU and subject of a famous picture of the interracial handshake between captains prior to the "Game of Change", was the head varsity basketball coach at MSU during the 1966-67 season.

Unlike the Black students attending MSU, Godfrey Dillard and Perry Wallace did not live on the MSU campus and experience the environment on a daily basis. However, newspaper evidence suggests that the mistreatment of Dillard and Wallace was not solely the result of the behavior of misguided fans, but the reflection of a largely White campus community struggling to come to terms with the end of social segregation and the psychological effects of the system. The Black student experience during the late 1960s and early 1970s as reported in MSU's newspaper, *The Reflector*, seems incongruous with the mostly hospitable university described by Richard Holmes in 2015. In fact, in the fall of 1972, then graduate student Richard Holmes expressed a very different view of MSU after desegregation.

Reflector journalist Rae Dillon interviewed Richard Holmes as part of a piece regarding how MSU had changed in the seven-plus years since Holmes first enrolled. In the article, Holmes described his experience as an undergraduate student as “a lot less than heaven” and that by 1972 the campus only “changed somewhat” (Dillon, 1972, p. 5). During his undergraduate years at MSU, White students welcomed Holmes to his classes with organized student walkouts when he entered the room. By 1972 the walkouts had stopped, but Holmes still felt a sense of racial inequality. During the 1972 and 1973 academic years, Black students presented the university with a list of requests to help bridge the perceived gap in equality; however, the university did not appear to fully address the student concerns (Dillon, 1972).

More than a decade after the “Game of Change”, White student attitudes and behavior, at least on an anecdotal level, still often failed to reflect a university that embraced desegregation. Student journalist Roger Culbertson chronicled the bigotry

emanating from the MSU student section during a home football game in the fall of 1973. Culbertson (1973) acknowledged students targeting players with harsh language, however, the targets of the barbs and eventually racial slurs were not visiting players, but Black MSU football players. With home fans comfortable enough to openly deride fellow classmates without fear of reprisal it is not surprising that a year after Dillon's 1972 interview of Holmes, Black students felt that racial intolerance still existed on campus (Dillon, 1972).

Although the "Game of Change" marked the desegregation of the university's athletic competitions, its sports teams remained segregated until 1970 and the experience of Black athletes from visiting teams on the campus was far from inclusive.⁸ Visiting Black athletes were subjected to verbal and physical abuse in the form of racial slurs and taunts, as well as spitting and vandalism. As a result, visiting Black athletes like Godfrey Dillard "knew we were in trouble" as soon as they arrived in Starkville (Maraniss, 2014, p. 161). Beginning in 1965, Black MSU students were also subjected to varying levels of abuse from their White peers, behavior that the first Black student at MSU, Richard Holmes, felt barely changed nearly a decade after he desegregated the university (Dillon, 1972).

Statement of the Problem

In the years following MSU's appearance in the 1963 NCAA basketball tournament social change came about slowly on the campus. Desegregation of the student body did not occur until 1965 and, even then, took place during the depopulated

⁸ Varsity basketball desegregated in 1971.

summer term. Although MSU's segregated athletic teams began playing and hosting desegregated opponents, the experiences of the first Black athletes playing on the campus do not consistently align with the contemporary MSU narrative of a tranquil movement toward integration. The contrasting narratives regarding desegregation, progress, and tolerance expressed by Mississippi State on the one hand and the historical record on the other suggest that further investigation of the post-desegregation racial climate on campus is necessary. Verbal and psychological violence carried out by MSU students suggests that desegregation on campus and in the athletic department was less than peaceful. Furthermore, MSU's account of the desegregation narrative is noticeably one-sided. The university often frames its desegregation as a success of the White population that vigorously challenged state precedent and did not react to desegregation with lawlessness, rather than the result of the near century's long civil rights movement for racial equality.

It has been argued convincingly that the culture and identity of the South is deeply tied to college football (Doyle, 1994; Borucki, 2003). The integration of MSU football is therefore an important cultural event. Mississippi State football, being a football program in a Southern state, helps define the culture. Without a comprehensive account of the history and context of Mississippi State football, the self-understanding of Mississippians and Mississippi State stakeholders is weakened. An examination of the desegregation of the football team enriches the history and context of Mississippi State football. It is important then to critically examine the past in order to present information that more accurately reflects the true culture and identity of Mississippi State University football during this transformational time.

Statement of the Purpose

Minimal research exists regarding the desegregation of Mississippi State University generally and the Mississippi State football program specifically. The primary purpose of this study is to analyze the content of print media related to Mississippi State's football team between 1970 and 1973. As the dominant form of news delivery at the time, the analysis will provide enriched context for the atmosphere surrounding the university and Starkville during MSU's desegregation era. The theoretical framework shaping this content analysis will be Critical Race Theory. The goal of this project is to gain better understanding of the social climate surrounding the Mississippi State campus and the experiences of the first Black football players as reflected in the print media of the time.

Research Statements

As a content analysis, this project will examine the print media portrayal of the football team at Mississippi State University. Specifically, this study seeks to explore:

1. How did two local and one statewide newspaper report and portray Robert Bell and Frank Dowsing, the first Black football players at Mississippi State between 1970 and 1973?
2. How prevalent a factor was race in reporting about Mississippi State football?
3. What do the media portrayals of the team and players indicate about the social climate on and around the Mississippi State campus at the time?

Importance of the Study

Because a relative lack of scholarly and mainstream literature on the desegregation of Mississippi State University and Mississippi State football exists, this

study is intended to provide sport scholars, MSU stakeholders, and Starkvillians with a more complete understanding of the history of the program, the campus, and the community. Given college football's relationship to American Southern identity, this study can provide sport managers with valuable insights into the historical behavior and evolution of Mississippi State football consumers. Additionally, this examination will bring attention to the genesis of today's integrated Mississippi State football team while also offering a cultural snapshot of the dynamics of the program's supporters and the greater campus, community, and state at the time. Finally, the study may inspire future research into the evolution of the MSU football fan base, as well as other fan bases of collegiate football team's desegregation periods.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

During the Mississippi State Bullpup's freshman football victory over the University of Mississippi freshman team on November 22, 1969, defensive lineman Robert Bell tackled a Mississippi ball carrier with such force that the student section began to cheer "Give 'em hell Robert Bell" (Wilson, 1970, p. 3). The spontaneous cheer grew into a rallying cry, printed on buttons and donned by Bulldog fans throughout Bell's three year varsity career (Smale, 1996). Robert Bell, along with Frank Dowsing, officially desegregated the varsity football program at Mississippi State the following fall. In their first varsity game they helped the Bulldogs upset a favored Oklahoma State Cowboy team, 14-13, at Jackson (MS) Memorial Stadium.

The desegregation of the Mississippi State football team occurred during a transitional period on the football fields and college campuses of the Southeastern Conference (SEC). Between 1967 and 1972 each of the member schools of the SEC recruited, enrolled, and played Black football players for the first time. Throughout the transition period, newspapers closely covered the performances of the SEC football players and football teams. Understanding how newspapers covered athletes and programs at this time is valuable to sport scholars. An examination of how newspapers portrayed the first Black football players sheds light on the importance of sport, especially its influence on society, culture, and identity.

The Civil Rights Movement of the mid-twentieth century was reflected on athletic fields and arenas of both professional and college sport teams. However, the sporting culture of America and Black participation in and contribution to that culture predates the twentieth century. Sport historian David K. Wiggins (2014) traced Black athlete participation in America to the slave culture of the Southern states, noting that while talented slaves were afforded the opportunity to participate in athletics, they were denied individual control of their abilities. Following emancipation, Black athlete access to the sports world administered by predominantly White leadership was severely limited by the existence of segregationist policies (Wiggins, 2014).

Perhaps the most prominent example of the limitations placed on Black athletes by White society is the case of heavyweight boxing champion Jack Johnson, the Galveston Giant. After winning the World Colored Heavyweight Championship in 1903, Johnson fought reigning World Heavyweight Champion Tommy Burns, a White Canadian, in Sydney, Australia on December 26, 1908. Johnson knocked out Burns in the 14th round, beginning a six-year reign as champion. During his six years as champion and the remaining 38 years of his life, White boxing officials attempted to characterize Johnson's physicality as something other than "White" human while law enforcement persecuted him for rejecting early twentieth century social norms (Carrington, 2010).

The popularity of college football increased in the Southern United States during the 1920s and 1930s (Borucki, 2003; Doyle, 1994). That popularity was not limited to White universities. College football at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

thrived as an expression of Black culture and achievement, becoming an important cultural symbol for the Black community (Wiggins, 2014).

In examining the relationship between society and sport, as well as the study of sociology and sport, McKay (2015) indicated that using multiple perspectives from relevant and interrelated disciplines to produce quality research in an academic climate trending towards criticism of the humanities is critical. In the sociology of sport, Thorpe (2006) has argued for increased acceptance and use of history in sociological study, as historical research can provide context for an event. Similar to sociology, recent publications related to the field of sport management have also called for the inclusion of history to strengthen and broaden the field of sport management because of the ability of history to provide context to an event (de Wilde & Seifried, 2012; Seifried, 2010). Given the importance of historic research methods in providing understanding and context across academic disciplines, historical research is incorporated throughout this project, including the review of literature.

Before an analysis and discussion of the media portrayal of the early 1970s Mississippi State football team can commence, an examination of the scholarly literature regarding the relationship between media, culture, sport, and race is necessary. Four topic areas were identified for inclusion in this review of literature: (a) Football and Southern Culture, (b) Media, Sport, and Culture, (c) Media, Sport and Race, and (d) Critical Race Theory. These areas have a direct relationship to the study being undertaken and provided a solid foundation for this project.

Football and Southern Culture

Intercollegiate football, as it exists today, can be traced to a contest between Rutgers University and Princeton in November of 1869.⁹ Limiting the expansive volumes of works published on nearly one and one half centuries of collegiate football, in both number and scope, is difficult. Focusing on the geographic location of Mississippi State University in the American South carries tremendous significance when attempting to understand the identity of the people and the significance of football to that identity. In order to develop a better understanding of college football as it relates to Mississippi State University, an understanding of the importance of football in the university's history, as well as the sport's impact on the culture and history of football on the region is advantageous.

The origins of the importance of college football in the American South can be traced to the end of the American Civil War. Doyle (1994) positioned college football as a key to the modernization of the Southern economy and way of life, as well as a source of dignity and pride in the face of perceived Northern social and economic superiority that began during Reconstruction. Central to Doyle's thesis that college football symbolized the South's coming of age is the success of the University of Alabama (Alabama) football team in the Rose Bowl during the mid-1920s. Prior to Alabama's acceptance of a bid to play a heavily favored University of Washington team on January 1, 1926, Southern football was considered an inferior product to the Northern version of the game. This inferiority, whether actual or perceived, Doyle argues, existed as an

⁹ Scholarly research on the history of American collegiate football and its origins indicates that games may have been played as early as the 1820s, however, for the purpose of this project, the accepted first official game in 1869 will be used as the genesis moment of the sport as we understand it today.

extension of Northern dominance established following the U.S. Civil War. As a result, the idealized notion of Southern lifestyle became a joke, even in the minds of Southerners (Doyle, 1994).

Following Alabama's 20-19 upset victory over Washington, the Crimson Tide were welcomed as heroes across the South. The team's train ride home featured "ecstatic receptions" across the South (p. 235). According to Doyle (1994), "class antagonisms among the white population of Tuscaloosa evaporated" in a city-wide celebration on the team's return (p. 235). This pride further swelled when Alabama unexpectedly tied Stanford University the following year in the 1927 Rose Bowl. A second consecutive positive experience on the national stage afforded local leaders the opportunity to capitalize on a region-wide swell in Southern pride. With football becoming a direct link to not only the South's past, but also tied to its perceived progress, Doyle argues that civic leaders used the sport to bring modern industrialization to the South, using the sport to link memories of a strong Southern past with the economic realities of competing with the industrialized North. In doing so, they positioned football as measuring stick of success and progress, not only in on-field competition, but in all aspects of life (Doyle, 1994).

Wes Borucki (2003) expanded on Doyle's (1994) claims of football being tied to Southern culture and pride by examining how the South adapted to the Civil Rights movement and Northern and liberal admonishment of segregation. Unlike Doyle's (1994) focus on the South using football as an instrument of pride and symbol of modernity, Borucki examined the parallels between football and Southern self-image. A self-image which Borucki argued was based in White racial supremacy and similar

notions of positive self-image that existed prior to the American Civil War. Confederate Vice President Alexander Stephens argued that the foundation of the Confederacy rested upon the notion that “the negro is not equal to the white man” (Borucki, 2003, p. 485). Southern sportswriter Morgan Blake used White supremacist rhetoric in his descriptions of Southern college football in the early 1930s when describing Alabama’s 1931 Rose Bowl win, claiming “Saxons are on the warpath again” (Borucki, 2003, p.485).

As the Civil Rights Movement gathered steam following the Second World War, Borucki (2003) identified that the prospect of desegregation and integration not only challenged the Southern White supremacist social institutions, it also caused Southerners to ponder “how long Southern college football teams would wait until they allowed black athletes to compete” (p. 486). Of particular importance in the region is University of Alabama football desegregation. Borucki emphasized legendary Alabama coach Paul ‘Bear’ Bryant’s approach to integrating the team eight years after the university desegregated in 1963. According to Borucki, after Alabama desegregated, Bryant focused on recruiting the best athletes, believing that Alabamians would cheer for a winning team, regardless of the racial composition of the team. Based on this belief and position as head football coach, Bryant “balanced white Southerners’ vision of how their team should represent them” implying winning would be viewed as more important (p. 487). Despite eventual desegregation of the Southern campuses and football teams, the Majority White Institutions continued to struggle with reconciling the new status quo on campus with a tradition of White Supremacy.

MSU Football Desegregation

The desegregation of MSU football five years after university desegregation has been minimally covered in histories of the university, the football team, MSU athletics, and the Southeastern Conference. In a published general history of the university, Ballard (2008), after providing an in depth analysis of the “Game of Change”, briefly acknowledged that Frank Dowsing was the first Black athlete at MSU and had a successful career. However, the author gave no further mention of his experiences or Robert Bell’s participation. Similarly, Nemeth’s (2009) recounting of the history of the football program indicated that Dowsing and Bell had productive careers on and off the field at MSU. Interestingly, Nemeth mentions the successes of Robert Bell after graduation in a comparison to Frank Dowsing’s on-field accolades. Despite this increased coverage, Nemeth’s discussion of Bell and Dowsing does not address the personal experiences of Dowsing and Bell.

Charles H. Martin’s (2010) *Benching Jim Crow* examined athletics and desegregation in the SEC. Martin’s work discussed the progress of desegregation across the conference on a school by school basis. Of particular interest to this project is his description of desegregation of the Mississippi State football program by Frank Dowsing and Robert Bell. Dowsing and Bell, in addition to ability, were quality candidates to desegregate the program for two other reasons, their experiences at previously desegregated high schools and their desire to remain in the state of Mississippi. Beyond the author’s claims regarding the probability of their enrollment into MSU, Martin also spent some time describing the successes that each player had on the team (2010).

Martin (2010) described Bell as a part-time player and fan favorite with a “reasonably successful” career (p. 270). Dowsing, however, experienced a much larger degree of success at MSU. While at MSU, Dowsing was All-SEC, All-American, Academic All-American, and National Football Foundation scholar athlete as a defensive back. Additionally, Martin claimed that Dowsing’s election as Mr. Mississippi State in 1972, a vote by the student body, demonstrated an evolution of Mississippi race relations in the decade since James Meredith’s enrollment in the University of Mississippi. Ultimately, Martin pointed to MSU’s winning records in the mid-1970s and bowl appearances as an indicator that integration likely helped turn a once moribund program into a competitive SEC football team (Martin, 2010).

Sport Historian David Smale (1996) produced a concise history of Mississippi State University’s athletic history from the birth of athletics at the university up to the end of the twentieth century. Smale examined the limited success of the football program throughout the 1960s and the realities of program desegregation in 1970. According to Smale, the transition of the program and acceptance of Black athletes occurred only after White students had the opportunity to get to know Dowsing and Bell personally. Once the White population became comfortable with the young men, Dowsing and Bell were embraced by the campus community. Smale quoted legendary MSU radio broadcaster Jack Cristil regarding the relationship of the White fans to Black players:

“Here in the South, particularly in those days, you had black friends on an individual basis. Many people had blacks in their homes who helped to rear their children, that they thought as much of as any member of their family. You

rejected the blacks as a group. You accepted the people as individuals, but you do not accept them as a group” (p.111).

The research on the relationship between football and Southern culture and the impact of desegregation on collegiate football across the South and at Mississippi State University indicates the importance of the sport to the people of the Southern United States. Whether academic or non-academic in nature, the significance of football in the lives and identities of many Southerners has generated significant research interest. While the literature has expanded, the scholarly work dedicated to Mississippi State football, and the desegregation of the program has received limited coverage. How the media portrayed the first Black athletes remains unexplored. This thesis will provide a content analysis of Mississippi newspaper coverage of MSU football program desegregation. While history helps to provide a proper context for the importance of this topic, the relationship between media coverage of sport and the impact of that relationship on culture must also be studied.

Media, Sport, and Culture

The primary goal of this project is to provide a content analysis of media coverage, specifically newspaper coverage, of Mississippi State football during the desegregation period (1970-1973). An understanding of the relationship between media, sport, and culture is crucial to appreciating the need to examine media coverage of Mississippi State football. Previous content analysis research demonstrates that media coverage of sport influences public perception and national identity. Furthermore, the pattern of sport media coverage to present views and descriptions of racial minority athletes has also been examined.

Newspapers hold the prominent position as conduits for expressing what Starc (2007) considered “a never ending process” of national identification (p. 96). Additionally, Starc examined newspapers because, unlike other forms of media, they are more permanent, making reporters “important actors in the struggle for truth and understanding of our social reality” (p. 96). In other words, newspaper reporters and the stories they write are products of the society that produces them, and reflect what the reporter observes in that society (Starc, 2007). Starc also indicated a belief that sport as a form of entertainment, results in news that is also designed to be entertaining. As a result, stories are, to varying degrees, written to support the beliefs of the intended audience. Additionally, Dauncey & Hare (2014) noted that experiencing an event through the newspaper helps to reinforce a collective cultural identity.

Print media coverage of international and domestic sport has been used to galvanize communities of people with a shared background. Vincent and Hill (2010) examined “how national identity was constructed through the English national soccer team and their fans” by considering Montserrat Guibernau’s (2007) *The Identity of Nations* contention that identity is developed, in part through the establishment of media and symbols that promote the idea of the nation (p. 195).¹⁰ Specifically the authors demonstrated the impact of newspaper narratives on the construction and reconstruction of national identity. In the case of English sporting fans, cultural identity reflected the imperial past of Great Britain, rather than the ethnically diverse contemporary nation that

¹⁰ According to the authors, Guiberneau’s (2007) process of national identity development contained the following elements: Image of nation defined by dominant ethnic group, creation of community through common symbols, a common set of civil rights, creation of an us versus them mentality, and the use of media to distribute images of the nation.

it is. Furthermore, Starc (2007) demonstrated that sport, even when foreign to a nation can become a unifying agent as time and political circumstances evolve.

Scholars Dauncey and Hare (2014) explored the evolution of the ways sport and media can influence cultural identity. Using historiography, Dauncey and Hare demonstrated examples from both the United States and Europe of how cultural historians have examined the media to expand upon existing scholarly research. For the authors, studying sport and the media in relationship provides cultural historians with “an inexhaustible supply of objects of study” (p. 6). While Dauncey and Hare examined the evolution of sport and various types of media in detail, their focus on sport, media, and identity is of particular interest to this project. Specifically, the authors profile how media and sport have impacted community via newspapers. In regards to the newspaper and the development of identity, both national and local newspapers are important sources in creating cultural identity via second-hand consumption of a sporting event (Dauncey & Hare, 2014).

Media, Sport, and Race

The study of the media’s coverage of sport and discrepancies in the coverage and descriptions of White athletes and minority athletes, either as a result of overt or underlying discrimination exists as a sub category of the broader study of media, sport, and culture. In four decades of studies of broadcast media representations of minority athletes compared to their White counterparts, the results demonstrate the representation of Black athletes as being physically and athletically gifted, while White athletes are described using characteristics like intelligence (Eastman & Billings, 2001; Murrell &

Curtis, 1994).¹¹ However, according to Byrd and Utsler (2007) and Goss, Tyler, and Billings (2010), these stereotypes seem to be less pervasive in national print media. As a project focused on the early 1970s, the currently unexamined media coverage of Black college athletes in the American South provides increased significance to the study.

Byrd and Utsler (2007) used content analysis to determine if the racial stereotypes, for both White and Black National Football League (NFL) quarterbacks, previously found in media studies had begun to abate at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The authors collected content from *Sports Illustrated*, a major sport magazine in the United States and examined articles over a span of three NFL seasons whose subjects were one of twelve quarterbacks (six Black, six White) with similar quarterback rating. Based on the content, as interpreted by the researchers, results demonstrated that Black quarterbacks are not described in the same way as White quarterbacks; however, they did receive nearly the same references to intelligence as White quarterbacks (Byrd & Utsler, 2007).

Goss, Tyler, and Billings (2010) also used content analysis to investigate the types of coverage afforded to Black and White athletes in *Sports Illustrated*. Unlike Byrd and Utsler (2007), the authors focused on National Basketball Association athletes and their portrayals through pictures, specifically magazine covers, in an attempt to quantify any biases being presented. Two hundred sixteen magazine covers spanning over forty years

¹¹ It is worth noting at this time that while scholarship on the differences in media presentation of quarterbacks along racial lines has been researched extensively. During the 1972 and 1973 football seasons Mississippi State experienced a quarterback controversy between Black and White quarterbacks Melvin Barkum and Rocky Felker. While there is a wealth of newspaper coverage on these two players given the status of their position and the back and forth starting roles they shared, examining the media coverage of their roles exists outside the scope of the current project.

were originally coded as being intellectual or physical in nature, with subsequent coding accounting for visual and environmental factors. The authors found that the investigation of magazine cover pages resulted in a difference in overall coverage; however, like the findings of Byrd and Utsler (2007), the authors found that were “almost equally likely as White players to be portrayed for their intellectual skills (Goss, et al., 2010).

Hylton and Law (2009), using a coding system influenced by a Critical Race Theory framework, investigated the coverage of athletes in *Sports Illustrated*, as well as *Observer Sport Monthly*. The authors selected these periodicals due to the perceived esteem in which they are held, as well as their high rate of circulation in the United States (*Sports Illustrated*) and Europe (*Observer Sports Monthly*). Using four CRT-derived themes, the authors examined the permeation of racialization into sport journalism. That is, the process of racial categorization and subsequent suppression. The results gleaned from the twelve issues examined from each periodical, according to the authors, demonstrated “evidence of racialization and its impact” (p. 103). More specifically, they found that White power structures influenced reporting of sport and often resulted in reporting from a point that tended to favor the racial or political power structure (Hylton & Law, 2009).

An examination of print media content analyses yielded results reflecting the coverage of race and sport on a national periodical level. Those results of those studies, when compared to the results of broadcast media analyses beginning in the 1970s, indicated that the coverage of Black and White athletes continues to differ; however, those differences appear to be diminishing in the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In terms of media representation, Black athletes are portrayed in a more

physical manner than White counterparts. Despite this continued emphasis on superior athletic ability, evidence exists that Black athletes are receiving more favorable descriptions as it relates to their intangible or mental skills (Byrd & Utsler, 2007; Goss, et al., 2010). While this trend toward equal representation of intellect is a positive trend, Hylton and Law's (2009) interpretation appears to demonstrate that media coverage is a reflection of White societal power structures that continue to promote racialism and racial differences that emerged beginning in the early twentieth century (Carrington, 2010).

Critical Race Theory

Previous content analyses on race and sport have examined if and how media coverage of athletes differs when considering race. While research has shown that a difference tends to exist, the question of why that difference exists has received less attention. Hylton and Law (2009) interpreted the results of their content analysis through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and offered explanations and criticisms of the apparent trends in two nationally circulated periodicals. Critical Race Theory emerged from legal studies during the 1980s as a way to explore how Black populations have experienced structural disadvantages because of their Blackness. CRT attempts to create an understanding of the social situation in which we exist (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Furthermore, CRT can be used to create an understanding of how we as a society simultaneously communicate what is and what should be (Delgado, 2000). One application of Delgado's (2000) understanding of society through CRT is put forward by Lopez (2000). Lopez argues that due to a lack of scientific evidence of race, "race must be viewed as a social construction" (p. 168). Just as CRT can be used to generate

understanding of contemporary society, as Delgado and Stefancic (2001) claim, CRT can be used to revise history and challenge attempts to portray society as color blind.

Kevin Hylton (2009) examined the relationship between race and sport using CRT and the concept of racialization. The author chose to focus on racialization because it encapsulates multiple disciplinary approaches to understanding the issues of race while invalidating the biological differences that are so often inferred when hearing the term racism. Hylton explored sport within the CRT framework in part because sport, by its nature, is supposed to be equal opportunity. However, the nature of American sport, being influenced by centuries of racialization has disempowered Black participants. The author noted that using CRT to examine history, as well as media representations of Black athletes, can help to better understand the sporting narratives and, if applicable, change or create a new narrative. This is possible and desirable because the narrative will provide a more nuanced picture of Black experiences in society by shining a light on the marginalized or ignored Black experience. It is, in part, with this idea of understanding the existing narrative of Mississippi State University football desegregation and potentially amending how the narrative is presented that this project will proceed (Hylton, 2009).

Conclusion

This literature review examined the interrelated research covering football and southern culture, media, sport, and culture, media, sport and race, and Critical Race Theory as they inform understanding of the specific exploration of media coverage of Mississippi State football. McKay (2015) called for the inclusion of various humanities disciplines to bolster the understanding of societies. Thorpe (2006) suggested that using

history to support and inform sociology can provide an understanding of context for an event or phenomena. Seifried (2010) and de Wilde and Seifried (2012) encouraged the inclusion of historical methodologies to improve and provide context to the field of sport management. This thesis uses research influenced by sociological and historic methods to inform the study of sport by analyzing the content of specific Mississippi newspapers during the early 1970s to establish a better understanding of the social climate experienced by Black athletes at Mississippi State University.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The representations of campus life and the experiences of Black students at Mississippi State University during the decade following desegregation have been expressed through two contrasting narratives. The dominant Mississippi State University Narrative largely positions MSU as a university and community more willing to positively embrace desegregation than other schools in the South (Ballard, 2008; Henderson, 1997; Mississippi State, 2014; Starkville Civil Rights, 2015; Steinberg, 2015). Unlike the MSU narrative, the Contrasting Narratives in many ways contradict the relatively positive community response to desegregation (Alford, 1973; Culbertson, 1973; Dillon, 1972; Maraniss, 2014; Mohler, 1973). Both narratives use examples from MSU athletics to demonstrate the university's response to desegregation, thereby incorporating sport into the foundation of the larger identity of the university and its stakeholders.

The current study examines newspaper coverage of the desegregation of MSU football in light of these competing narratives. Sport has been used to shape public perception and national identity (Smith, 2002). Furthermore, newspaper coverage of sporting events has been shown to impact perception of an event, a society, and strengthen community identity (Dauncey & Hare, 2014; Starc, 2007; Vincent & Hill, 2011). In consideration of these points, a critical analysis of newspaper content and

coverage of the desegregation of varsity football at MSU will provide a richer understanding of the campus during the desegregation era. Although not the focus of this project, the content analysis may also provide insights into how the prevailing Mississippi State University Narrative has become an integral part of the identity of MSU stakeholders.

Content Analysis

Examinations of print media through content analysis have existed for several centuries and newspaper content analysis has been common since the late nineteenth century (Krippendorff, 1980). Content analysis has been used to explore nation building and identity through sport (Starc, 2007; Vincent & Hill, 2011), as well as representations of race and sport in society (Goss, Tyler & Billings, 2010; Hylton & Law, 2009). In order to investigate the desegregation narrative at Mississippi State University and the role of athletics, specifically MSU football, in university desegregation, a content analysis of the coverage of MSU football by three Mississippi newspapers during the period of varsity football desegregation was conducted. For the purposes of this thesis, the content analysis was guided by Krippendorff's (1980) definition and framework for content analysis.

According to Krippendorff (1980), "content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context" (p. 21). That is, the methodology used by a researcher and the results he or she obtains should be consistent, regardless of researcher or time period of the study, assuming the same methodology is followed. While this definition of content analysis supports the scientific veracity of the methodology, the practice itself can lead to multiple interpretations of data. Of chief

concern to Krippendorff and, subsequently, this thesis is that a researcher must be aware that various meanings can be gleaned from the data because the original meaning of the data can only be known to its author (i.e. newspaper sports reporters in this analysis). In order to support the validity and replicability of the results, an understanding of the context of the data is vital (Krippendorff, 1980).

Understanding the context of the data is a key and multifaceted aspect of content analysis (Krippendorff, 1980). For Krippendorff, the context of the data, unlike the data or message itself, is determined by the individual examining the content. That is, on one level the information or data being received is processed and interpreted by the individual with respect to his or her known environment. This occurs because, typically, the gleaning of information is done by individuals without first-hand experience of the events described. As a result, the context of the data relies on the general environment within which the information would have originally been received by readers at the time the story was published. Krippendorff also describes a second aspect of understanding the context of the data. Here he focuses on the context of the individual performing the scientific content analysis. In this way, any researcher performing a content analysis also receives and interprets the information being examined based on his or her knowledge of sources and lived experiences. In order to guard against misleading inferences based on the researcher's reality, it is necessary to establish the environment in which the data will be interpreted (Krippendorff, 1980).

To address Krippendorff's (1980) concerns, the environment, and therefore context, was established using a conceptual framework established through the review of literature. In regards to the general environment in which the data was initially received

at the time of its publication, that is, the historical context of the Southern United States and the state of Mississippi in the 1970s, Doyle (1994) and Borucki (2003) demonstrated the importance of football in the American South. Further, Borucki noted that Majority White Southern universities struggled ideologically with the desegregation of their football teams (2003). Ballard (2008), Nemeth (2009), and Smale (1996) presented the importance of Mississippi State's athletic desegregation story through the "Game of Change" while also indicating the football desegregation was a noteworthy occurrence in the history of the university and program. Given the importance of the "Game of Change" to university stakeholder identity and the role of football in Southern identity, the documented behavior of fans, specifically towards minority athletes is a crucial component to the environment in which athletic articles were originally received by newspaper readers. Alford (1973), Culbertson (1973), Maraniss (2014), and Mohler's (1973) accounts of fan mistreatment of Black athletes and the apparent tolerance of such behavior by the university and other fans provides further insights into the environment of permissive racialism in which news stories were originally received.

Regarding Krippendorff's (1980) second concern of interpretation of data based on researcher knowledge of sources, within the review of literature several sources identified that media, specifically print media, used sport to influence culture (Dauncey & Hare, 2014; Starc, 2007; Vincent & Hill, 2010). Additionally, print media used sport to influence perceptions of athletes based on race. Research in the coverage of media, sport, and race revealed that media tends to focus on Black athlete athleticism and physicality, while White athletes tend to be portrayed as hard working and intelligent (Eastman & Billings, 2001; Murrell & Curtis, 1994). Byrd and Utsler (2007) and Goss, et al. (2010)

established that increased equal representation of athlete characteristics began to emerge at the beginning of the 21st century. The findings that equal representation in the media did not appear to emerge until the late 1990s and early 2000s coupled with the notion that Hylton and Law (2009) found that media, even in the 21st century, promotes a White power structure, informed and established the investigator environment for a project focused on predominantly White media portrayals of Black athletes in the 1970s.

In an attempt to enhance the replicability and validity of inferences made with respect to context, Krippendorff (1980) described a six-part framework for content analysis: (a) The data as communicated to the analyst, (b) The context of the data, (c) How the analyst's knowledge partitions his reality, (d) The target of a content analysis, (e) Inference as the basic intellectual task, and (f) Validity as ultimate criteria of success. This framework directed the content analysis undertaken in this thesis and the first five components, being critical to the execution of this methodology are discussed below. The sixth aspect of content analysis is addressed in the discussion portion of the thesis.

Data Collection

To investigate newspaper coverage of Mississippi State varsity football desegregation, articles from three Mississippi newspapers (*Starkville Daily News*, Mississippi State University's student newspaper, *The Reflector*, and *The Jackson Clarion-Ledger*) that covered the MSU varsity football team were analyzed. The newspapers were chosen based on their proximity to the MSU campus, access to the football program, and their readership. The articles were gathered using the library archives at Mississippi State University and the Starkville branch of the Oktibbeha County Public Library. Articles examined were focused on the MSU varsity football

team, as well as Robert Bell and Frank Dowsing's participation on the team. The time frame for this project is bounded by August 1 and December 1, 1970, 1971, 1972, and 1973 since the football preseason practices for the varsity season began in August and the regular season concluded the last week of November.¹² The 1973 season was included to determine any immediate historical perspective on the careers of Dowsing and Bell.

The Data as Communicated to the Analyst

The practice of newspaper content analysis, as mentioned above, has existed for over a century. By its nature, a qualitative content analysis of newspapers is, although potentially time consuming, unobtrusive (Jensen, 2002). Furthermore, Starc (2007) noted that unlike the immediate production and consumption of radio or television information, newspapers serve as a form of almost permanent media. For this study, the coverage of MSU football by three Mississippi newspapers that regularly covered the program was analyzed. Specifically, this content analysis focused on articles from *The Starkville Daily News*, *Mississippi State Reflector*, and *Jackson Clarion-Ledger* between August 1 and December 1, 1970-1973. The content of these newspapers was examined through archived microfilm files held at the Mississippi State University Library archives and Oktibbeha County Public Library. Additionally, hard copies of the *Reflector* were available for 1971, 1972, and 1973.

Limitations and Delimitations

When approaching the data collection for this thesis a series of limitations and delimitations emerged. The first limitation of the data focused on the nature of the data

¹² MSU did not participate in any bowl games during the time period of the study.

itself. Microfilm, although a convenient medium for storing and presenting archived newspapers, generated one instance of illegibility of articles.¹³ As a result, the content of one article, although generally accessible, could not be interpreted due to the quality of the microfilm reproduction. Availability of all published issues within the set parameters further limited the available data. The *Reflector* issues proved most problematic in this regard. Because of Thanksgiving Break during the 1970 Fall Semester, the publication associated with December 1 was not produced, as a result the December 4, 1970 issue is included in the study. Additionally, no issues were available through archived materials for the following dates: November 2, 1971, October 3, 1972, and November 17-30, 1973. The November 24, 1972 issue of the *Clarion-Ledger* also could not be obtained.

Because the collection of data was done without the assistance of a searchable electronic database (i.e. Lexus Nexus) the acknowledgment of the possibility that newspaper articles focused on either MSU football or Bell and Dowsing may have been inadvertently excluded is necessary. However, any such occurrence of exclusion would have been minimal. Lastly, the authors and sources of some articles could not be clearly determined. As a result, the publication of one article in multiple newspapers occurred on multiple occasions. These articles were included in data recording in order to give an accurate representation of the coverage being provided by the three newspapers.

In regards to major delimitations, rather than use every newspaper article that mentioned Robert Bell, Frank Dowsing, and MSU football, the data was refined to exclude articles that made only brief mention of Bell or Dowsing but did not provide any substantive discussion of them. Articles about a team other than MSU that mentioned

¹³ This was the case with the September 5, 1973 issue of *Starkville Daily News*.

Dowsing or Bell, but did not provide any insights beyond their name were excluded. Additionally, feature articles about other players that mentioned Bell and Dowsing were also excluded, as they were not an integral part of the article. The same applied to anecdotal mentions of Bell or Dowsing that were not focused on the players or team directly.¹⁴ Articles like the “Magnolia Round-up,” a statewide summary of all college sports teams were excluded from the analysis as they only provided context for how each team performed in a game with respect to the rest of the state. Also articles focused on the point spreads and gambling were excluded, as were practice reports, as these did not necessarily constitute coverage of the teams or players; however, they did provide enriched understanding of the interests of the readership.

The Context of the Data

Without a specifically identified context in which the content analysis will be performed, the replicability of the study and the validity of the inferences could be weakened as there are numerous contexts through which data can be analyzed (Krippendorff, 1980). Historical context guided and bound this content analysis. The historical context of the information being analyzed focused on the Southern United States, specifically Mississippi following the desegregation of public universities, between 1970 and 1973. More precisely, this analysis examined the content of newspaper coverage of MSU football by three Mississippi newspapers from August 1 through December 1, 1970-1973. This specific time period was chosen because it encapsulated the first three seasons (1970-1972) of desegregated varsity football at MSU

¹⁴ The November 17, 1970 issue of *Starkville Daily News* mentioned Frank Dowsing limping in the Baton Rouge airport while the team waited for a replacement plane.

and the careers of the first Black players, Robert Bell and Frank Dowsing. While Bell and Dowsing first arrived on campus in 1969, freshman football players were not yet allowed to participate in varsity football per NCAA rules and freshman teams played a truncated schedule. Additionally, the study incorporated 1973 coverage in an attempt to capture reference to the players after leaving the program.

How the Analyst's Knowledge Partitions His Reality

Although defining context protects the replicability and validity of the inferences made, the issue of prior knowledge of the researcher, or bias, may generate criticism of any inferences made from the data. In order to combat this, Krippendorff (1980) prescribed acknowledgement of the origins of the data and any assumptions the researcher has regarding how the data were consumed by their intended audience. The first point is addressed below, via a brief description of the three newspapers included in the content analysis. To the second point, it is the view of the author that in the instance of the *Starkville Daily News*, the presence of Mississippi State University as the main employer of the community where the paper was circulated could have resulted in increased favorable coverage of the university. Similarly, content in the *Reflector*, as a newspaper published by the university, should include mostly favorable coverage of university desegregation. Lastly, considering the emerging negative impact that television and radio had on newspaper sales, it would not be surprising to see what Tuchman (2002) described as a reemphasis on the importance of community in response to more general national coverage provided by television. For this project, the community would be Mississippi in the coverage of *The Jackson Clarion-Ledger*. Regardless of newspaper, it is also believed that the ultimate goal of the newspapers,

specifically the *Starkville Daily News* and *The Jackson Clarion-Ledger* was to sell newspapers. Therefore, stories were likely written in a way that would not alienate their core market audiences.

The Starkville Daily News. The *Daily News* serviced and continues to service Starkville, Oktibbeha County, and Mississippi State University. Unlike the *Clarion Ledger*, the *Daily News* only published regular issues Tuesday through Saturday during the years included in the current study. Further publications were also limited around holidays.¹⁵ Because of its proximity to the MSU campus, the *Daily News* provided enriched understanding of the day-to-day happenings on the practice field and, on occasion, the campus response to the football team. The layout of the newspaper often positioned sports on the second page of each issue, suggesting the importance of athletics to the readership.

The Reflector: the student newspaper of Mississippi State University. Billed as “serving Mississippi’s Most Dynamic University,” Mississippi State’s student newspaper covered many aspects of the day-to-day life of the students enrolled at the Starkville campus. Included in this coverage are Mississippi State athletics, athletes, and the football team. Although currently a weekly periodical, during the early 1970s the paper published editions on Tuesdays and Fridays throughout the semester. Due to the publication constraints on the paper, the first article of each new school year was

¹⁵ For example, during the week of Thanksgiving, the paper would publish issues on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday only.

typically not published until mid-September. As a result, some early season coverage of the football team is not included in the analyzed content from the paper.

The Jackson Clarion-Ledger. During the 1970s the *Jackson Clarion-Ledger* was published as a newspaper “Mississippi Owned, Mississippi Edited, For Mississippians.” The *Clarion-Ledger* had the largest circulation in the state during the time period included in this thesis. The paper was also known for its conservative stance and pro-segregation publication during the 1960s (Ballard, 2008).¹⁶ As it relates to college football, the newspaper published an annual football preview issue and had the resources to send sports reporters to all MSU games and publish stories about those games in the Sunday morning edition.

The Target of a Content Analysis

At the most basic level, the target of the content analysis is what the analyst is investigating (Krippendorff, 1980). This content analysis, as stated in chapter one, examined the print media portrayal of the football team at Mississippi State University. Specifically, the study explored: (a) How did two local newspapers and one statewide newspaper report on and portray Robert Bell and Frank Dowsing, the first Black football players at Mississippi State between 1970 and 1973? (b) How prevalent a factor was race in reporting about Mississippi State football? (c) What do the media portrayals of the team and players indicate about the social climate on and around the Mississippi State campus at the time?

¹⁶ Ballard (2008) mentions that the newspaper typically promoted the maintenance of Mississippi’s separate society and would frequently defend segregation.

Data Analysis

The initial examination of newspapers and articles resulted in 601 articles about MSU varsity football. Those results were further scrutinized to eliminate articles that did not relate to the program desegregation, Robert Bell, and Frank Dowsing. As a result, 398 articles were removed, leaving 203 articles for analysis. Those articles were examined using a three-tiered qualitative analysis of the data. The first reading was completed in an informed, inductive manner to identify sensitizing concepts. The second reading established a set of frames and themes within the articles. The third reading evaluated each article as an individual unit of analysis for coding within the established frames and themes [0 = no, 1 = yes]. In all, there was a total frequency of 426 frame instances and 686 theme instances, or a total of 1,112 codes drawn from 203 articles.

Inference as the Basic Intellectual Task

Before the results of a content analysis can be viewed as valid, the processes or theory used to generate any inferences need to be expressly stated (Krippendorff, 1980). This notion is further supported by Blumer (1954) through his identification that every object in the world "...has a distinctive, particular, or unique character and lies in a context of a similar distinctive character" (p. 7). Because of this reality, Blumer argued that we exist in a world of sensitizing concepts, whereby researchers are able to make sense of what is being observed, but are unable to be definitively identified (1954). As a means of generating sense and understanding of the observed data from the content analysis, the newspaper articles (data) were examined using a three-tiered qualitative analysis. The first tier of analysis utilized an informed, inductive reading of all newspaper articles identified as pertaining to MSU varsity football desegregation. That

is, the first reading was informed in that the data were read with the knowledge that in the 1970s, the Black athlete story was likely excluded or marginalized in newspapers and that newspaper coverage likely focused on Black athlete physicality and athleticism. The first reading was also inductive, in that any subsequent themes or relevant concepts emerged from the data, rather than the themes and concepts being placed on the data prior to interpretation (Patton, 1980). This first tier created understanding of the content with respect to Blumer's (1954) sensitizing concepts and established the sensitizing concepts that would influence the second tier of the study. The sensitizing concepts are listed in Table 1.

During the second tier of the study, an additional reading of the identified newspaper articles was conducted in order to generate a set of coding categories, in the form of frames and themes with respect to the sensitizing concepts, that best represented the data. The frames or frameworks identified provided boundaries for discussion, while the themes consisted of ideas that ran throughout each frame (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). Finally, during the third tier of analysis, the articles, now serving as individual units of analysis were read a final time and formally coded within the representative frames and themes established during the second tier of analysis. Due to the nature of the articles and the coverage of the football program and individual players, many articles presented overlapping frames and themes. When this occurred, the articles were coded as reflecting all themes under which they could be attributed.

Table 1

Description of Sensitizing Concepts

| Sensitizing Concepts | Example Description |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Factual accounts (No Embellishment) | Story written without describing performance, just statistics |
| Factual Accounts (Embellishment) | Story is written describing specific player performance providing praise/admonition |
| Tangible qualities/physicality | Players physical attributes, such as musculature are described |
| Intangible qualities (positive) | Leadership skills |
| Team Effort | Team or phase of game unit praised or derided |
| Publication Source | Story source portrays different narrative |
| Legacy | Where are the players senior year? |
| Anticipation/Potential | Stories describing what will hopefully happen |
| Media Relationship | Players described as getting along with writers |
| Off-field Intelligence | Players described as good students |
| Player of Game | Individual singled out as cause of victory |
| Excuses and Reasons | Emphasis on penalties (player not identified) Interceptions or fumbles |
| The Coach | Coaches temperament |
| Practice | Daily reports on practice |
| State of Mississippi Football Success | Comparison of each college team in state |

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This content analysis examined coverage of MSU varsity football desegregation through newspaper articles ($N = 203$) from the Jackson *Clarion-Ledger* ($n = 95$), *Starkville Daily News* ($n = 74$), and Mississippi State University *Reflector* ($n = 34$). The analysis of those articles yielded 15 themes bounded within three broader frames (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). The results of the content analysis are displayed in Table 2.

Performance

The first identified frame ($n = 151$) of newspaper articles covering the desegregation era of MSU varsity football focused on the output of Robert Bell and Frank Dowsing as members of the varsity football team: Performance. For this frame, performance is defined as the depictions of player actions and traits as student athletes at MSU. The frame encompasses six themes that demonstrate how newspapers covered program desegregation at MSU: (a) Performance as physical in nature, (b) Performance as mental in nature, (c) Performance had a positive impact on outcomes, (d) Performance had a negative impact on outcomes, (e) Performance portrayed as graceful, (f) Performance portrayed as violent.

Table 2

Frequency of Frames and Themes

| Frame | Theme | Frequency ($n =$) | Percentage |
|------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Performance | Physical | 118 | 58.13 |
| | Mental | 23 | 11.33 |
| | Positive Impact | 116 | 57.14 |
| | Negative Impact | 8 | 3.94 |
| | Graceful | 10 | 4.93 |
| | Violent | 16 | 7.89 |
| Part of the Team | Roster Inclusion | 85 | 41.87 |
| | Unit Inclusion | 60 | 29.56 |
| | Contributions | 100 | 49.26 |
| | Availability/Health | 32 | 15.76 |
| Individual | Race Mentioned | 7 | 3.45 |
| | Player Motivations | 7 | 3.45 |
| | Performance Recognition | 60 | 29.56 |
| | Legacy | 15 | 7.39 |
| | Expectations | 29 | 14.29 |

Performance as Physical in Nature

The first theme of physical performance ($n = 118$) relies on describing the players using physical characteristics (i.e., height, weight, musculature, speed) as well as the use of action verbs to describe player performance. For example, former MSU assistant

football coach Ken Donahue authored an article in the *Starkville Daily News* describing physical performance, writing “The secondary is outstanding. Frank Dowsing is very, very fast and can cover just about any receiver in the country one-on-one” (1971, p.4). In this example, the author not only describes Dowsing’s physical performance (i.e. speed), but also positions him as one of the fastest players in the country.

Performance as Mental in Nature

The second theme of mental performance ($n = 23$) also demonstrates player ability. However, unlike the physical characteristics of the players and the actions they performed, these articles described the athletes based on their academic abilities and successes. In a September 24, 1970 article from the Jackson *Clarion Ledger*, Frank Dowsing’s intelligence was described in the following manner: “If Dowsing’s performance on the field is tops, no one would be less surprised than his classroom instructors. Quick thinking and articulate, he is majoring in pre-med and making the Dean’s list” (1970, p. B1). In this instance, the author implies that Frank Dowsing’s intelligence makes him a better player, supporting that assertion by describing his intelligence in relation to the expectations of his instructors and his in-class achievements.

Positive Impact on Outcomes

The third performance related theme ($n = 116$) describes the positive impact the players’ performance had on the team over the course of the season or during specific games. The nature of the positive impact ranged from a specific play made by a player to an overall performance that helped MSU compete in a contest. Student sports journalist

Mercury Morris described the positive impact of a Frank Dowsing performance in the Bulldogs 13-10 upset victory over the Florida Gators in 1971, noting “State appeared to be in business again when Frank Dowsing intercepted another of Reaves strays and returned it to the Gator 43” (1971, p. 13). Morris’s description identifies a specific play during the course of the game, the interception and subsequent return by Dowsing, as positioning the Bulldogs to succeed on offense.

Negative Impact on Outcomes

The fourth performance theme ($n = 8$) contrasts with the theme of positive impact. Articles of the negative impact Dowsing’s and Bell’s performances had on the Bulldogs described their miscues on the field (i.e. fumbles or penalties) and failure to perform. The *Clarion Ledger* demonstrates coverage of negative performance with its description of Dowsing being bested on a play during a 1970 loss to the University of Florida stating “Alvarez and Mississippi State’s Negro sophomore, Frank Dowsing, tangled on an early game pass pattern. Dowsing bumped into the stellar Gator wide receiver, but Alvarez caught the ball” (MacFeely, 1970, p. F1). This example portrays Dowsing as a somewhat uncoordinated player who is unable to prevent a superior player from improving the opponent’s chance of scoring.

Portrayed as Graceful

The fifth theme ($n = 10$) goes beyond a description of the type of player performance, describing how they performed. Despite the violent nature of the game of football, newspapers described performances in elegant or graceful terms in some

instances. *Clarion-Ledger* Sports Editor, Larry Guest reported a Frank Dowsing punt return touchdown against the Tennessee Volunteers in the following terms:

Dowsing, a Tupelo junior, found a few gears, however gathering in a Majors punt at his own 46, slipping through a hedge of blockers, sailing down the right sidelines, and cutting back behind Jim McAlpin's block at the Vol 20 to dance into paydirt for the only Bulldog score this day (Guest, 1971, p. D4).

In this example, Guest first implies that Dowsing is the elusive quarry of the Volunteers (i.e. slipping through the hedge), but also portrays him as a graceful player dancing and sailing on the field.

Portrayed as Violent

The sixth and final performance theme ($n = 16$) not only expresses the violent nature of the game of football, but also utilizes descriptions of violent acts of players both within the context of the game (i.e. hitting) and outside of the context of the game (i.e. killing). The *Starkville Daily News* utilized an example of violence outside of the context of football in recounting Frank Dowsing's game saving play against Oklahoma State in the 1970 season opening game:

Oklahoma State, trailing by one, 13-14, the Bulldogs margin of victory was still breathing hard on a fourth and three situation from the State 45 when young gladiator Frank Dowsing crashed into the Okie's surest hands of All-American candidate Hermann Eben killing any reasonable hopes OSU had of a comeback (Foster, 1970, p. 2).

Foster characterizes Frank Dowsing as a violent figure (i.e. gladiator) in this instance and goes on to present his actions as violent (i.e. killing) as well.

Part of the Team

The most prevalent frame ($n = 185$) of Mississippi newspaper coverage of MSU program desegregation regarded the participation of Black players as members of the larger team entity. Four major themes exist within this frame: (a) Being included as a member of the Bulldog defensive roster, (b) Being included as a member of a specific unit on the defense (i.e. defensive line/tackles, secondary/defensive backs), (c) Contributions the players made to the team, (d) The health and availability of the players throughout the course of the season and how that impacted the team.

Defensive Roster Inclusion

The MSU defense, although not always exceptional in the desegregation era, consistently played at a level that afforded MSU an opportunity to win football games. The theme of defensive roster inclusion ($n = 85$) depicts Bell and Dowsing as members of the consistent Bulldog defense. This consistency was often attributed to experience and skill. Prior to Bell and Dowsing's senior season both were expected to be starting members on the defense:

The other seniors on the No. 1 defensive unit include tackle Robert Bell of Meridian, rover Billy Southward of Tishomingo, left half Phares of Clinton, La., right half Frank Dowsing of Tupelo and safetyman Emile Petro of Leland. All except Bell have been starters since the first game of the soph campaign in '70 (Daily News, 1972, p. 2).

In this example, Robert Bell and Frank Dowsing are listed among the senior starters for the experienced Bulldogs defense. Additionally, the attribution of experience to the

defense's success is implied through the upperclassmen status of the players and plainly stated through mention of Bell's comparative lack of experience.

Unit Inclusion

Beyond being members of the Bulldog defense, articles also focus attention on specific units making up the defense ($n = 60$). This theme was most prominently seen in depictions of the defensive secondary, a unit that featured the same three starters for three seasons. The *Starkville Daily News* described the key role of the players in the secondary during their first year playing together, noting "And State's defensive secondary of Ken Phares, Frank Dowsing and Emile Petro, all sophomores, has been a real help to the defense" (Daily News, 1970, p. 4). This example clearly defines the secondary as a specific unit of the defense, but also clearly identifies Frank Dowsing as one of the three key members of that unit.

Contributions Made to Team

The third theme ($n = 100$) extends beyond belonging to the defense and units within the defense to how the players contributed, either positively or negatively, to the defense, position group, and team. Larry Guest of the Jackson *Clarion-Ledger* described how Frank Dowsing contributed to the MSU team in a positive manner against the University of Alabama in November, 1972:

And State closed out its scoring with the only other tally in the period, a sparkling 47-yard punt return by fleet Frank Dowsing. The senior cornerback broke down the right sidelines after the Tide had kicked out of its own endzone, cut back

against the traffic and easily outlegged several Tide pursuers after he had popped out into open terrain (1972, p. C1).

Although part of a 58-14 losing effort for MSU, this example refers to Dowsing's positive contribution to the team through its description of his punt return touchdown against the Crimson Tide.

Health and Availability

In order to actively participate on the field as a member of the team, the health and availability of the players was vital. This fourth theme ($n = 32$) depicts the wellness of the players and the likelihood that they will play during a given week. Newspapers covered the health of Frank Dowsing, more than Robert Bell, and his availability to play on a week to week basis. One example of the availability and health of Frank Dowsing printed in the *Clarion-Ledger*:

At least two Mississippi State players are listed as doubtful starters for the Kentucky game, All-SEC cornerback Frank Dowsing hurt his knee against Florida and sophomore Jimmy Webb, a starter, injured his shoulder. Dowsing has intercepted two passes this season for the Bulldogs (1972, p. 21).

This example identifies Frank Dowsing as an not only a player who sustained a knee injury, but it also notes that he would, in all likelihood, not be able to play in the game.

Players as Individuals

The final frame ($n = 90$) considers the players, to some degree, outside of the context of the team. Rather, the frame contains five themes that discuss Bell and Dowsing as Black men, individuals, and student athletes who enrolled in Mississippi

State University and played football: (a) The overt mention of the players' race, (b) The motivations of the players to attend MSU and play football, (c) Performance and award recognition earned by Bell and Dowsing, (d) The legacy Bell and Dowsing left after finishing their playing careers, (e) The stakeholder expectations of Bell and Dowsing throughout their careers.

Overt Mention of the Players' Race

Robert Bell and Frank Dowsing were the first Black athletes to accept athletic scholarships to Mississippi State University and participate in varsity athletics. The first theme of the individuality frame is the overt portrayal of player's race in the media ($n = 7$). Newspapers covered Dowsing's and Bell's race and identified the players using the construct, as evidenced by Don Foster of the *Starkville Daily News*:

Of the forsh [sic] graduates, perhaps the most heralded of the lot is Frank Dowsing, the first Black athlete to sign a grant-in-aid scholarship with Mississippi State. Dowsing was followed by another prep catch, Robert Bell of Meridian who became the second Black football prospect recruited by the Bulldogs and like Dowsing is a candidate for the varsity.

(1970, p. 2).

In this case, the author does not merely identify Bell and Dowsing as football players for Mississippi State, but classifies them as Black football players for Mississippi State.

Player Motivations to Attend MSU and Play Football

The factors motivating Bell and Dowsing to attend MSU and play football constituted the second theme ($n = 7$). The reasons why they chose MSU and what they

hoped to accomplish during and after their playing careers are mentioned in newspaper coverage. Frank Dowsing described his educational motivations in an interview quoted in the *Starkville Daily News* as “I see a great need for black doctors in Mississippi, especially in the Tupelo area. I know that acceptance of me as a qualified physician may be a gradual thing: but it will happen” (1973, p. 3). In this instance, Frank Dowsing clearly states why he chose to attend college and the important role he planned to play in his community after he finished his education.

Performance and Award Recognition

The third theme within the individual frame, performance recognition ($n = 60$), discusses how newspapers covered and acknowledged awards earned by the players. In addition to Frank Dowsing’s multiple All-SEC selections, the *Reflector* highlighted his receipt of a National Football Foundation and Hall of Fame Scholar Athlete Award:

Frank Dowsing, Jr., a pre-med student at Mississippi State University was named a National Football Foundation and Hall of Fame Scholar for 1972. Three All-American candidates are in the group: Greg Marx, 6-5, 265-pound tackle who is the Notre Dame Captain; Bruce Bannon, a defensive end from Penn State and Dowsing (1972, p. 11).

This article indicates that Frank Dowsing is an exceptional college football player who is likely to receive post-season awards (i.e. All-American candidate), but that he is also receives awards and acknowledgment of his academic abilities as well.

Legacy

The fourth theme centers on how the MSU task of replacing Robert Bell and Frank Dowsing as three-year varsity players ($n = 15$). *Clarion-Ledger* Sports Writer Ponto Downing described the defensive void left following the 1972 season, indicating “the Bulldog defense has suffered with notables such as Frank Dowsing and Ken Phares, a pair of all-SEC defensive backs, gone via graduation, but the offense appears better” (1973, p. 15). Downing’s description of the state of the MSU defense after Frank Dowsing’s graduation not only indicates the important role that he played in the secondary and on the defense, but the author also implies that his departure due to graduation may be difficult for the defense to overcome.

Stakeholder Expectations

The final prominent theme within the framework of players as individuals reports on the expectations of MSU football stakeholders (i.e. administrators, coaches, fans, players) for Dowsing and Bell during their careers ($n = 29$). Stakeholder expectations encapsulated not only Dowsing’s and Bell’s arrival on the varsity, but also returns from injury and the level at which they could be expected to perform. A 1970 season preview article by *Clarion-Ledger* Sports Writer Bob Shearer illustrates the expectations of the Black football players at MSU:

Although the entire Sate secondary returns intact, Shira is likely to open with three freshmen, among them perhaps the brightest of the Bulldogs – Frank

Dowsing. Dowsing, a 9-5 sprinter with the torso of a muscleman, may be Mississippi State's answer to LSU's Tommy Casanova¹⁷ (1970, p. C3).

Shearer (1970) also mentions Head Coach Charles Shira's expectations for Dowsing within the article, attributing the following quote to Shira: "Frank is a fine athlete with great speed. He's a tough, smart kid and we plan to use him as a defensive starter although we will also use him in spots offensively and on kick return teams" (p. C3). This example demonstrates the heightened expectations for Frank Dowsing based on his physical traits (i.e. speed, muscular physique), his versatility as described by his head coach, and comparisons to a successful player at a rival institution.

¹⁷ Tommy Casanova was a three-time first-team All-American and labeled by *Sports Illustrated* as the best college football player in the United States.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The reporting of three newspapers that covered Robert Bell, Frank Dowsing, and the football team were examined using Krippendorff's (1980) content analysis framework in an attempt to gain a clearer understanding of the social and racial climate surrounding the university and football program as it desegregated. The content analysis resulted in the identification of three frames and 15 themes present in 203 newspaper articles covering MSU football between the 1970 and 1973 football seasons. It is from these resulting frames and themes that validity of the analysis emerges. For Krippendorff, validation is achieved through the acquisition of specific evidence related to questions posed prior to the content analysis. For this thesis, three specific research questions were developed to enhance the validity of the content analysis:

1. How did two local and one statewide newspaper report and portray Robert Bell and Frank Dowsing, the first Black football players at Mississippi State between 1970 and 1973?
2. How prevalent a factor was race in reporting about Mississippi State football?
3. What do the media portrayals of the team and players indicate about the social climate on and around the Mississippi State campus at the time?

Summary of Results

The most prominent frame identified, Part of the Team, demonstrates media accounts as positioning Robert Bell and Frank Dowsing as members of specific subsets of the football team and uses those subsets as part of player identification. As a result, this frame reinforces their standing as members of the football team and representatives of the university (roster inclusion; unit inclusion). The most prominent theme bounded by this frame is contributions (to the team). It is within this theme that Bell and Dowsing are actively participating for and on behalf of MSU. The fourth and final theme (availability/health) identified from this frame deals with whether Dowsing or Bell were healthy enough to participate in football games and fulfill their on-field roles for the football team.

The second most commonly identified frame to emerge from the qualitative content analysis, Performance, reveals a media focus on the traits and immediate impact of Robert Bell and Frank Dowsing on MSU football. That the coverage of the first Black football players at MSU focused on their performance is not out of line with previous content analyses on media portrayals of Black athletes. The coverage of Bell and Dowsing during the desegregation period not only highlighted their physicality, but emphasized, in a mostly matter of fact manner (that is, without embellishment), the positive impact of their performances during games. Although the themes of physical abilities and positive impact were most prominent, themes related to mental, graceful, violent, and negative impact performance were identified, but with less frequency.

The final frame that emerged during the analysis, the Individual frame, differs from the other frames in that it focuses on the Bell and Dowsing, in part, as distinct

players apart from the team. The themes bounded by this frame encompass the totality of the varsity careers of Bell and Dowsing, including the expectations for the players prior to their first varsity season and the legacy of the players after finishing their careers. This frame also features themes that put forward the identity of Bell and Dowsing, specifically, the overt mention of their race and the player motivations to participate on a previously segregated football team at a recently desegregated university. The most prominent theme, performance recognition, highlights the successes and accomplishments of the players as acknowledged by relative experts on college football.

Discussion

For more than 50 years, the history and identity of Mississippi State University has been linked to its athletics programs. MSU has used its sports history, in part, to position the university as a racially progressive alternative to its instate rival institutions, The University of Mississippi and University of Southern Mississippi. MSU supports its progressive position through the identification and promotion of two desegregation events directly tied to the university, the 1963 “Game of Change” and university desegregation in 1965. MSU shares its version of these events in university publications (Ballard, 2008; Smale, 1996), on university webpages (MSU Library), and in its facilities (Humphrey Coliseum, Holmes Cultural Diversity Center). Despite the promotion of this narrative, evidence exists in student testimony from the late 1960s and 1970s that the MSU community response to desegregation was not as progressive and welcoming as the university puts forward. As Mohler (1973) noted in *The Reflector*, students, faculty, and fans of MSU football demonstrated racist behavior with regularity. The prominence of the MSU narrative coupled with the relative overshadowing of the negative experiences

of Black students and student athletes at MSU suggests that the narrative put forward by the university is worthy of reexamination. As mentioned in the introduction and literature review of this thesis, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is one method scholars can employ to reexamine and reinterpret the world as we understand it.

Scholars such as Starc (2007), Vincent and Hill (2010), and Dauncey and Hare (2014) demonstrated that print media is capable of using sport to shape national identity. When considering the claims of Borucki (2003) and Doyle (1994) that the role of college football and the significance of college football teams in establishing and reinforcing Southern identity and community pride, the media coverage on Robert Bell and Frank Dowsing as MSU football players provides insights into the culture of Mississippi State University, Starkville, and the feelings of university stakeholders. Contrary to the MSU desegregation narrative, a critical and CRT reexamination of the media coverage of the football team during the desegregation period reveals a different, underreported cultural narrative.

Part of the Team

Part of the Team, the most prominent frame identified during the content analysis, focused on Bell's and Dowsing's status as contributing members of the MSU football team. The MSU football team, like many college football teams in communities throughout the South, exists as a symbol and reflection of the MSU community. In looking at themes identified from this frame, the emphasis on Bell and Dowsing as members of the team and therefore symbols of MSU emerged most prominently. The focus on their standing as members of the football team, specifically how they helped contribute to the team supports the MSU narrative of progressivism. However, the

emphasis on Bell and Dowsing as members of the team, also projects an oversimplified image of inclusion and equality at MSU.

The Part of the Team frame demonstrates a tendency for newspaper coverage to present a premature sense of racial assimilation on both the football team and on campus. The danger in presenting premature assimilation is that such actions provide a false sense of inclusion and imply that discrimination does not exist (Campbell, 1995). By focusing on Bell and Dowsing as welcomed, contributing members of the team and not reporting on any mistreatment, the sports pages presented their audience with an oversimplified image of life for Black students at MSU.

Culbertson (1973) reported that even three years after the desegregation of the program, fans in the MSU student section directed racial slurs at MSU players. Additionally, Dillon (1972) noted that Black students felt that they were not treated as equals on the campus. This point is furthered by Richard Holmes's claims that the university had changed little since his enrollment in 1965 (Dillon, 1972). These reports directly contradict an article from *The Reflector* the previous season that stated racial differences were not an issue for the football team (Voss, 1971). For the MSU stakeholder and football fan reading about the team and its exploits, but not the experiences of the Black student population on campus, the likely result from these conflicting reports is the assumption that issues related to race were not relevant on the campus, furthering the pro-MSU desegregation narrative.

Performance

The second frame, Performance, showcases the print media focus on the abilities of Bell and Dowsing and how those abilities benefitted MSU football. Although football,

by its nature is a physical game, and coverage of physical performance would be inherent in discussion of the game, a focus on the performance of Black athletes is uniquely noteworthy. While the media's emphasis on the physicality of Black athletes has been demonstrated across various sports in the last three decades (Byrd & Utsler, 2007; Eastman & Billings, 2001; Goss, Tyler, & Billings, 2010; Hughey & Goss, 2015; Hylton & Law, 2009; Murrell & Curtis, 1994), the implication of these studies is that Black athletes are portrayed as figures who are more physically gifted than White athletes and to some extent, more aggressive and violent. While the Performance frame certainly reflects the findings of previous works concerning physicality, the newspaper coverage of MSU football desegregation suggests elements of "Whitecentrism" in football coverage.

The concept of Whitecentric coverage is explained by Hylton and Law (2009) as "... powerful processes that privilege White voices, images or imagined communities..." (p. 90). It is within the shared community of MSU stakeholders that conditions for Whitecentric coverage exists. Unlike the presentation of assimilation, the Whitecentric coverage demonstrates the impact of Bell's and Dowsing's performances on the program. The majority White MSU community is the ultimate focus of coverage of Bell and Dowsing. Descriptions of Bell and Dowsing playing and the impact of their performance ultimately reflect back on the majority White university, football program, and stakeholder population. Positive plays help MSU while negative performance hurts the university. Descriptions of their performance demonstrate that the MSU football team utilizes Black athlete ability to better the team. Reports on player intelligence demonstrate that the football team recruited Black players who could represent the university as students and athletes. Regardless of the type of performance, Mississippi

State, and by extension its predominantly White population dominates the focus of the coverage.

Individual

The final frame covers Bell and Dowsing as unique individuals compared to their teammates. Coverage in this frame offers understanding of Bell and Dowsing's identity as well as the glimpse into media representations of them in and outside of the context of football. At first glance, this frame demonstrates that race, specifically the overt coverage of race, was minimal. This, coupled with the other identified themes appears to demonstrate that the journalists writing or the audiences reading the newspapers were not interested in reading about varsity football desegregation. Nonetheless the coverage of Bell, Dowsing, and MSU football desegregation is largely colorblind.

To ignore race in the context of program desegregation is problematic when considering the context in which MSU varsity football desegregated. Colorblindness, in a societal context, can be detrimental to race relations and equality if the society practicing colorblindness has a history of racism within its social structure (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The Mississippi university and public school systems did not desegregate until the years immediately prior to varsity football desegregation at MSU. Furthermore, the state sponsored separation of races created two separate, but nominally equal societies. The de jure racialism in the state of Mississippi embedded racial inequality into the fabric of both the state and the identity of the people. As a result, the failure to mention race and challenge the social system is akin to supporting it.

When scrutinized further, the Individual frame, rather than demonstrating the progressive nature of the MSU community, as could be inferred from the coverage of

Bell and Dowsing as individuals, demonstrates that newspaper coverage sought to maintain the status quo. The coverage of Bell and Dowsing, in addition to minimizing their race, also minimized their personal motivations for attending Mississippi State. At the same time, the prestige they brought to the program and the expectations the largely White stakeholder population had for the players appeared most prominently in the frame.

Findings

The findings of this content analysis of newspaper coverage of the desegregation of Mississippi State University varsity football and the interpretation of its results guided by Critical Race Theory contradict the popular narrative regarding MSU desegregation, MSU athletic desegregation, and the progressive nature of the MSU community and its stakeholders. The MSU narrative positions the university as both pushing for racial equality and being tolerant of social change. A CRT interpretation of newspaper content demonstrates that the coverage of MSU varsity football desegregation and the varsity football careers of Robert Bell and Frank Dowsing were reported in a way that supported the power structure of the majority White MSU stakeholder and community population.

While this interpretation of data and events presents an alternative to the dominant MSU desegregation narrative, it does not conclusively position the MSU narrative as false, nor does it unequivocally establish itself as the truth. What can be claimed with some certainty is that Robert Bell's and Frank Dowsing's participation with the varsity football team was clearly newsworthy. Extricating race from the coverage of the first years of desegregated sport in a state with a history of legally supported racialism is difficult, especially when attempting to interpret reporting on Black athletes to a largely

White population raised in that racist system. Because of the likely intended newspaper audience, the assertion that the newspaper coverage was consciously or subconsciously favorable to the White population is plausible, while the marginalization of the experiences of Bell and Dowsing is similarly plausible in that context.

However, the fact remains that the nature of MSU desegregation and MSU varsity football desegregation and stakeholder response to those moments cannot be viewed in isolation. Similarly, individuals should caution against ascribing to one narrative while completely eschewing the other. In reality, the truth regarding desegregation rests both within and surrounds the various interpretations of events in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This thesis presented an interpretation of data and facts to create a richer understanding of the desegregation moment and the realities of Mississippi State University during that time period. Ultimately, that interpretation, coupled with other historical interpretations will help to create a richer identity for Mississippi State University.

Contribution to Sport Studies

Previous content analyses regarding race and sport have demonstrated the tendency for print media to focus coverage on Black athlete performance and traits (Byrd & Utsler, 2007; Eastman & Billings, 2001; Goss, Tyler, & Billings, 2010; Hylton & Law, 2009; Murrell & Curtis, 1994). Additionally, that coverage has evolved over time and has demonstrated a more equal representation of athletes regardless of race (Byrd & Utsler, 2007; Goss, Tyler, & Billings, 2010; Hylton & Law, 2009). While these studies demonstrated that there has been a progression towards equal coverage of athletes as sport leagues and fans have become more accustomed to desegregated sport, they

position this process beginning in the 1980s and 1990s. The case of coverage of Mississippi State University football desegregation demonstrates that the local and state newspaper coverage, likely as a means of maintaining stakeholder confidence in MSU football as a symbol of a community that did not delay civil rights, placed an emphasis on the role the White stakeholder population played in desegregation and presented Bell and Dowsing's accomplishments in a manner favored by the White majority. As a result, the university and its stakeholders did not develop a conceptual understanding or appreciation for desegregation of the program or university from the viewpoint of Black students and Black student athletes.

Suggested Future Research

Between 1970 and 1972 the desegregated Mississippi State University football team logged a combined record of 12 wins and 21 losses (.364 winning percent), a slight improvement over the .338 winning percentage recorded by the team throughout the 1960s. Following the 1972 season, Charlie Shira, the MSU Head Football Coach and Athletic Director resigned from his coaching position and promoted MSU Offensive Coordinator Bob Tyler to Head Football Coach.¹⁸ Robert Bell accepted a graduate assistant coaching position on the MSU football junior varsity coaching staff. Frank Dowsing participated in two college football all-star games (Hula Bowl; Blue-Grey Classic), was drafted in the 16th round of National Football League Draft by the Philadelphia Eagles, and, ultimately, enrolled in medical school. Bell and Dowsing's

¹⁸ On December 28, 1974 the Mississippi State University Bulldogs defeated the University of North Carolina Tar Heels 26-24 in the Sun Bowl for the program's first bowl appearance and win since the 1963 Liberty Bowl.

careers as student athletes at MSU were documented in a variety of newspapers with varied circulations and audiences.

Throughout the research and writing of this thesis several topics related to, but outside of the scope of this project emerged and should be considered worthy of potential future research. With a focus on newspaper coverage of desegregation of MSU football, the restrictions imposed on newspaper article publication by editors, temporal deadlines, and publication ideology may have diminished some accounts and recording of the events surrounding Bell, Dowsing, and the desegregated MSU football team. As part of enriching the history and understanding of the desegregation of the football team, the inclusion of interviews of Robert Bell, Frank Dowsing's family members, or other individuals who were alive during program desegregation could form a productive complementary piece to this content analysis of newspaper coverage. Additionally, a project focused on the individual story of Frank Dowsing warrants further investigation. Despite his status as the first Black student athlete to sign an athletic scholarship, be named all-conference and all-American, a scholar athlete, and Mr. Mississippi State, his story and impact on the program is largely unexamined. Further, his lack of recognition by the university, football program, and M-Club (specifically in the sports hall of fame) is surprising considering his athletic, academic, and campus-wide accomplishments and historical impact on the university.

A third area of potential research focuses on the media's coverage of Frank Dowsing in relation to its coverage of Ken Phares. Dowsing and Phares were both members of the class of 1973, played defensive cornerback, returned punts and kicks, were all-conference players, and were taken in the 1973 National Football League Draft.

Comparing differences and similarities in the media coverage of Dowsing (Black) and Phares (White) should provide further insights into media coverage of desegregation at MSU as well as the overall community reaction to program desegregation.

Related to this examination, a third study could be done to compare and contrast the media coverage of MSU's first Black Quarterback, Melvin Barkum, with his White counterpart, Rocky Felker. Both Barkum and Felker enrolled in MSU in 1971 and shared starting varsity quarterback duties in 1972 and 1973. Given the prominence of the quarterback position and the coverage of the position, this comparison may be very helpful in generating increased understanding of the social climate on campus and in the community in the early 1970s.

Conclusion

Collegiate football plays an important role in the history and culture of the Southern United States. By performing a content analysis of the Starkville *Daily News*, Mississippi State University *Reflector*, and Jackson *Clarion-Ledger* coverage of Mississippi State University varsity football between 1970 and 1973, this thesis fills an apparent gap in the understanding of Mississippi State University and MSU varsity football desegregation. By systematically identifying frames and themes that emerged from the newspaper articles and interpreting the meaning of the frames and themes with a Critical Race Theory approach, a greater understanding of the desegregation period of MSU football emerged. The emphasis on Robert Bell and Frank Dowsing as members of the team and de-emphasis on their individuality beyond recognition of performance that benefitted the team and university helped to establish a potentially incomplete understanding of desegregation at the university. As a result, football desegregation

became an extension of the progressive narrative the MSU White stakeholder population presented beginning with the “Game of Change” in 1963.

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