

# Deep in the Heart of Texas: College Football, Race, and Booster Culture Through the Lens of the Southwest Conference

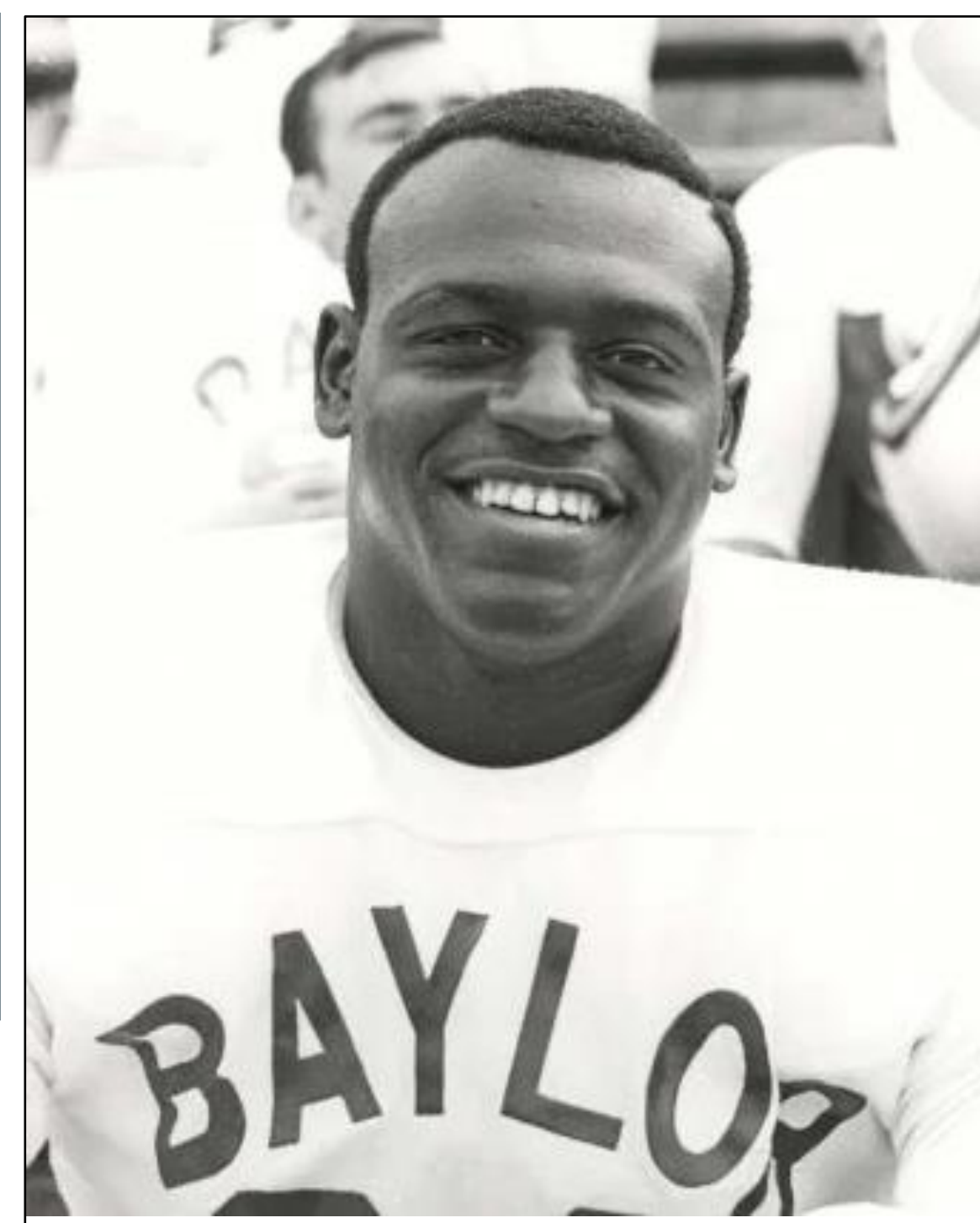
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## Abstract

The Southwest Conference (SWC) was the most prominent Texas-centric organization in collegiate athletics, including football powerhouses such as the University of Texas and Texas A&M University. Existing from 1914 to 1995, it dominated college football for much of its tenure. This thesis argues that the SWC reflected Texas social practices, rooted in boosterism tied to land speculation and the oil boom. The SWC also embodied the Lone Star state's white supremacist roots, largely ignoring Black players and integrating well after *Brown v. Board*. Slow integration, economic isolation, and Texan brashness led to the SWC's collapse. Using diverse sources, this study shows how the SWC shaped perspectives on culture, higher education, and race.

## Thesis

College football is a cultural and political force in the state of Texas, that both reflects and affects Texans' perspectives on booster culture, higher education, and race.



Right: John Hill Westbrook, the first African American to play in the SWC, circa 1965

## Key Sources

### Primary Sources:

- Student and Municipal Periodicals (i.e. *The Battalion*)
- Alumni Magazines (i.e. *The Alcalde*)

### Secondary Sources:

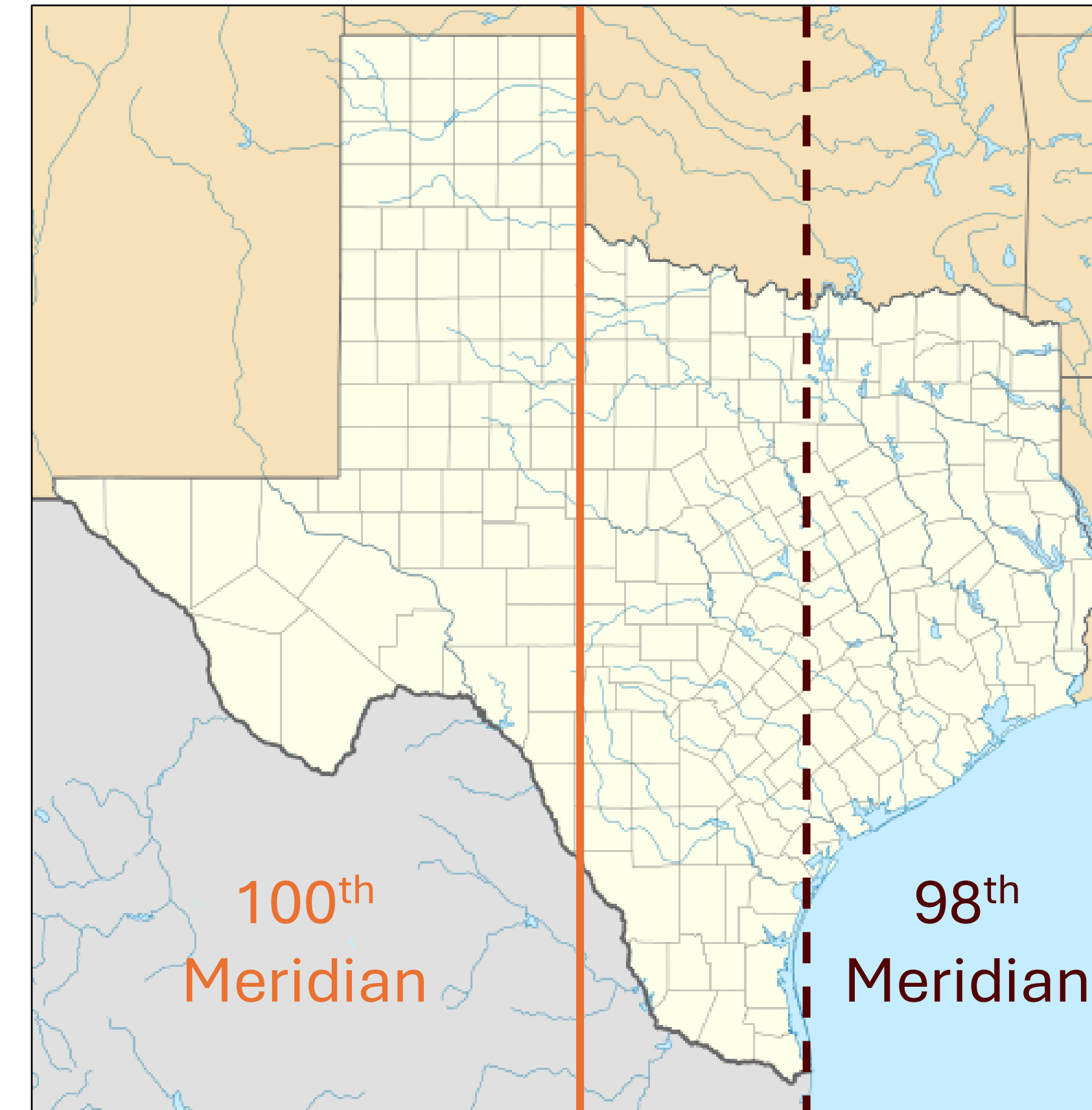
- *The Handbook of Texas* – Texas State Historical Society
- *The Great Plains* – Walter Prescott Webb
- *A Payroll to Meet* – David Whitford



Above: *Family Portrait of the SWC*, showcasing the mascots of the nine universities

## Texas as a Southern State

- Founded as a slave-holding territory
- East v. West Texas – 100<sup>th</sup> meridian
- Sharecropping trapped freedmen in East Texas
- Race affected SWC institutions recruiting and donor practices
- Following *Brown v. Board*, SWC stubbornly integrated from 1965-1970



## Football as a College Sport

- Football follows the spread of higher education across the U.S.
- Coincides with Muscular Christianity
- Used by Texan schools as a selling point, making football a commodity
- Football is used as a tool to integrate universities after *Brown v. Board*.



Above: *The First Game*



Above: Kyle Field following its 1930 booster-funded expansion.

## Texan Boosters and College Football

- Texan booster practice was established through land speculation practices and cowboy culture
- Boosters effectively privatize higher education, including college football
- The SWC is reliant on Texan boosterism
- Booster practices weaponized integration to poach African American talent in underserved communities

## Conclusion

- Booster interference and their continued attempts to commodify college football severely damages the SWC
- The SWC's slow integration doomed the conference
- Texas-Centrism consumed and destroyed the SWC
- The SWC is a story of racism and greed

## Acknowledgements

My family is intertwined with college football and inspired this I.S. My dad took me to my first football game ever at Wooster. My mom supported my sports obsession, driving me to my games and cheering me. My Aunt Vicki and Uncle Ed fueled my passion through generosity, including my first "Horseshoe" tickets. My advisors were pivotal: Dr. Hettinger offered wisdom, and Gillian Lee provided writing guidance. Thank you all for your lasting influence. This project would not be possible without your support.