Early Black Leadership in Collegiate Football: Massachusetts as a Pioneer

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The study of the role and position of blacks in American life finally became a critical aspect of historical scholarship in the 1940s and since 1960 has grown to become one of the most discussed and researched areas of investigation. One prevailing theme evolving from the research in black history is a general agreement that the lowest period of the "freeman's" quest for equal rights extended from approximately 1877 to the beginning of the First World War. There is some disagreement as to the exact year or years when black rights reached the absolute bottom, but the general consensus of leading historians is that it occurred sometime during the first decade of the twentieth century.

It is an apparent contradiction to this consensus to discover that blacks were participating on predominantly white college football teams at this time. Not only were some blacks playing the game with whites, but two Negroes were elected team captain. They were William H. Lewis at Amherst College in 1891, and William H. Craighead at Massachusetts Agricultural College, Amherst (now University of Massachusetts), in 1905. One Negro, William H. Lewis was at Harvard, named to the All-American team in 1892 and 1893, and another, Matthew W. Bullock, was appointed head coach at Massachusetts Agricultural College in 1904.

These examples of early black leadership in collegiate football were obviously pioneer efforts but did not lead to the widespread integration of American sports. It is suggested that these events were made possible because the state of Massachusetts was a pioneer in black-white relationships. The "self-help" philosophy for black success was at its peak and the men involved were not only accomplished athletes but were also extremely capable scholars and outstanding personalities.
The South, having the majority of American blacks, led in the development of race discrimination and segregation in the post-Reconstruction era. The Negro had been looked upon as an alien incapable of assimilation and his inferiority was a common assumption during the first half of the nineteenth century. After emancipation in 1865, blacks were viewed as a burden on everyone and many solutions to this problem were suggested. Some of the more prominent perceived solutions were that natural laws would inevitably force blacks to locate in a purely African type environment thus removing them from full view, that Black colonies should be established outside of the United States and the Negro population exported, and that Negroes would become "extinct" as a result of a Darwinian "struggle for existence" because they were inferior to the white man.

The late 1870s and early 1880s were a transitional period when segregation and discrimination had not reached their fullest extent. According to C. Vann Woodward, there was still open discussion of what would become forgotten alternatives in black-white relations. But, in the latter years of the 1880s, segregation policies became solidified and race relations in the South degenerated to the point that lynchings, burnings, and shootings were endemic and justified as answers to the race problem. By the end of the century, blacks were accused of having a greater propensity for crime than whites. Charles Carrol's bizarre work of 1900, The Negro a Beast, depicted the black man as something close to an animal. Kelly Miller, a contemporary black sociologist, described the stereotype of the black man at the turn of the century:

The criminal propensity of the Negro is the charge that is being most widely exploited in current discussion. By fragments of fact and jugglery of argument he is made to appear a beast in human form whose vicious tendency constitutes a new social plague.

Such was the dismal condition confronting most blacks in the United States during the 1890's and the first decade of the twentieth century.

Although blacks were generally having difficult times during the last third of the nineteenth century, one geographic area excelled as a forerunner in race relations. New England attempted civilize race relations earlier than other sections of the United States, but Massachusetts was the early leader in black-white relationships. The Bay State was the first to abolish "Jim Crow" cars on railroads, it repealed laws against interracial marriage in 1843, and passed laws pertaining to discriminatory attitudes toward blacks as early as 1865. Negroes were admitted to schools on an equal basis after 1865 and by 1880 blacks had achieved recognition of their right to an education.

The political situation was also extremely favorable for blacks in Massachusetts before the close of the nineteenth century. Black Bostonians sat in the Massachusetts House of Representatives almost continuously from 1878 through 1897, eleven blacks were elected to Boston's Common Council in the
same years, and at least four blacks were appointed to federal positions during this time.\textsuperscript{14} In fact, the leading Negro newspaper agreed that Boston "more than any other large city has been friendly, liberal, and progressive in all movements for the advantage of colored people."\textsuperscript{15} One contemporary writer in Massachusetts even proclaimed that "being a Negro actually counted as an element of advantage, as signifying a special claim upon the community and eliciting special sympathy and help."\textsuperscript{16}

During the late 1880s, the claim began to be made that blacks had made progress since emancipation because they had the help and encouragement of Southern whites. This type of reporting was of course aimed at the North where there were lingering doubts about Southern racial policy. However, George M. Fredrickson indicated that "many in the North were quite ready by 1890 to be persuaded that the South's new 'paternalism' was the answer to the Negro problem."\textsuperscript{17} Closely associated with this way of thinking was the doctrine of "self-help" which was seen by both blacks and whites as the necessary ingredient for Negro success. An early historian of Boston's black community, John Daniels, devoted an entire chapter, "The Negro Forced Upon His Own Resources,"\textsuperscript{18} to the idea, and said of 1890 that "the conviction has taken root that... to achieve real and lasting progress, they (Negroes) must be made to depend primarily... upon their own independent effort...."\textsuperscript{19} John Hope Franklin, prominent black historian, also identified this period as one when "Negroes had to work out their own formulas for survival."\textsuperscript{20} Finally, a leading Presbyterian minister, Reverend Henry M. Field, was very concerned with assisting blacks and published a book in 1890 for this purpose entitled, \textit{Bright Skies and Dark Shadows}. He prescribed hard work and frugality and could only advise blacks: "Your fate is in your own hands."\textsuperscript{21} The "self-help" philosophy was dominant at this time and was gospel to many of the pioneering blacks.

Black football players began to appear on the white teams of liberal New England colleges about twenty years after the historic game between Princeton and Rutgers in 1869. Two blacks, William Henry Lewis and William Tecumseh Sherman Jackson played on the Amherst College eleven during the seasons of 1889, 1890, and 1891, and before the end of the century a few other blacks had football success at white institutions. George A. Flippin played halfback for Nebraska in 1892 and 1893, Joseph H. Lee was a tackle for Harvard in 1896, George M. Chadwell played end at Williams College during the seasons of 1897, 1898, and 1899, and William Washington starred at Oberlin (Ohio) during the same years.\textsuperscript{22}

William H. Lewis and William T.S. Jackson are credited as being the first great black collegiate football players, but they also excelled in many other campus activities.\textsuperscript{23} Lewis was a college senator, class orator, and president of the Hitchcock Society of Inquiry.\textsuperscript{24} Jackson was also a member of the Hitchcock Society of Inquiry, played baseball his freshman year, was football director for his class, and starred in track. He represented Amherst College in the half-mile run at the New England Intercollegiate Athletic Association's meet
in 1890 and registered a commendable time of two minutes and eight seconds. After the football season of 1890, the Amherst College team elected Lewis as captain for the upcoming year. He became the first black player to be selected for this esteemed position at a predominantly white institution. Lewis served his school well and at the conclusion of the season, the editors of the college yearbook, The Olio, expressed their appreciation: "Our congratulations to all the team for their excellent work on the field, due in no small degree to the efforts of the Captain, 'the finest center rush in New England.'"

Lewis left the Amherst area upon graduation and enrolled in the Harvard Law School. Since there were no rules prohibiting graduate students from participating in intercollegiate athletics, Lewis naturally joined the football team. His skill was so outstanding that Walter Camp selected him as an All-American "center-rush" in 1892 and 1893. He earned a law degree in 1895 and became a partner in the Boston law firm Lewis, Fox, and Andrew. But, still in contact with his alma mater, he returned to help coach the Harvard line during the 1898 season. He was credited for Harvard's 10 to 0 victory over the University of Pennsylvania that year because he "had worked out an effective defense to the 'Guards Back' attack." His book, How to Play Football, written around this time, was widely read as a good source for the techniques and fundamentals of the game.

William H. Lewis became one of the most prominent black men in politics and law. His first political office came in 1899 when he was elected to the Cambridge City Council. Three years later, he became a member of the Massachusetts State Legislature and served until 1903 when he was appointed by President Theodore Roosevelt as Assistant United States Attorney for Boston. In 1907, he was made Assistant United States Attorney for New England in charge of naturalization affairs where he remained until 1911, when he was named by President William Howard Taft as Assistant Attorney General for the United States. He served in this capacity for two years and then returned to private practice in Boston.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, a few black collegiate stars had acquired fame for themselves and their race, but during the first decade, a slight increase in black participation was noticeable. Almost all of the blacks playing football on white teams were enrolled in colleges in the North, but only two were able to acquire positions of leadership. Some of these pioneers were W.N. Johnson and Robert Taylor at Nebraska, Horace Bell and Robert Marshall at Minnesota (Marshall was on Camp's 2nd All-American team in 1905 and 1906), Samuel D. Morrell at Oberlin, Roy M. Young and H.H. Wheeler at Illinois, William C. Matthews at Harvard, Robert Hamlin at the YMCA College in Springfield (now Springfield College), Ernest Marshall at Williams College, Edward Gray at Amherst College (Gray was named to Camp's 3rd honor team in 1908), William H. Williams, Charles E. Roberts, and William H. Craighead at Massachusetts Agricultural College (M.A.C.), and Matthew W. Bullock at Dartmouth.
The M.A.C. star of 1901 through 1905, William H. Craighead, had an outstanding football career as an “Aggie.” He had played two years of football at Howard University Preparatory School before coming to Massachusetts and with this added experience, excelled at both the guard and tackle positions. At the conclusion of the 1904 season, the members of the M.A.C. team elected Craighead captain in a unanimous decision. The local press reported that the “Colored Man Captain” was “a strapping six footer of 190 pounds” and “a well-built colored man who wears a fourteen size shoe.” Craighead became the second black man to be elected captain of a predominantly white college football team.

The “Aggie” captain was not only an outstanding performer on the gridiron but was also an excellent student. He was elected vice-president of his freshman class, won first prize in the Flint Oratorical contest, and delivered his prize-winning essay, “Booker T. Washington,” at the 1905 Commencement exercises. Craighead held the rank of Fourth Corporal in the M.A.C. Cadet Battalion and graduated with a Military Diploma in addition to his Bachelor of Science degree. After graduation, he moved to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, where he became an editor. He later assumed the position of County Agent for “colored people” in Bowling Green, Virginia. Craighead died there on November 17, 1940.

Matthew Bullock, Dartmouth player and M.A.C. coach. From The Index, XXIX (1909), 14.
Another early black collegiate star was Matthew W. Bullock, the famous end at Dartmouth College from 1901 to 1903. One noted historian of black sports wrote: "Why Bullock did not receive All-American selection has never been understood. Bullock was one of the brainiest men of football ability the game has had." Track was also one of Bullock's specialties and he represented Dartmouth in the high jump and broad jump.

Acquiring the services of a football coach from outside of one's own institution was a common practice at the turn of the century and every fall most of the colleges recruited a suitable candidate. The Massachusetts Agricultural College team was no exception. It had been a custom at M.A.C. to use past Dartmouth players to coach its team, and in 1904, Matthew W. Bullock, an alumnus of the New Hampshire college, was hired for the position. The Athletic Board at M.A.C. extended an appeal for alumni contributions and in the final tally, $251.03 had been donated to pay the new coach. Bullock became the first black man to hold the head coach's position at a predominately white collegiate institution and did a meritorious job his first year.

The M.A.C. football team of 1904 began the season with only a small nucleus of returning players and probably the toughest schedule they had ever played. Their opponents were Holy Cross, Dartmouth, Williams, Brown, Wesleyan, Springfield Training School, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, and Tufts. As the season progressed, enthusiasm increased and the student body assembled their support behind the team and Coach Bullock. A hint of this excitement can be gleaned from a newspaper account of the victory celebration after the 12-0 defeat of Williams.

The news of the victory was received at Amherst with great rejoicing. The college bell was rung for more than an hour. The team returned early in the evening by trolley from Northampton and was met by a procession of the students headed by the cadet band. The members of the team were seated in a barge, and there was a triumphal procession from the Amherst house corner to the college grounds, the band playing and the students making a plentiful display of red fire and shouting the college slogan. When they arrived at the campus a big bonfire was kindled, salutes were fired, and speeches were made by Captain Munson and Coach Bullock. Later the students visited the homes of Professors Waugh, Brooks and Hasbrouck, who responded to the calls and made brief speeches of congratulations.

The team ended the season with a fine 5-2-1 record and the editor of the M.A.C. College Signal was certain the success stemmed from the efforts of the new coach.

For this success a large share of the praise is due to our coach, Matthew W. Bullock the former Dartmouth star. A student of football and a fine conditioner of men, he put his heart and soul into his task and throughout the season had the team 'coming.'
Although M.A.C. had their best football season in a number of years under Bullock, they were not able to secure his services for the 1905 season. Bullock coached the Malden High School team in 1905 and 1906 while attending Harvard Law School where he received his degree in 1907. After two dismal seasons with records of 3-7 and 1-7-1, M.A.C. succeeded in bringing Bullock back to coach the 1907 team. His return was looked upon with great optimism as evidenced by the report to the alumni by the treasurer of the Athletic Board.

Mr. M.W. Bullock, who was our coach two years ago, is the famous Dartmouth ‘end’ of several years ago and is one of the best football coaches in this part of the country. He is a gentleman of excellent character and ‘knows his business.’ The college authorities and the student body and the members of the team are satisfied and pleased that he has been secured.  

M.A.C. football team, 1904, with Coach Matthew Bullock (right) and William H. Craighead, player (second person on second row, left). From The Index, XXXVI (1906), 72.

Many favorable comments were made concerning Bullock’s coaching ability during the 1907 season since it was obvious that the team had improved considerably over the past year. The editor of the M.A.C. College Signal said: “Coach Bullock is fast rounding a mass of rather unpromising material into a strong football machine.” The comments were not misleading. Bullock did another fine job with the team and completed the season with a 5-3-1 record.
Bullock's services were acquired again by M.A.C. for the 1908 season, but this would be his last year coaching in New England. The M.A.C. team lost the majority of their varsity players and Bullock had to work extremely hard to finish with a very average 3-3-3 season. Upon completion of the schedule, he secured a teaching and coaching position at Atlanta Baptist College (Morehouse) in Atlanta, Georgia. While at Atlanta Baptist, Bullock, along with Edwin Henderson, was among the first to select Negro all-college teams. He remained teaching there until 1912 when he established a law office in Atlanta. From 1915 to 1917, Bullock was Dean of the Agricultural and Mechanical College at Normal, Alabama and, after this, returned to Boston where he gained admittance to the Massachusetts Bar. During World War I, Bullock was a physical director in the American Expeditionary Forces and at the conclusion of the war, returned to Boston where he served as Special Assistant Attorney General, was a member and later chairman of the Massachusetts Board of Parole. After 1948, he devoted his time and efforts to the Baha'i World Faith and was elected to the Baha'i National Assembly in 1953. In 1971, Dartmouth College honored its famous alumnus with an honorary Doctorate of Laws degree.

In conclusion, it is suggested that these examples of early black leadership in collegiate football occurred in a geographical area ahead of its time in race relations which was "ripe" for trust in the Negro. The New England area, and especially Massachusetts, was far more advanced in black-white relationships than any other section of the United States. Massachusetts provided educational benefits for blacks, passed anti-segregation laws, permitted blacks to vote, and appointed many blacks to state and municipal offices. However, these achievements reflected advanced racial attitudes in the Northeast, but were limited and, as attitudes began to change, temporary.

At no time had race relations in New England approached any sort of egalitarian ideal. In Boston, for example, the black community remained residentially segregated and economically depressed throughout the nineteenth century. And, as the community itself was changed by an influx of southern and West Indian blacks in the 1880s and 90s, the racial attitudes of white Bostonians began to follow those of the South into the racist consensus of the early twentieth century. As early as 1890, an editorial in the Boston Globe noted that blacks in Boston were "ostracized in a more effective manner than...in the south" and suggested that the local reformer "who is ready to devote his life to the cause of the black man has an abundant field right here in the city of Boston." John Daniels, who saw blackness as an advantage in earlier years, selected 1895 as "the dividing point between the old order and the new." "Because sentiment for the Negro had mounted higher in Boston than anywhere else," he wrote, "the subsidence which was now taking place was, by contrast, most marked in that city." The return of Matthew Bullock to coaching at M.A.C. in 1907 after having just received a law degree from Harvard University might well have reflected a general lack of professional opportunities for an educated black man resulting from the hardening of racial attitudes in the Progressive Era.
The black athletes discussed were obviously men of high aspirations and possessed talents far above the average. They entered higher education at the peak of the "self-help" campaign and succeeded in great pioneering efforts for their race. In a sense, they were a "black-elite" of very capable scholar-athletes who were given an opportunity in a few liberal Massachusetts colleges.

The efforts of Lewis, Craighead, and Bullock seemed almost futile by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. Even the residents of Massachusetts changed their views toward blacks as the attitudes of the South spread into and permeated the North. Evidence of this fact lies in the loss of political positions once held by blacks and in Supreme Court decisions supporting segregation. In addition, although there may be isolated examples to the contrary, college football did not have any other black captains or coaches until late in the 1920s. As a result, it is believed that college football for Lewis, Craighead, and Bullock was simply mirroring the black image at the time in the state of Massachusetts. When the form reflected in the mirror was altered, so was the color of the collegiate football captain and coach.

NOTES


5. An apparent drop in the Negro population as determined by the 1890 census caused a revival of belief in the "power of Darwin's ideas." For example William Benjamin Smith, The Color Line: A Brief in Behalf of the Unborn (New York, 1905), described "the Negroes alleged failure in the struggle for existence." The full impact of "Racial Darwinism" was alluded to by Pierre L. VandenBerghe, Race and Racism: A Comparative Perspective (New York, 1967), pp. 25-34. See also Fredrickson, The Black Image in the White Mind, p. 255.

7. Lynchings, most of them in the South, "reached their peak in the 1880s and early 1890s, averaging about 150 a year during the two decades and attaining a maximum of 235 in 1892." Quoted in August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915*, p. 20. Shootings and burnings, along with lynchings, are discussed by Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, pp. 271-272.


12. A series of laws were passed up until 1895 when the penalty for discrimination was a maximum of $500 and jail not more than a year as an alternate or additional penalty. It is interesting to note that in 1893, William H. Lewis, then at Harvard Law School, was refused service at a barber shop in Cambridge. With the aid of a local attorney, he petitioned the legislature which resulted in amending the anti-discrimination law to include "barber shops or other public places kept for hire, gain, or reward, whether licensed or not." John Daniels, *In Freedom's Birthplace: A Study of the Boston Negroes* (Boston, 1914), pp. 94-95.


14. For a more detailed discussion of the political situation in Massachusetts, see Daniels, *In Freedom's Birthplace: A Study of the Boston Negroes*, pp. 98-105.


18. Daniels, *In Freedom's Birthplace*, Chapter IV.

19. Ibid., p. 131.


24. Lewis was the son of former slaves and prepared for college at Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute in Petersburg, Virginia. He was born on November 28, 1868, which made him 23 years of age when he was elected captain at Amherst College.

25. The material relating to the campus activities of Lewis and Jackson at Amherst College was taken from the Amherst College Olio of 1891-94. The activities of Jackson are mentioned here because he is usually associated with Lewis as being one of the first two black collegiate football players. He was three years older than Lewis when he played football. Jackson went on to become a teacher, and then principal, of the M Street High School (now Dunbar), in Washington, D.C. Henderson, The Negro in Sports (1939 edition), p. 8. He died on November 11, 1943.

26. The Olio of Amherst College, 1893, p. 121.

27. Ibid., p. 120.

28. It is interesting to note that W.E.B. DuBois and William Trotter, two leaders in Negro history, traveled from Boston to Amherst to see Lewis graduate. Traveling with them was Bessie Baker, the girl Lewis married. W.E.B. DuBois, "A Negro Student at Harvard at the End of the Nineteenth Century," in Black and White in American Culture, ed. by Jules Chametzky and Sidney Kaplan (Amherst, 1969), pp. 117-137.


34. Springfield Republican, December 2, 1904, p. 4.

35. Ibid., December 4, 1904, p. 4.

36. Harvard University gave Booker T. Washington the honorary degree of Master of Arts in 1896, the first time that a New England university had conferred an honorary degree upon a black. Logan, The Betrayal of the Negro, p. 278. Washington delivered a lecture at College Hall in Amherst on October 5, 1904. Amherst Record, Vol. LXII, No. 26 (September 21, 1904), p. 4.

37. The College Signal (1902-1906), The Index (1902-1906), Catalogue of the Massachusetts Agricultural College (1905-1906), and, the M.A.C. Bulletin (1902-1906). The University of Massachusetts Alumni Office provided information on his life after graduation.


42. *Amherst Record*, Vol. LXII, No. 29 (October 12, 1904), p. 4.


47. *Dartmouth College — 50th Reunion of the Class of 1904*, n. p. Bullock was also Chairman of the Ward 8 Republican Committee, a member of the Massachusetts Republican State Committee, Secretary of the Urban League, and President of the national fraternity, Omega Psi Phi. Additional information pertaining to Bullock's life was obtained from Ralph W. Bullock, *In Spite of Handicaps* (New York, 1927), pp. 85-89.

48. Matthew W. Bullock died on December 17, 1972 in Detroit, Michigan, where he was living with his daughter, Julia Gaddy. His son, Matthew, Jr., is a judge in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.


51. Roy Young coached the Northwestern University (Illinois) line in 1912, Charles Ray was captain of Bates College (Maine) in 1926, Homer Harris was the first black captain in the Big 10 at Iowa University in 1938, and Levi Jackson became Yale's first black captain in 1948.