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Erin Grayson Sapp. *Moving the Chains: The Civil Rights Protest That Saved the Saints and Transformed New Orleans*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2023. 282 pp. paper, $29.95

Whatever transpired between Pete Rozelle, then commissioner of the National Football League, and Thomas Hale Boggs, then a Congressional Representative from New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1966, died with them. A congressional antitrust committee had been established to examine the merger between the NFL and the upstart American Football League. Rozelle wanted the acrimony between the two leagues to end. Boggs wanted professional football in New Orleans. The result created the New Orleans Saints. How New Orleans landed the franchise remained clouded by rumors of a quid pro quo arrangement between two powerful white men. Erin Grayson Sapp’s *Moving the Chains: The Civil Rights Protest that Saved the Saints and Transformed New Orleans* challenges that assumption by exploring what football meant to the Crescent City and how Jim Crow-style governing shackled New Orleans to the past inside a rapidly evolving world. It would take more than two men talking in the Capitol Rotunda to bring professional football to New Orleans. For twenty-first century Saints fans, imagining New Orleans as a segregation stronghold. Grayson Sapp illustrates how a cultural and social backwater, known only for the enjoyment of life, embraced a racially liberal plan to gain a professional football team.

*Moving the Chains* contains little about the Saints; this is a book about what key figures in New Orleans, Louisiana, and the NFL did to establish an NFL team by committing to more inclusive social practices. Among others, players from the AFL were instrumental in calling attention to racism in New Orleans. David Dixon, a New Orleans businessman, wanted professional football in the city; as a white resident, though, he understood the obstacles his community presented: Professional football did not sync well with the city’s racist culture. Grayson Sapp presents Dixon as a civic-minded progressive. However, not enough information is provided about what exactly Dixon did and how he worked covertly to bring professional football to the city, except for writing pointed letters and addressing civic groups, even though she credits him with breaking down social and political obstacles bound by racism. Both Tulane University alums, Dixon and Boggs were well acquainted. Dixon wrote to Hale Boggs stressing that pro football would give “New Orleans and Louisiana a chance to recover our good name nationally” (76). He also knew Hale Boggs could bridge disparate groups. Selling progressive ideas, though, was not easy, especially in the South.

How pro football arrived in New Orleans is Grayson Sapp’s hook. As a historian, she explains how sports, specifically football, made minor social changes in New Orleans. Consisting of eleven chapters, each titled with a football reference, the book opens with the 1956 Sugar Bowl selection, a process with a historical result—a Black athlete played in the game. On January 2nd, Bobby Grier, a second-string fullback for Pitt, was on the field when the University of Pittsburgh kicked off to Georgia Tech. Symbolically, the slow gears of social change began to engage in a game featuring a team from the East and a team from the South, which ended with a single controversial Georgia Tech touchdown: Tech 7, Pitt 0. In New Orleans, Grier was celebrated as a trailblazer, and the city experienced an integrated sporting event both on the field and off. It would take more than one Sugar Bowl game to achieve real social change, however. As Grayson Sapp makes clear, progress takes time, patience, political machinations, and cultural shifts.

If the city was going to join the new South, change was mandatory. Football offered a space where people of all races, backgrounds, and social levels might be able to share, albeit for a few hours.

Dixon recognized the insurgent American Football League as a conduit leading to a New Orleans professional football franchise. However, a stadium with a small seating capacity, like Tulane Stadium, posed problems. Still, in 1962 Dixon thought an AFL team was possible until Sam Lacy and the *Afro-American* newspaper addressed the issue with an honest editorial: “Attention is respectively called to the fact that the city of New Orleans and its environs practice racial discrimination in brazen defiance of law and reason, with no evidence of desire to do otherwise” (83). AFL expansion was deferred and preseason games, which featured integrated fan seating, an integrated press box, and Black players proved successful. The AFL awarded New Orleans the 1965 AFL All-Star game. Things did not go well. Black athletes heard racial slurs at the airport and their hotels, they were refused hotel dining room seating, some had to use the rear entrance to their hotels, and many were turned away at French Quarter clubs. The Black players called for and agreed to boycott the all-star game. Ron Mix, a white player joined them, and so did Jack Kemp, the Buffalo Bills quarterback. Then every white player agreed to support the boycott. There would be no AFL All-Star game in New Orleans in 1965. A labor stoppage helped create the New Orleans Saints.

Grayson Sapp is not a labor historian, which is unfortunate. When football players like Art Powell, Buck Buchanan, and Willie Brown unite to force change, there is a rich history to probe. Still, Grayson Sapp focuses on civic leaders and businessmen who wanted to change New Orleans locally and nationally. The national embarrassment caused by the AFL player boycott required immediate response. By January 1967, the charter for New Orleans Saints, Inc. was filed. The city would have an NFL team. On September 17, 1967, the Los Angeles Rams kicked off to the New Orleans Saints at the renovated, expanded Tulane Stadium. John Gilliam, a Black wide receiver for the Saints, took the opening kickoff back for a touchdown. "The response of 80,879 stomping and hollering ticket holders sparked legends of cracks forming in the stadium's foundation and dishes vibrating off tables at nearby homes," Grayson Sapp writes (219). Civil rights finally reached Louisiana and the city of New Orleans through a sporting event pushed on by the solidarity of fifty-eight Black and white AFL All-Stars and progressive behind-the-scenes agents. Grayson Sapp has compiled a historiography worthy of a four-quarter commitment.