

University of Mississippi

eGrove

Study the South

Publications of the Center for the Study of
Southern Culture

3-31-2016

Back to One City: The 1973 Memphis State Tigers and Myths of Race and Sport

Aram Goudsouzian
University of Memphis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studythesouth>

Recommended Citation

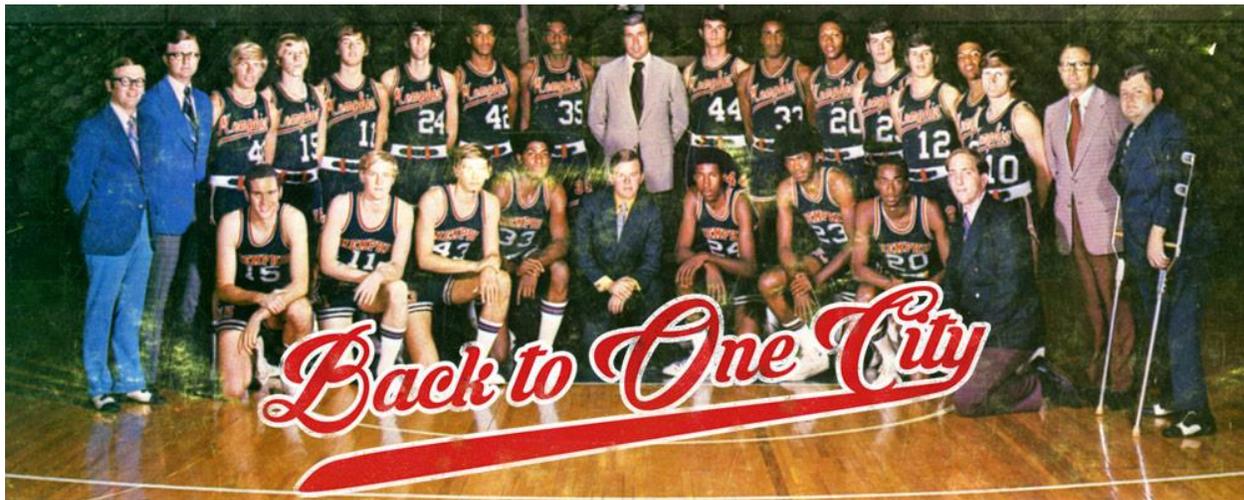
Goudsouzian, Aram, "Back to One City: The 1973 Memphis State Tigers and Myths of Race and Sport" (2016). *Study the South*. 18.

<https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studythesouth/18>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Publications of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Study the South by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact egrove@olemiss.edu.



STUDY *the* SOUTH



THE 1973 MEMPHIS STATE TIGERS AND
MYTHS OF RACE AND SPORT
BY ARAM GOUDSOUZIAN
PUBLISHED: MARCH 31, 2016

1 INTRODUCTION

February 18, 1973 was Senior Night, the last home basketball game of the season for the Memphis State Tigers and an emotional celebration of Larry Finch and Ronnie Robinson, the team's two beloved black stars. Before the game, Gov. Winfield Dunn had called to wish them well, and Mayor Wyeth Chandler offered a tribute.

The Tigers jumped ahead of West Texas State, and by the second half the lead was insurmountable. Finch was hitting leaning jumpers, and Robinson was soaring high for rebounds. The pep band fostered a sentimental mood, playing a gentle, half-tempo version of the fight song, "Go, Tigers, Go." With four minutes left, coach Gene Bartow subbed out his stars. The band now played loud and fast, and the Mid-South Coliseum shook with sustained, deafening roars. As the game finished, the band played "Auld Lang Syne." "It did some people in," described one sportswriter. "Women cried and there were grown men in the stands who stood and watched their feet shuffle, almost afraid to look up because you're not supposed to get choked up over a game. Or are you?"¹

Robinson hoisted Finch to snip the nets at one basket, and then Finch did the same for Robinson at the other end. They signed autographs for hundreds of children. Overcome with emotion, Robinson slipped into the locker room. "I don't know what's going to happen to me now," he said. "There might be another war, like Vietnam, and I might have to go to it, but

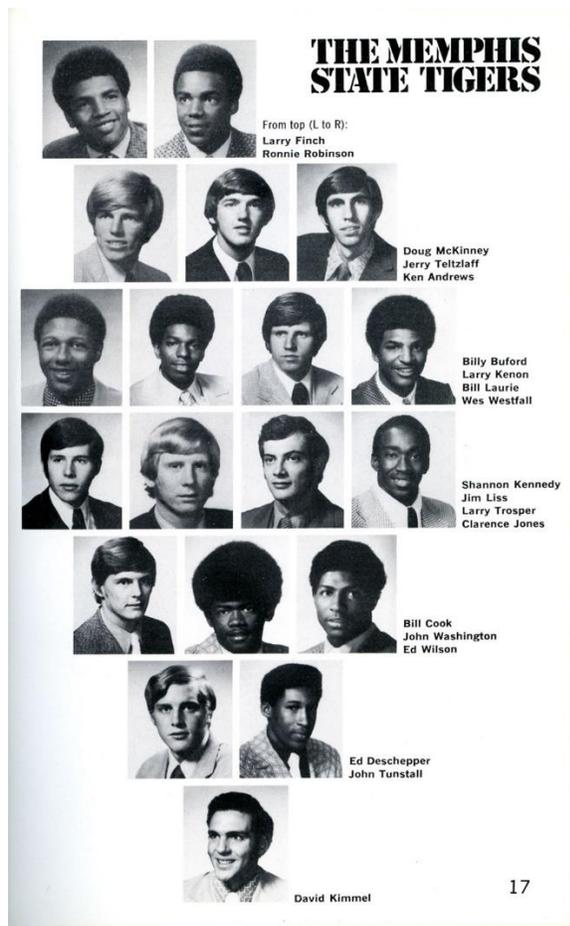
whatever becomes of me I want you to know that I'm never going to forget what has happened to me at Memphis State. Never again could anything be so great." A tear dripped down his cheek.²

Later that evening, the team gathered at the home of a wealthy white booster. It was Finch's birthday, so they celebrated with cake and ice cream. Around one o'clock that night, Finch's mother found him in the kitchen, playing an imaginary game of hoops with a gaggle of preteen boys.³

Larry Finch and Ronnie Robinson were not only athletic stars, but also ambassadors of racial goodwill. Mayor Chandler had already proclaimed that the team "unified the city like it's never been unified before. Black and white, rich and poor, old and young are all caught up in their success. Memphis is a better city now, thanks to the Memphis State basketball team." After the sentimental Senior Night, one columnist waxed: "If our racial barriers are lower, then credit Finch and Robinson for having a lot to do with it."⁴

That season, the Tigers' greatest triumphs were still to come. The team would win the Missouri Valley Conference and reach the NCAA tournament final. In the history of college basketball, Memphis State's season is just a footnote, as the Tigers lost the title game to UCLA, which captured its seventh consecutive NCAA championship. But in Memphis, this team became a civic mythic legend. With each victory, the city's enthusiasm ballooned, inspiring more paeans to Finch, Robinson, coach Gene Bartow, and budding superstar Larry Kenon. Politicians and journalists upheld the team as a vehicle of interracial unity, healing the scars of the 1968 Sanitation Strike and Martin Luther King's assassination.

As with many myths, this one has elements of truth. Basketball did provide common ground across lines of race and class, and Finch and Robinson did inspire sincere admiration. Memphians, black and white, paint the moment with great cultural importance. Yet, as with many myths, it hides as much as it reveals. The success of the basketball team smoothed over Memphians' anxieties about the status of the university, the prestige of their city, and the future of race relations. The language of racial healing inspired by Finch and Robinson occurred amidst political disillusion and a controversial court-ordered busing plan to integrate schools. The story of the Tigers' season thus illuminates how sports can not only foster racial progress, but also obscure racial divisions.⁵



(Preservation and Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis)

2 FERTILE GROUND FOR BLACK PROTEST

In recent years, the image of the black athlete had undergone a revolution. For years, athletes such as Joe Louis, Jesse Owens, and Jackie Robinson had served as emblems of black respectability. But the “Revolt of the Black Athlete” argued that sport reinforced racial barriers. The iconic Black Power salute by Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics captured this militant spirit. By the early 1970s, the brash Muhammad Ali won public fascination as he returned from exile after refusing induction into the Vietnam War. The world’s greatest basketball player was Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, the Milwaukee Bucks’ shy, sullen center who had recently converted to Islam. Many white traditionalists perceived these stars as angry, entitled black separatists.⁶

College sports were particularly fertile ground for black protest, as Memphis learned in December 1972, when hosting the Liberty Bowl. After a dispute over complimentary tickets, Georgia Tech coach Bill Fulcher suspended Eddie McAshan, the first black quarterback to start for a historically white school in the Deep South. McAshan had endured various indignities from Georgia Tech students, fans, and coaches over the years, and as noted by the *Tri-State*

Defender, Memphis's black newspaper, his conflict with his coach revealed the emerging "sensitivity of the black athlete." McAshan's generation wanted more than just inclusion—it needed evidence of equal treatment.⁷

At a rally in Atlanta, McAshan punctuated his speech with a Black Power salute, and a coalition of civil rights groups asked black players on both squads to boycott the game. Maxine Smith, executive secretary of the Memphis NAACP, began negotiations with Fulcher. McAshan remained suspended and no one boycotted, but about four hundred protestors from the NAACP, Urban League, and Operation PUSH picketed the Liberty Bowl. PUSH leader Jesse Jackson bemoaned how black athletes were "treated as trained animals." Memphis NAACP officials called the incident "a total ethnic affront to all Blacks in this country."⁸

While racial turmoil plagued the Liberty Bowl, the basketball heroes at Memphis State allayed white anxieties about militant black athletes. "Larry Finch is a calm, friendly and self-assured young man and Ronnie Robinson acts as though he is the first cousin of the city," admired the *Helmsman*, the campus paper at Memphis State. The players chatted with admirers, signed autographs, and wore constant smiles. Neither star boasted about individual accomplishments. They even had endearing nicknames: the round-bodied Finch was "Little Tubby," and the athletic Robinson was the "Big Cat."⁹

Finch and Robinson had been friends since the seventh grade. Both grew up in Orange Mound, the city's largest black neighborhood, and attended Melrose High School. Like churches and other community institutions, Melrose basketball reflected both the pride of Orange Mound and the hardship of racial segregation. Finch and Robinson won wide acclaim in Memphis, as the city was finally removing the distinction between the all-white Prep League and all-black Negro League. During their senior year, they led Melrose to a 34–2 record. Before the 1969 city championship game, four thousand fans were turned away from a sold-out Mid-South Coliseum.¹⁰

Various college programs recruited Finch and Robinson. Leonard Draper, an African American recruiter for the Tigers, became a consistent presence on their doorsteps. In 1969 they both chose Memphis State out of some combination of hometown pride and family ties. "It wasn't a popular decision not only in the Orange Mound community, but throughout the black community in Memphis," recalled Draper. Melrose coach William Collins refused to attend their signing ceremony since the university had a reputation as being hostile to African Americans.¹¹

"As Finch and Robinson elevated the team's fortunes, it established 'the significance of the black athlete to Memphis State's future.'"

At Memphis State, though, Finch often celebrated how basketball erased racial barriers. He considered his team a model for the larger society. "If a city or a country were like an athletic team, we wouldn't have as many problems because everybody would be working toward that same goal. Everybody would try to understand more about the races. Black people would try to

understand the whites better and the whites would try to understand the blacks.”¹²

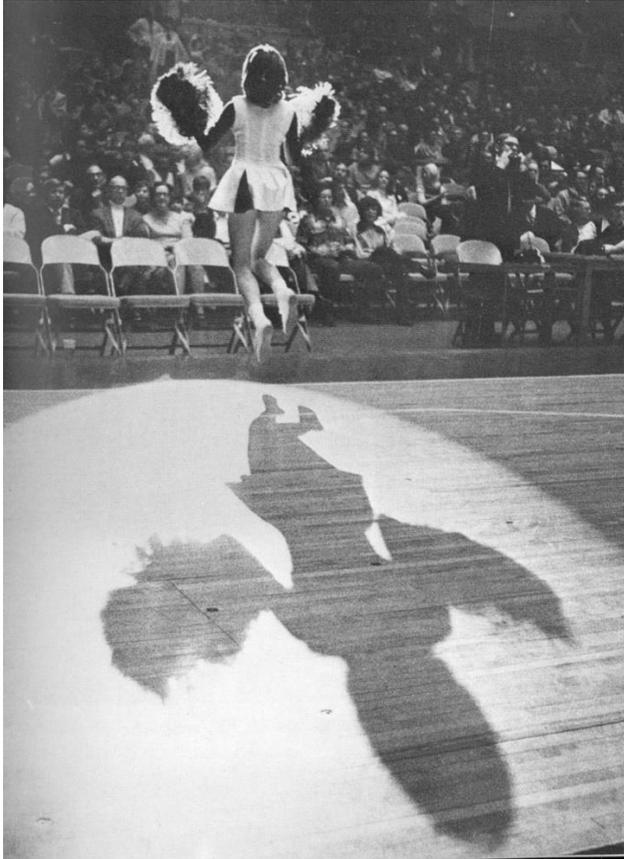
Art Gilliam, a black writer for the *Commercial Appeal*, penned a column early in their senior seasons entitled, “Finch and Robinson: A Good Team.” As Finch and Robinson elevated the team’s fortunes, it established “the significance of the black athlete to Memphis State’s future.” Like other journalists, Gilliam highlighted their loyalty to Memphis. Finch, for instance, had declined two lucrative summer jobs so he could mentor children at the Melrose gym.¹³

In a somewhat extraordinary gesture, the 1972–73 team media guide was dedicated to their mothers, Mabel Finch and Naomi Robinson. “It might be old-fashioned and trite to talk about motherhood,” it stated, “but in these cases it is worth every bit of the space. The manner in which these ladies have sacrificed and contributed to their sons’ careers is worthy of honor.” This dedication might have reflected the black stereotype of the dominant black mother, but it also spoke to a genuine popular sentiment about Finch and Robinson.¹⁴

For whites, MSU basketball had long been the biggest show in town. In 1957 the “Dixie Darlings” made the finals of the National Invitational Tournament in New York City, charming a national television audience. The team kept achieving success and appeared in the 1962 NCAA tournament. These teams were all-white, mirroring the segregation of college sports in the South until the mid-1960s. In 1965, Herb Hilliard became the first African American to play basketball at MSU. By then, about two hundred fifty blacks attended the university, following a path laid by the pioneering “Memphis State Eight” in 1959.¹⁵

Moe Iba became head coach in 1966, after four seasons as a recruiter and scout for Texas Western University, which beat the No. 1 ranked University of Kentucky to win the 1966 NCAA title with an all-black starting lineup. In Memphis, he started recruiting more African Americans. By 1968–69 his team had eight blacks, including the outstanding Richard Jones. Despite recruiting players who thrived in a fast-paced style, Iba insisted upon a deliberate passing offense and traditional man-to-man defense. In 1970, with the freshmen Finch and Robinson still ineligible for the varsity, MSU went 6–20, and Iba was fired.¹⁶

The new coach, Gene Bartow, quickly won admiration for his integrity, courtly manners, and close-knit family. A native Missourian who had thrived at Valparaiso University in Indiana, “Clean Gene” did not drink, smoke, or cuss. One local columnist praised him as “a soft-spoken, warm-hearted man who has sincere, genuine interest in the human race.” Bartow was a tireless evangelist for the basketball program, accepting every possible invitation to speak before student groups, civic organizations, or sports boosters. He also courted the Rebounders, a booster club of about three hundred members, which supplied his players with mentors and high-paying summer jobs.¹⁷



Memphis State University cheerleader (Preservation and Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis)

Bartow embraced the trappings of big-time college basketball. Now, at Mid-South Coliseum, players were introduced under a spotlight, fans hung banners and posters, and a pep band, pretty cheerleaders, and uniformed color guards entertained the crowd. While urging fast-break basketball, he resuscitated the Memphis State program. When Finch and Robinson were sophomores, the team finished 18–8. The next year, the Tigers went 21–5 and tied for the Missouri Valley Conference championship before losing a one-game playoff for the berth to the NCAA tournament.¹⁸

Finch and Robinson flourished under Bartow. Finch, a 6'2" guard, was a brilliant shooter and deft passer. By the end of his junior year, he had led the conference in scoring, smashed the team's single-season point record, and won the MVC player of the year award. Robinson, a 6'8" defensive and rebounding specialist, had tied the school's single-season rebound record and been named to several all-star teams.¹⁹

Before the 1972–73 season Bartow landed a prize recruit. Larry Kenon, a 6'9" All-American at Amarillo Junior College in Texas, had averaged twenty-seven points and twenty-five rebounds a game. Despite scholarship offers from big-time college programs and contract offers from the American Basketball Association, he chose Memphis State because it was a quality program near his hometown of Birmingham, Alabama. He impressed his new teammates before the first

practice, when he palmed two basketballs, soared above the rim, and dunked them both. Though dubbed “Dr. K”—a play on the nickname for pro superstar Julius Erving—Kenon was quiet, shy, and distant. He also nursed a pulled groin muscle throughout the early season, so it took time for Memphis fans to appreciate his greatness.²⁰

Kenon headlined one of the nation’s best incoming classes. Bartow lured two other junior college transfers, Wes Westfall and Billy Buford. Like Kenon and Robinson, both were talented, athletic forwards who wore fashionable Afros. The new supply of talent meant that Memphis State basketball featured four black starters, with Buford the first player off the bench. The only white starter was Bill Laurie, a tough little point guard who focused on passing and defending.²¹

Heading into the season, the Tigers had to integrate the team’s new players, both on and off the court. Finch and Robinson had to share the ball with Kenon, while Kenon had to adjust to Bartow’s discipline. Moreover, the three junior college arrivals felt some resentment. “Memphis was Larry and Ronnie’s town,” said Buford, “and we were outsiders.”²²

3 A S L O W S T A R T

Bill Grogan, MSU’s hyper-energetic sports information director, was once described as “an industrious, gnomelike creature whose zeal for a hot item is never inhibited by reality.” His media guide for the 1972–73 season proclaimed: “MEMPHIS STATE’S CHANCES IN 1972–73 ARE AS GOOD AS ANY OF THE MAJOR TEAM’S IN THE NATION WITH BUT POSSIBLY ONE EXCEPTION.” The UPI preseason poll ranked them fourteenth in the nation, and AP rated them eleventh, but Grogan had higher aspirations. He adopted an old ditty—the title of a Judy Garland movie—with an eye on the Final Four and UCLA coach John Wooden: “*Meet me in St. Louis, Wooden, beat your Bruins there! Meet me in St. Louis, Wooden, Memphis State’ll be there!*”²³

When the season started, that confidence seemed absurdly misplaced. After beating overmatched Missouri Western in the opener, Memphis State endured a shocking blowout loss to a weak LSU team. Even in a win over South Florida, the Tigers looked sloppy on offense and sluggish on defense. In Milwaukee, they lost a close game to fifth-ranked Marquette, and in a home game against a mediocre Texas squad, the Tigers turned the ball over, failed to feed their big men, allowed too many layups, blew a ten-point second-half lead, and lost by one point. Their record stood at 2–3.²⁴



Memphis State bench, Larry Finch (second from left) and Coach Bartow (center) (Preservation and Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis)

Bartow was tinkering with the lineup. The players were despondent. Fans were grumbling. Finch was in a shooting slump and looked overweight. Robinson was in-and-out of the lineup with injuries, as were others. But the biggest problem was learning to sacrifice for the sake of the team. After the Texas debacle, the players held a closed-door meeting. “We got out what we needed to get out,” recalled Robinson, and they emerged with a better sense of mutual trust.²⁵

Slowly, the Tigers rounded into form. In consecutive home dates, they routed Navy and overcame an eleven-point deficit against UC–Santa Barbara. In Little Rock, they edged a scrappy Arkansas team—reserve guard Jim Liss played only the last twenty-seven seconds, but he sank the free throw that gave Memphis State a one-point victory. Finch then netted thirty-five points in a post-Christmas annihilation of Cornell.²⁶

The last game of 1972 was on the road against undefeated, 10th ranked Vanderbilt. The Commodores were favored by seven and a half points. The Tigers led early, but Vanderbilt staged a comeback. Bartow grew furious. His players kept getting battered, while the referees choked on their whistles. After receiving a technical foul, Bartow waved his arms, motioning for his club to leave the floor and head to the locker room—a bluff, to be sure, but it made a point. The Tigers held on for a three-point upset victory. Afterwards, the players exuded a quiet pride, a good sign for a once-troubled team.²⁷

4 “THE BIGGEST SHOW IN TOWN”

Memphis State University was saddled with the nickname “Tiger High.” Founded in 1912 as a teachers college, it grew dramatically in the 1960s, when enrollment increased 260 percent. Yet MSU lacked the intellectual or social community of many big universities. By 1970 more than three-fourths of the eighteen thousand students were commuters, and approximately 60

percent worked at least part-time. Students complained about overcrowded classes, underqualified instructors, and an apathetic campus culture.²⁸

Sports thus served as a critical binding agent, uniting students while connecting the campus to the city. Football was the region's prevailing passion, but Memphis State was overshadowed by traditional powers in the Southeastern Conference. Despite hiring a promising new coach, Fred Pancoast, the football team lost its first four games and finished 5–5–1. Home crowds were disappointing all season.²⁹

Civic leaders envisioned big-time sports in Memphis, but that vision kept fading. In the fall of 1972, the city council reviewed proposals to expand Memphis Memorial Stadium and possibly add an exclusive stadium club or even a domed plexiglass roof. Supporters touted that it would lure visitors and entice an NFL team, but critics balked at the price tag. That same fall, Memphis State announced plans for a new basketball arena just north of campus. It would have seated five thousand more people than the Mid-South Coliseum, which was located at the fairgrounds almost three miles away. But students and residents complained about the costs and disruption, and that arena was never built, either.³⁰

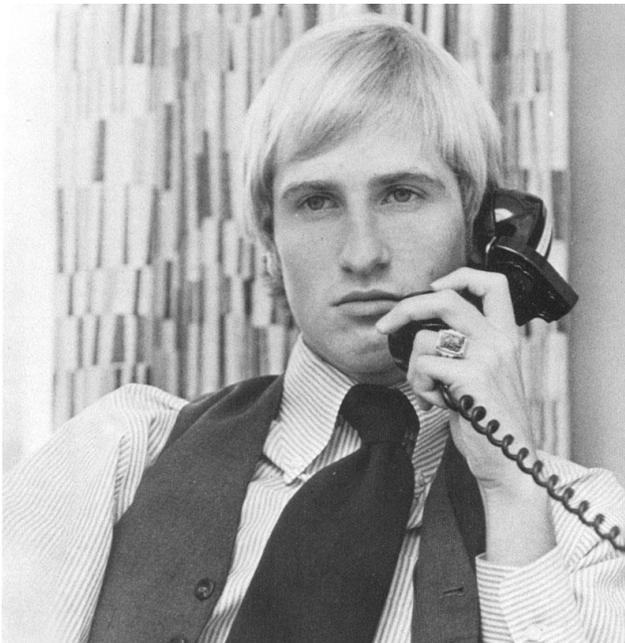
Professional sports had a tenuous foothold in Memphis. In 1970 the New Orleans Buccaneers of the American Basketball Association had moved to Memphis and renamed themselves the Pros. After two months of terrible crowds, the owner deeded the franchise to the league office. Memphians managed to keep the team through a February 1971 stock offering, but in 1972 the Pros finished in last place and bled money. Flamboyant sports magnate Charles O. Finley rechristened the team as the "Tams" (an acronym for Tennessee-Arkansas-Mississippi), but his venture was a bust. The team endured player holdouts and dizzying roster changes. Finley looked to sell the franchise. Its latest coach resigned. The Tams finished in last place, with an even worse record.³¹

By contrast, Memphis State basketball had about seven thousand season ticket holders. Students loyally attended games. Most away games were televised, while fans often listened to home games on the radio and then watched the replay on late-night public television. During Tigers games, explained one reporter, "the taverns with televisions sell more beer; night shifts slow to a crawl while everybody gathers around a transistor radio, and wives don't fuss at husbands for watching games on television because they're watching too. After all, Memphis State basketball is the biggest show in town."³²

5 "THE OLD RACIAL 'HANG-UPS'"

During the November 1972 elections, Memphis State basketball directly figured into one local campaign. The incumbent in House District 93, Jim Williams, was a conservative Democrat. His Republican opponent was Brad Martin, the student government association president at Memphis State who would turn twenty-one two days before the election.³³

A cloud of disillusion hung over the national political scene, with the Vietnam War finally ending and the Watergate scandal just beginning. President Richard Nixon nevertheless won re-election with promises of “law and order” and appeals to the “Silent Majority.” Most voters seemed to crave refuge from the hot-button issues of the 1960s: race, poverty, war, protest. Even with African American progress in electoral politics—Barbara Jordan and Andrew Young became the first two black representatives from the South—there remained a widespread black pessimism. In Memphis, the incumbent Republican congressman, Dan Kuykendall, ran against the black Democrat J. O. Patterson. Kuykendall won, in part, by offering coded warnings about the burgeoning threat of black political power.³⁴



Brad Martin, the Memphis State student government association president and candidate for the Tennessee House of Representatives (Preservation and Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis)

Local black leaders remained loyal to the Democratic Party, but the young Martin cast himself in the mold of moderate Tennessee Republicans, such as Gov. Winfield Dunn or Sen. Howard Baker, who sought alliances with black power brokers. Martin was competing for office in a legislative district that stretched south of Memphis State’s campus and was evenly divided among blacks, working-class whites, and middle-class whites. “Blacks told me during the campaign that they had never met a white politician before who went into their neighborhood to shake hands,” he related to the *New York Times*. “My generation just isn’t stuck on the old racial ‘hangups’.”³⁵

Martin was friends with Finch and Robinson—he loved basketball and even traveled to various road games. When he ran for office, the Memphis State stars endorsed him and attended campaign rallies. Finch and Robinson helped render Martin a legitimate option in Orange Mound, despite his Republican affiliation.³⁶

On the Saturday before the election, Martin's association with Finch and Robinson took center stage. Five children were distributing pro-Jim Williams campaign leaflets in a white neighborhood. The leaflets reproduced a photo from Martin's campaign of him smiling alongside Finch and Robinson. In this context, the Williams campaign was suggesting that Martin was an unsavory race-mixer. Martin and his campaign manager drove there and talked to the kids, who admitted that they had been hired by Jim Williams. The adults drove them home. Then, to Martin's shock, the police arrested him for disorderly conduct. At a trial that Monday, in a particularly absurd twist, one child identified his "kidnapper" as a reporter for the *Commercial Appeal*. The judge ultimately dismissed the charges.³⁷

Martin narrowly edged Williams, becoming the youngest state representative in Tennessee history. He won about 30 percent of the black vote, an unusually high percentage for a Republican in 1972. The incident with the campaign pamphlet revealed a region in slow political transition: Martin's use of the photograph showed how Memphis State basketball could symbolize a new era in race relations, while Williams's use of the same photograph suggested an enduring prejudice among many whites.³⁸

6 BACK IN THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION

Memphis State began its Missouri Valley Conference schedule after the New Year, starting with a harrowing two-game road trip in the Midwest. Traveling through a blizzard, the team had to deplane in Kansas City and ride a bus all night to reach Iowa City, where it took two overtimes to beat a resilient, pressing Drake squad. Two nights later, thanks to Larry Kenon's twenty-four points and seventeen rebounds, Memphis State nipped Bradley, 76–74.³⁹

The Tigers then started a seven-game home stand. In a rout of overmatched Florida Tech, Finch established Memphis State's career scoring record, and Robinson became the Tigers' all-time leading rebounder. After outlasting a deliberate St. Louis team, Finch set a single-game scoring record with forty-eight points against St. Joseph's of Indiana. Memphis State next faced its nemesis, Louisville. Fueled by a raucous crowd, the Tigers staged a 20–5 run in the second half and held on for the win. The Tigers were now 13–3 and back in the national conversation, ranked No. 17 in the AP poll.⁴⁰



Larry Finch drives to the hoop against St. Louis (Preservation and Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis)

During these January games, Bartow unveiled a new weapon: a full-court 1-2-2 zone press, which forced turnovers and fueled surges of momentum. When New Mexico State tried to stall after opening an early lead, Bartow used the zone press to discombobulate the opposing guards. The Tigers then beat Drake and faced Bradley, which tried to slow the game to a crawl, drawing hisses and boos from the crowd. Again pressing their stalling opponent, Memphis State prevailed and swept its homestand.⁴¹

On February 8, hot-shooting Louisville snapped MSU's fourteen-game winning streak, 83–69. Two nights later, Tulsa had an eight-point edge late in the second half. Bartow employed the zone press with his quickest lineup: Finch, Kenon, Buford, and freshman guards Bill Cook and Clarence Jones. The Tigers won in overtime, 91–87, giving them a two-game lead in the MVC standings over both Tulsa and Louisville.⁴²

"We're number 1! We're number 1!" chanted fans as Memphis State crushed its next opponent, Wichita State. MSU set a new home attendance record, and Larry Kenon grabbed the team's single-year rebounding mark. "If they play like they played tonight," marveled Wichita State coach Harry Miller, "I don't know how in the world they ever lost a game." Indeed, the team was peaking, as again evidenced by the rout of West Texas State on Senior Night. Finch found his shooting touch, Kenon blossomed into a superstar, Robinson was healthy, and Billy Buford sparked the team off the bench.⁴³

Memphis State needed two more difficult road wins. First, it beat North Texas State in a claustrophobia-inducing venue known as "The Pit," where fans crowded to the edge of the

sideline and tossed cups of ice onto the court. The team then played under tight security at New Mexico State, where a recent ban on female visitation in male dormitories had ignited violence and arson. With five seconds left and Memphis State up 54–53, superstar guard John Williamson uncharacteristically missed a seventeen-foot jump shot. Kenon soared over the opposing center to grab a spectacular rebound, and Memphis State claimed the conference championship.⁴⁴

7 A SICK SOCIETY

On campus, everyone wanted to talk about basketball. The *Helmsman* noted that student government elections, a university president search, and midterm exams were all “playing second fiddle to one of the most phenomenal happenings in the history of MSU and Memphis.” The student newspaper celebrated how the city was rallying around the Tigers. “This might not be the most academic oriented venture ever undertaken by MSU,” it admitted, “but it is the only thing we know of that has effectively attracted the interests of a broad base of students.”⁴⁵

The raucous crowds at Mid-South Coliseum gave the team an advantage, but their zeal had a dark edge. When a referee made a questionable call, some unruly spectators tossed debris onto the court, which could trigger a brutal reaction from the stadium’s security officials. During one game, three officers tackled and beat a recent Memphis State graduate, simply because he had questioned the arrest of his friend. The attack left his face bruised and his nose fractured.⁴⁶ The most controversial fan behavior, however, concerned members of MSU’s Black Student Association (BSA), who refused to stand for the National Anthem. The BSA had demonstrated during the 1968 Sanitation Strike, and in 1969 it held sit-ins to demand more African American faculty and administrators. By the early 1970s, the organization’s spirit of protest had somewhat abated, but basketball games remained a visible arena to make political points. By sitting down during “The Star-Spangled Banner,” these students registered their own quiet yet dramatic protest of American racism and imperialism. At one December game, they waved three flags supporting the Viet Cong.⁴⁷



Black Student Association, 1972–73 (Preservation and Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis)

“Such disrespect for the Anthem and for this country should not be tolerated by the school administration,” fumed one Memphis State student. After pointing to MSU’s record of peaceful racial integration, he argued that this protest could “only serve to further polarize the races.” Others defended the students’ right to free speech, including the sports editor of the *Helmsman*, who decried “this sort of redneck ethic of control over the conduct of others.”⁴⁸

The brouhaha illustrated one way that black students were shifting the culture of Memphis State. The school enrolled more than one thousand African Americans; it had among the highest percentages of black students at any large, predominantly white university. Odell Horton, the black president of LeMoyne-Owen College, was a recent commencement speaker. The BSA sponsored a tribute to Martin Luther King, a lecture by the NAACP’s Maxine Smith, and a fundraising drive to combat sickle cell anemia. The theater department staged a play with a black director and all-black cast. Thanks to white students splitting their votes, a black homecoming queen was elected in 1970, 1971, and 1972.⁴⁹

Yet the campus was no racial utopia. There was only a handful of black faculty, and black students complained about some bigoted white faculty members. If black students faced little overt racist hostility, they might nevertheless feel invisible around whites, and whites and blacks rarely socialized off-campus—“it just was not done at the time,” recalled one student. As one reflection of the understated tension, in 1973 the university replaced the homecoming queen with a five-woman homecoming court, contending that it had become a “black-white issue.”⁵⁰

In the larger city, racial antagonism was often more obvious. The prevailing myth was that until 1968, Memphis had a record of good race relations, in contrast to the violent white supremacy

in Alabama or Mississippi. But this tale obscured how black Memphians had suffered under and fought against poverty, second-class working conditions, and racial paternalism. When the city's sanitation workers went on strike, *Time* stated that "Memphis simmered on the rim of racial rampage." The national press highlighted the racist mayor, brutal police force, and a group of young black militants known as the Invaders. The April 4, 1968, assassination of Martin Luther King sharpened the racial divisions. Leading whites assumed a defensive posture toward social change and racial progress, while the Memphis NAACP launched "Black Monday" boycotts to force a genuine integration of public schools. When national reporters revisited Memphis after 1968, they pointed to racial progress in politics and business, but they also found a black population frustrated with the prevailing conservative mentality.⁵¹



Sanitation workers on strike in Memphis, 1968 (*Memphis Press-Scimitar* collection/Preservation and Special Collections Department, University of Memphis)

Downtown was decaying, blight was rampant, and crime rates soared. Black commentators, in particular, linked the city's stilted progress to bad race relations. Mass protests against racial discrimination had ceased, while the confrontational rhetoric of Black Power had run its course. Black leaders decried the lack of economic development in their neighborhoods. They called for not only more education and discipline among African Americans, but also for a fair criminal justice system. In the winter of 1973, five young black men were on trial for the 1971 firebombing of the Red Lantern Lounge, even though eyewitnesses pinned the crime on a white man. "Can the Memphis Five get justice and a fair trial in Memphis?" asked the *Tri-State Defender*. Based on the region's history, "The answer is NO!"⁵²

As blacks fumed about second-class citizenship, whites cried about court-mandated busing to integrate public schools. With 88 percent of black children in Memphis still attending virtually all-black schools, United States District Court judge Robert McRae ordered a busing program to remedy this continued segregation. Through the fall of 1972, his “Plan A” endured delays and controversies. The nine white members of the city council tried to withhold funds from the board of education, stirring objections from its three black members. McRae then ordered “Plan B” for the 1973–74 school year, which would integrate the remaining eighty schools that were virtually all-white or all-black.⁵³

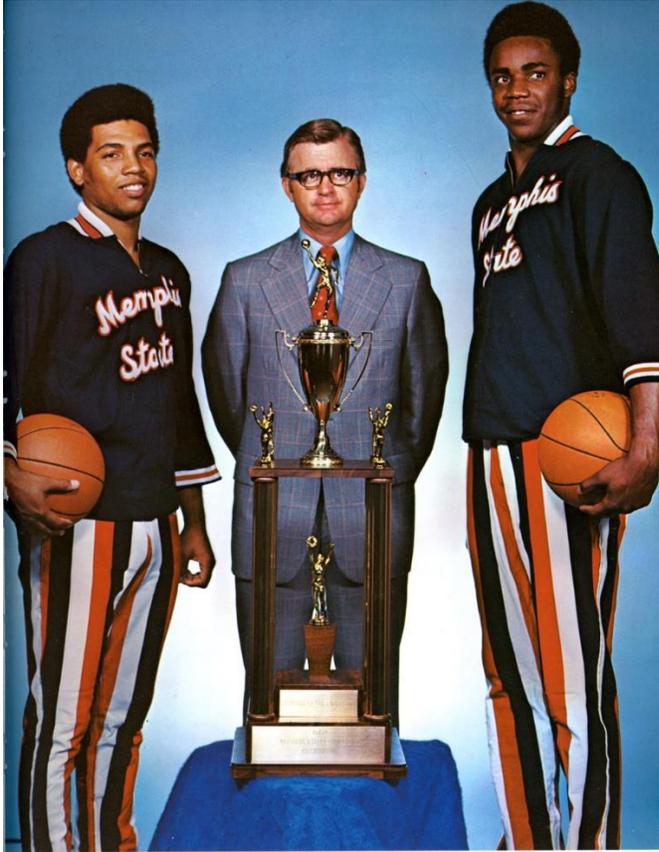
In late January 1973, as the Memphis State Tigers were riding a winning streak, Plan A went into effect. Thousands of white students boycotted, and enrollments nosedived. A group called Citizens Against Busing (CAB) had already organized twenty-six segregated schools in white churches. The city council deliberated whether to fund CAB schools, fueling outrage among black activists, while Mayor Wyeth Chandler endorsed a national drive for an anti-busing constitutional amendment. In general, Memphis whites protested the busing plan without explicitly mentioning race, instead decrying the plan as impractical, dangerous, or an infringement of rights. “What educational benefit will a child obtain by being bused from a low crime neighborhood to a school in a high crime area?” cried a typical letter to the *Commercial Appeal*.⁵⁴

After the Supreme Court refused to hear appeals on McRae’s order, the board of education submitted various half-hearted busing plans for 1973–74 to federal court. Black leaders grew disgusted. “There seems to be no respect, no sensitivity and concern by a majority of the board members as to desegregating the school system,” said Maxine Smith. Busing seemed the only recourse left to improve the conditions of underfunded black schools. Samuel “Billy” Kyles, director of the Memphis branch of PUSH, assigned staff members to protect black children at certain schools. In return, he fielded anonymous threatening phone calls—“an intellectual cross burning,” in his words, and a symptom of “the whole sick society.”⁵⁵

8 A HEALING PROCESS

The Tigers dropped their final regular season contest at St. Louis, but it failed to scuff the shine on their terrific season. The final AP poll ranked the team No. 12 in the nation. An affectionate profile in *Sports Illustrated* entitled “Dr. K, Big Cat, and Little Tubby” chronicled Bartow’s revitalization of the program. Projecting a myth of racial healing to a national audience, it related the “harsh polarization of the races” after the King assassination. “It was only recently—as the Tigers’ success took hold of the populace—that the wounds began to heal.”⁵⁶

By season’s end, some were calling Larry Kenon the best to ever play for Memphis State. Pro scouts salivated over him. He ranked fifth in the nation in rebounding, supplanted Finch as MVC player of the year, and made first-team All-America for *Basketball Weekly*. Yet Kenon was wary, reserved, and uncomfortable in the limelight. He never garnered the same affection as Finch and Robinson, the gregarious heroes from Orange Mound.⁵⁷



Larry Finch, Gene Bartow, and Ronnie Robinson (Preservation and Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis)

According to one anonymous source, the Tigers thrived only upon Finch and Robinson “reshaping their egos” after Kenon’s emergence. “I don’t even want to talk about something like that,” said Kenon. “We’re a team, and the only publicity we care about is that everyone knows you’re a winner, not how many points each guy gets.” His fellow stars also professed a focus on team goals. As Robinson insisted, “There are no jealousy hang-ups.”⁵⁸

The players did share a genuine mutual affection. “What I like about this team is that everybody likes each other,” said Bill Cook. “I know that may sound corny, but it’s true.” The freshman guard had admitted that Kenon’s stardom demanded adjustments from Finch and Robinson, but they now believed in each other. Dexter Reed, a high school star from Little Rock, chose Memphis State because of that camaraderie. On his recruiting visit, he saw black and white players enjoying each other’s company, good-naturedly ribbing each other. The key, thought Reed, was Larry Finch. “He just didn’t see color.”⁵⁹

Team booster Jack Schaffer recalled that while many black athletes seemed alienated and angry, “Larry and Ronnie were the antithesis of that. They knew that what they did was a healing process.” Phyllis Dibell, the team photographer, remembered some of MSU’s earlier

black players as grim-faced and intimidating. By contrast, Ronnie Robinson was “just the neatest guy you’d want to meet,” and young white women “thought Larry Finch was fabulous. He talked to you, made you feel good. He was cute.” The basketball stars wore funky clothes and natural hairstyles with confidence. “Everyone was so tired of angry hippies and so on,” she stated, contrasting the sunny optimism of Finch and Robinson with the period’s political hangover.⁶⁰

“George Lapidès recalled that ‘for the first time, race didn’t matter. That had never happened in Memphis before.’ They obviously noticed that the team had four black starters, ‘but nobody talked about it. Not the white people, anyway.’”

The *Helmsman* waxed: “Larry Finch and Ronnie Robinson have stolen the hearts of Memphis basketball fans, and racism is no longer quite so popular in the city as it once was.” The *Press Scimitar* extolled: “An important part of the Memphis State team is not only that they are good players, but that they are good young men—demonstrating that it is possible to get along in racial harmony.” George Lapidès, then the sports editor of the *Press Scimitar*, recalled that “for the first time, race didn’t matter. That had never happened in Memphis before.” They obviously noticed that the team had four black starters, “but nobody talked about it. Not the white people, anyway.”⁶¹

Blacks in Memphis embraced the Tigers, too. They admired how the stars won with class and panache. Herb Hilliard, the first black player at MSU, believed that “the best thing that ever happened to this city was Larry and Ronnie coming to Memphis.” He contended that their success opened the university to more African Americans, creating opportunities that helped develop the black middle class.⁶²

MSU’s most famous fan was Isaac Hayes, perhaps the only black Memphian more beloved than Finch. “Black Moses” was then riding the peak of his popularity, highlighted by the Grammy and Oscar-winning *Shaft*. With his shaved head, dark shades, and outrageous outfits of furs, chains, capes, and tights, Hayes signified the surging black pride of the “soul” era. He arrived at the Mid-South Coliseum by striding out of his velvet-upholstered and golden-hubcapped Cadillac, a gorgeous woman on each arm. Friends with Finch and Robinson, Hayes even helped Bartow with recruiting. “We win the Valley and Isaac will throw a little party,” revealed Finch. “A little \$10,000 party.”⁶³

9 MEMPHIS BELIEVERS

An estimated fifteen hundred fans headed from Memphis to Houston for the Midwest Regional

of the NCAA tournament. They arrived in organized bus excursions, in caravans of cars, and on solo and quixotic quests. The Memphis drawl was audible in hotel lobbies around the city. A couple from Southaven, Mississippi, drove nine hours to Houston with their ten-year-old son on Thursday even though they had no tickets. After somehow convincing the ticket-takers at Hofheinz Pavilion to admit them, they drove back through the night and opened their hamburger joint on Friday morning. On Saturday, they hopped back in the car at four o'clock in the morning and drove back to Houston for the Regional Final.⁶⁴

Memphis State had a first-round bye. Its initial game was the regional semifinal against South Carolina, which ran a freewheeling, high-scoring offense. But the game's big star was Kenon, who tallied thirty-four points and twenty rebounds. The reporters on press row marveled at his athleticism and shotmaking. "Kenon is something," said South Carolina coach Frank McGuire. "If he shoots that way all of the time, he's the best I've ever seen." The Tigers won handily, 90–76.⁶⁵



Larry Kenon blocks a shot (Preservation and Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis)

Memphis State next faced Kansas State, which had won the Big Eight conference and ranked in the top ten. In one poll, nine sportswriters picked Memphis State, and eight picked Kansas State. A trip to the Final Four was on the line. Finch and Robinson were so excited that they awoke at three thirty that morning and flipped on the television, whiling away the hours until daylight with late-night movies.⁶⁶

Despite the lack of sleep, Finch was magnificent, scoring thirty-two points. The Tigers cruised to another surprisingly easy win, 92–72. This time, Wes Westfall had his star turn. Before the tournament, Westfall had missed practice (his second offense that season), and Bartow replaced him in the starting lineup with Billy Buford. He played just one minute against South Carolina. But against Kansas State, Kenon got in foul trouble, and Westfall picked up the slack,

hitting five of six shots. “We’ve come too far for a guy to be a sour-puss,” he mused. “I don’t want to go out with a bad attitude. I love these guys.”⁶⁷

The Tigers won over neutral fans with their style, determination, and infectious joy. Bill Grogan hustled down press row distributing copies of “Meet Me in St. Louis, Wooden.” Finch charmed the post-game crush of reporters. Back in Memphis, everyone was glued to a television. “In the stores, the cash registers seldom tinkled,” described one columnist. “On the main arteries, there was only the tiniest trickle of traffic. For a couple of hours, a big town stood still.”⁶⁸

That night, however, Memphis burst with joy. By eight o’clock that night, a crowd gathered at Memphis International Airport to greet the conquering heroes. By ten thirty, the parking lots were jammed. The late arrivals left their cars on the side of the road and hiked into the terminal. At least five thousand people crammed into the airport, covering every inch of the floor, sitting on airline counters, and packing five deep on the mezzanine. They piled onto a 1973 Ford Galaxy on display in the lobby, buckling the car’s vinyl top. At half past midnight, the players appeared on a stairway, and the crowd’s roar shook the building. It showcased the astounding civic enthusiasm for the Tigers.⁶⁹

“I think this whole thing has made people realize we’re not ‘Tiger High’ anymore.”

“Have faith in the Tigers,” read the sign outside one church. A local sandwich chain collected twenty thousand signatures for a telegram wishing the team good luck. About two thousand students attended a pep rally at the MSU fieldhouse, chanting “We’re Number One!” until the players arrived. “Sheer bedlam erupted” when the players walked in, according to one reporter. The noise was deafening, with an enthusiasm rooted in the university’s particular history. As one student said, “I think this whole thing has made people realize we’re not ‘Tiger High’ anymore.”⁷⁰

Charles Rafael, a dedicated “superfan” who traveled to most road games, returned home from Houston on Sunday night. Before leaving for St. Louis that Thursday, he received about 175 messages from friends, relatives, and acquaintances asking for tickets. “I don’t know where a person could get an extra ticket,” said one man. “And if I located one, I don’t know many people who could afford it.”⁷¹

People throughout Memphis arranged Final Four parties. An estimated two hundred fifty thousand households watched on television, with another hundred thousand listening on radio. About a hundred people plopped before the fourteen color televisions at the Sears, Roebuck & Co. at Southland Mall. Even at specialty shops catering to upper-class women, a clerk announced score updates. George Klein, the renowned disc jockey and buddy of Elvis Presley, was attending an award ceremony in London, but he vowed to find a radio broadcast and wear

his lucky MSU hat, the banquet's formalities be damned.⁷²

An unofficial caravan of cars barreled north, their blue MSU flags whipping in the wind. Once in St. Louis, they waited for tables at packed restaurants and moved to more convenient hotels as rooms opened up. They wore buttons proclaiming "Memphis Believer," part of a chamber of commerce program to counteract negative attitudes about the city. Jim Watson, president of the Rebounders, estimated that for all the fans in St. Louis, "we left at least twenty thousand at home who wanted to come."⁷³

Bennie and Janet Crossnoe honeymooned in St. Louis, but the newlyweds could not find tickets. While greeting the team at the airport on Thursday night, they met Bill Grogan, who publicized their plight. On Saturday morning, they were eating breakfast before going to watch the game at a motel, since it was blacked out within a 120-mile radius of St. Louis. At the last minute, *Commercial Appeal* sports editor Roy Edwards found them two tickets. After the game they sped back to Memphis, since each had children from previous marriages, but not before giddily watching the Tigers at the Final Four.⁷⁴

10 THE FINAL FOUR

Odds makers favored Providence College by four points over Memphis State. The Friars were 27–2, ranked No. 4, and starred flamboyant guard Ernie DeGregorio and high-leaping big man Marvin Barnes. Yet the Tigers were loose, enjoying their dream season, confident of victory. After their Friday practice, they grooved to a tape deck playing the Temptations and the theme from *Shaft*.⁷⁵

But when the game began on Saturday, Providence ripped off fast breaks, Barnes soared for rebounds, and DeGregorio dealt spectacular assists, including one behind-the-back dish from half-court that split two defenders, right to a cutting teammate for an easy layup. Providence led 24–18. Then Barnes leaped to block a shot, and while coming down, he collided with Ronnie Robinson and banged his knee. He limped to the locker room.⁷⁶

DeGregorio kept connecting on deep jumpers, employing an array of one-on-one moves, and awing the crowd with crafty passes. Providence still led 49–40 at halftime. But absent Barnes, Providence could not handle Kenon and Robinson, who combined for fifty-two points and thirty-eight rebounds. Thanks to Bill Laurie's chest-to-chest harassment, DeGregorio finally missed a few shots, and the Tigers roared back.⁷⁷

With 5:51 left and Memphis State ahead by five, Barnes shuffled back in with a heavily taped leg. His courageous return helped cut the lead to one point. But the Tigers' size and quickness overwhelmed the depleted Friars. After Kenon missed a free throw, Robinson and Westfall tipped it alive, then Kenon grabbed the ball and scored. Memphis State finished on a 13–1 run

and won, 98–85.⁷⁸

Jubilant fans shook their blue pom-poms and chanted, “We’re Number One! We’re Number One!” Gov. Winfield Dunn and other dignitaries crowded into the locker room. Isaac Hayes, resplendent in an ankle-length fur coat, put his arms around Finch and Robinson, and they posed for a photograph with their right index fingers pointed skyward. “There’s only one left,” purred Hayes. “Just one more time.”⁷⁹

The Tigers next faced UCLA, the greatest dynasty in the history of college athletics. The Bruins had won the last six NCAA titles and eight of the last nine. Since the 1966–67 season, their overall record was 203–5, and their semifinal victory over Indiana was their 74th consecutive win, an ongoing NCAA record. Figuring that Memphis State beat Providence only due to Barnes’s injury, the national media assumed another UCLA title.⁸⁰

The Tigers were a charming sideshow, a plucky little foil to the big bad Bruins. Publicity man Bill Grogan buzzed around with press releases, photos, buttons, and a weird list of 156 words associated with Memphis State basketball, including such nonsense as “xyloid,” “quitclaim,” and “gobbedygook.” More conventionally, the National Association of Basketball Coaches named Gene Bartow as coach of the year.⁸¹



Bill Grogan

Sports information director, Bill Grogan (Preservation and Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis)

Bartow praised UCLA coach John Wooden, a figure adored by the press as a symbol of humility and tradition. By contrast, UCLA’s star center Bill Walton smoked marijuana, wore long hair,

and protested the Vietnam War. Just prior to the Final Four, a false report circulated that he had demanded President Nixon intervene to allow collegians to play in upcoming exhibitions against the Soviet national team. It made for an interesting juxtaposition: Walton, a product of the white middle class, personified social upheaval, while Finch and Robinson, who grew up poor and black, were the sweet underdogs.⁸²

“We never thought we’d get this far,” mused Robinson. But even though UCLA was a thirteen-and-a-half point favorite, were picked to win by virtually every expert, and owned a 29–0 record, the Tigers maintained their relaxed confidence. Billy Buford reminded everyone that the UCLA players were not, after all, “the direct descendants of Christ.”⁸³

Well before the final on Monday evening, March 26, Memphis fans were on their feet, hopping to the pep band and roaring with the Tiger mascot as he bellowed, “Bruins are Tiger meat!” Adolph Rupp wished Bartow good luck. Just a few years ago, Bartow was coaching tiny Valparaiso, and now the four-time NCAA champion from Kentucky was greeting him before he faced the sport’s greatest legend, with the national title on the line.⁸⁴

For one half, the underdogs hung with the mighty Bruins. Finch and Laurie handled UCLA’s zone trap, and Kenon jumped past Walton for some nimble baskets. But the Tigers could not stop Walton, who kept backing into his defenders and scoring on turnarounds, tip-ins, hook shots, and bank shots. With the score tied 14–14, Kenon got called for an early third foul and went to the bench. Bartow switched to a 1-2-2 zone, but UCLA guard Greg Lee flipped perfect lobbs into Walton, who kept scoring and scoring.⁸⁵

UCLA was leading by seven with 4:14 left in the first half when Walton got his third foul. With the big man on the bench, the Tigers clawed back, tying the game by halftime. Memphis State’s entire frontcourt was in foul trouble, but in the locker room, the mood was assertive. “We got ‘em,” Buford told Kenon. “It’s over.” When the second half started, Finch hit two free throws, and Memphis State was winning, 41–39.⁸⁶

Of the 19,301 fans in St. Louis Arena and a record thirty-eight million watching on television, most were pulling for Memphis State. The Tigers played with obvious joy, and UCLA had been too good for too long. Moreover, Walton was an easy villain. Memphis fans griped that Walton was manhandling his defenders and committing offensive goaltending, yet whenever the call was against UCLA, he complained. They booed him.⁸⁷

Walton earned his fourth foul with 9:27 left on the clock, but Wooden kept him in the game, and UCLA pulled away. He finished with forty-four points, an NCAA final record. Most remarkably, he hit twenty-one of his twenty-two field goal attempts. With 2:51 left, he sprained his ankle and had to leave the game. But it was too late for Memphis State. UCLA won 87–66, capturing its seventh consecutive national title.⁸⁸

After the game, Walton ditched the interviews. “Excuse me, I want to go meet my friends,” he mumbled. “I’m splitting.” Later, in the lobby of the team hotel, he asked for privacy: “I don’t

want to talk about basketball. I don't want to talk to reporters." Shaped by the counterculture, Walton resisted life as a public commodity. That iconoclasm earned him complaints from the press corps.⁸⁹

The Tigers, by contrast, were media darlings. The UCLA players praised their opponents, and the hard-fought loss earned Memphis players more respect than their playoff victories. Endearingly, when Walton got hurt, Buford and Finch helped him up, and Finch walked his limping opponent back to the sideline. The moment captured Finch's sweetness and public spirit.⁹⁰

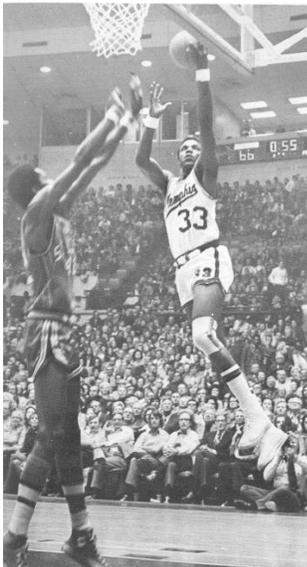


Memphis State mascot and a Tiger fan (Preservation and Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis)

"Memphis State University's basketball team belongs to the public, as the great fan response to a brilliant season demonstrates," admired the *Commercial Appeal*. Rather than weather another mob scene at the airport, the team boarded a special bus and bypassed the terminal.

At Finch's insistence, they cruised around Orange Mound before heading to a rally with five thousand fans at the Mid-South Coliseum. Typical of his personality, Finch exceeded the event. Many speakers, including Governor Dunn and Mayor Chandler, lauded Finch and Robinson. "When they came on this scene four years ago, this town was in turmoil," said Fred Davis, one of the first black city councilmen in Memphis. "They have been the catalyst and done as much to bring this town together as any two people in this town."⁹¹

In the tournament's aftermath, Finch and Robinson visited schools and signed autographs for children. A Project Head Start center in South Memphis unveiled a mural that depicted a frog, giraffe, bicycle, banana, and Larry Finch. The Memphis branches of the NAACP and Urban League presented them with awards. "Memphis," said one speaker, "has reached the stage where black and white people can throw basketballs at each other instead of bombs."⁹² Art Gilliam of the *Commercial Appeal* applauded how the team boosted the city's image both within and beyond Memphis. He appreciated Finch, Robinson, and Bartow for fostering an atmosphere of unity, and he celebrated how everyone respected their excellence, regardless of race. But he also delivered a warning. Gilliam watched the tournament with pride and sadness. Prejudice and poverty were restricting opportunities for more Larry Finches and Ronnie Robinsons. "If this city had looked to its black communities sooner, not just for athletes but for all talent, how much farther ahead would we be today?"⁹³



Ronnie Robinson lays it in (Preservation and Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis)

11 DID BASKETBALL MATTER?

Finch remained the face of Memphis basketball. After getting drafted by the ABA's Tams, he played for the star-crossed team and its short-lived successor, the Memphis Sounds, as did Ronnie Robinson. After a brief stint with the ABA franchise in Baltimore, he returned to Memphis and coached at Messick High School. In the 1980s he rejoined his alma mater, serving

as assistant coach to Dana Kirk. In 1986, however, Kirk resigned amidst allegations of scandalous behavior, and Finch took over, restoring the program's integrity. During his eleven-year tenure he took the Tigers to six NCAA tournaments and attracted local talent, including Anfernee "Penny" Hardaway. Even after buying out his contract in 1997, university president V. Lane Rawlins lauded Finch as "the most important figure in Memphis sports history."⁹⁴ Finch suffered a stroke in 2002 and died in 2011. Ronnie Robinson passed away in 2004. Gene Bartow died in 2012. On such occasions, as well on anniversaries of the Tigers' historic accomplishment, the media reflected on how this team brought the city together, healing the wounds of race. Players, fans, and politicians share that memory. Wyeth Chandler remembered that after King's assassination, there was "a real rift between the two races in this community, no question about it." But when the Tigers went to the NCAA finals, "all of the past from 1968 to 1973 . . . dropped away, and we were back to one city."⁹⁵

It is an important story, revealing much about the cultural power of sports. "It was a galvanizing thing," recalled Michael Cody, a white attorney who had helped defend Martin Luther King during the Sanitation Strike and who was then serving as chair of the Shelby County Democratic Party. He saw the season as advancing the important agenda of racial integration. Freshman guard Clarence Jones was awed by how people of all stripes cheered at games, greeted them at the airport, and admired them. "It was basketball that brought the city together," he said. "Now how long that lasted, I don't know. But at the time, it was special."⁹⁶

And yet, the larger story of Memphis in the 1970s is one of racial polarization. While the Black Student Association was protesting police brutality and racist wars, the court-ordered school busing plan was driving white flight to private schools and suburbs. By the end of the 1970s, the Memphis school system was 75 percent black and increasingly poor. Votes on the city council and school board often split along racial lines. Black political officials, from state senator John Ford in 1974 through Memphis mayor Willie Herenton in 1991, relied almost entirely on black votes.⁹⁷

Did basketball matter? Wyeth Chandler promoted the Tigers as a vehicle of racial unity, but as mayor he crusaded against the busing plan, sharpening racial divisions. Brad Martin won that first election with help from Finch and Robinson and served five terms in the state House, but under the banner of a Republican Party that abandoned serious appeals to black constituencies. Bill Laurie, the lone white starter on the 1973 team, married Nancy Walton, an heiress in the Wal-Mart economic empire, which has promoted a version of populist conservatism that continues to hurt poor working people.⁹⁸

Memphis still faces extreme rates of black poverty, as evidenced by its unemployment, violent crime, and infant mortality rates. Obviously, sports cannot solve those deep-rooted problems. But they inspire myths that can shape the political and cultural approaches to those problems. The "racial healing" narrative of the 1973 Memphis State Tigers expresses a noble ideal of unity, while also masking the city's persistent black inequality.⁹⁹

In 1973 Margo Bryant was an eighteen-year-old freshman at Memphis State. “Everyone I know—black people, white people, purple people, parents and little kids—care about the Tigers,” she said at the time. Over forty years later, she confirmed that feeling. The Tigers “brought the city together.” The atmosphere was festive, like a party, with everyone laughing and talking together in the cafeteria. She cautioned, however, that when it came to the larger patterns of race in Memphis, “it didn’t change anything.” She still had prejudiced professors. Whites and blacks still operated in separate circles. In her South Memphis neighborhood, African Americans still suffered from poverty.

“But you know what?” she said. “You take your happiness where you can get it.”¹⁰⁰

Link to video: <https://vimeo.com/160696064>



Aram Goudsouzian is chair of the Department of History at the University of Memphis. He grew up in Winchester, Massachusetts. He earned his BA from Colby College and his PhD from Purdue University. He is the author of *Down to the Crossroads: Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Meredith March Against Fear*, *King of the Court: Bill Russell and the Basketball Revolution*, *The Hurricane of 1938*, and *Sidney Poitier: Man, Actor, Icon*.

The author wishes to thank Charles Crawford, Wayne Dowdy, Randy Roberts, and Johnny Smith for their helpful feedback on initial drafts of this article.



Study the South is a peer-reviewed, multimedia, online journal, published and managed by the [Center for the Study of Southern Culture](http://www.cssc.edu/) at the University of Mississippi.

- ¹ Curry Kirkpatrick, "Dr. K, Big Cat and Little Tubby," *Sports Illustrated*, February 26, 1973, 24–25; H. Scott Prosterman, "Gene Bartow, 1930–2011," *Daily Kos* (blog), January 4, 2012, <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2012/1/4/1051545/-;> *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, February 19, 1973.
- ² *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, February 18, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, February 19, 1973.
- ³ *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, February 19, 1973.
- ⁴ *The Helmsman* (Memphis State University student newspaper), February 16, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, February 19, 1973. On the 1973 NCAA tournament, see Neal Isaacs, *All the Moves: A History of College Basketball* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1975), 299; Ken Rappoport, *The Classic: The History of the NCAA Basketball Championship* (Mission, KS: National Collegiate Athletic Association, 1979), 195; Barry Wilner and Ken Rappoport, *The Big Dance: The Story of the NCAA Basketball Tournament* (Lanham, MD: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2012), 38–40.
- ⁵ On a "racial harmony" narrative through sports that could obscure black protest, see Ruth Carbonette Yow, "Shadowed Places and Stadium Lights: An Oral History of Integration and Black Student Protest in Marietta, Georgia," *Oral History Review* (Winter/Spring 2015) 42 (1): 70–95.
- ⁶ See Harry Edwards, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete* (New York: The Free Press, 1970); Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle: The 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Douglass Hartmann, *Race, Culture, and the Revolt of the Black Athlete* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Thomas Hauser, *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992).
- ⁷ *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, December 15, 1972; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, December 15, 1972; December 17, 1972; *Tri-State Defender*, December 23, 1972. Even beyond the McAshan controversy, the 1972 game seemed star-crossed. Bowl officials issued early invitations to Georgia Tech and Iowa State, who then lost late-season games and finished 6–4–1 and 5–5–1, respectively. A prolonged spate of bad weather preceded the game, and thousands of tickets remained unsold. See *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, December 4, 1972, December 18, 1972, and December 24, 1972.
- ⁸ *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, December 16, 1972; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, December 16, 1972; *New York Times*, December 17, 1972; *Tri-State Defender*, December 18, 1972; Maxine A. Smith, "Report of Executive Secretary," December 6, 1972; January 2, 1973, Folder 12, Box 1, Maxine A. Smith NAACP Collection, Memphis/Shelby County Public Library.
- ⁹ Jack Eaton, interview by the author, Memphis, January 7, 2015; Memphis State University Basketball Guide, 1972–73, Special Collections, University of Memphis; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, February 1, 1973; *Daily Helmsman*, December 5, 1972.
- ¹⁰ *Helmsman*, December 1, 1972; Charles Williams, *African American Life and Culture in Orange Mound: Case Study of a Black Community in Memphis, Tennessee, 1890–1980* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013), 81–87; Memphis State University Basketball Guide, 1972–73, Special Collections, University of Memphis; H. Scott Prosterman, "Larry Finch—Basketball and Civil Rights Icon," *Daily Kos* (blog), April 3, 2011, <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2011/4/3/963081/-;> *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 13, 1973, February 15, 2014; Terry Davis, "The Legacy of Larry Finch," *Memphis Sport*, April 2, 2011, <http://memphisport.com/?s=The+Legacy+of+Larry+Finch>. Orange Mound was originally developed by African Americans as an all-black subdivision in the 1890s.
- ¹¹ Memphis State University Basketball Guide, 1972–73, Special Collections, University of Memphis; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, April 2, 2011; *Rightly Seasoned: The 1973 Memphis State Tigers*, WHBQ-Memphis television special, 2003, recording in author's possession.
- ¹² *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 13, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, November 28, 1972.
- ¹³ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, November 27, 1972; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, November 28, 1972.
- ¹⁴ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 26, 1973; Memphis State University Basketball Guide, 1972–73, Special Collections, University of Memphis. Finch's father died when he was young and Robinson's father left his family, but each had strong male role models. On the politics of black family life, see James Patterson, *Freedom Is Not Enough: The Moynihan Report and America's Struggle over Black Family Life—from LBJ to Obama* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).
- ¹⁵ Memphis State University Basketball Guide, 1973–74, Special Collections, University of Memphis; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 26, 1973; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 26, 1973, March 4, 1973; Herb Hilliard,

telephone interview with the author, February 10, 2015. On the integration of college sports in the South, see Charles H. Martin, *Benching Jim Crow: The Rise and Fall of the Color Line in Southern College Sports, 1890–1980* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 90–119, 150–79, 215–54.

¹⁶ Memphis State University Basketball Guide, 1966–67, Special Collections, University of Memphis; Memphis State University Basketball Guide, 1968–69, Special Collections, University of Memphis; Jack Eaton, interview by the author, January 7, 2015; Charles Rafael, January 14, 2015; Herb Hilliard, telephone interview with the author, February 10, 2015; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 20, 1973.

¹⁷ *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 2, 1972, February 27, 1973; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, October 14, 2011, January 4, 2012; *Memphis Statesman*, February 7, 1973; Sam Moses, “Pursued by a Very Long Shadow,” *Sports Illustrated*, November 17, 1975, 32–34; Jack Schaffer, interview with the author, January 27, 2015; Charles Rafael, interview with the author, January 14, 2015; Dexter Reed, interview with the author, January 28, 2015; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, July 3, 1972. Founded in 1965, the Rebounders were composed almost exclusively of white men from the business community. They loved basketball, but also realized that a successful team could promote city pride and unity. Many were Jewish, including some of the wealthiest and most prominent members, such as real estate developer Avron Fogelman and hotel executive Irby Cooper.

¹⁸ Kirkpatrick, “Dr. K, Big Cat and Little Tubby,” 24–25; “Coach Gene Bartow,” Memphis State University Basketball Guide, 1973–74, University of Memphis Special Collections; *Daily Helmsman*, February 23, 1973; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 8, 1972, March 12, 1972, March 17, 1972, November 14, 1972, November 23, 1972; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, December 5, 1972; *Courier Chronicle* (Humboldt, Tennessee), undated article, “General News—Out of Town Newspapers and Magazines—Clippings,” July 1, 1972–July 30, 1973, University of Memphis Special Collections. Memphis State did earn a consolation berth to the 1972 NIT, where it lost its first game against Oral Roberts University. After that season, Bartow further burnished his reputation by coaching Puerto Rico to a fifth-place finish at the 1972 Munich Olympics.

¹⁹ Memphis State University Basketball Guide, 1972–73, Special Collections, University of Memphis.

²⁰ *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 15, 1972, December 4, 1972, December 22, 1972; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, January 18, 1973, February 28, 1973; Larry Kenon, telephone interview with the author, February 10, 2015; Jack Eaton, interview with the author, January 7, 2015.

²¹ Memphis State University Basketball Guide, 1972–73, Special Collections, University of Memphis; Memphis State University Basketball Guide, 1973–74, Special Collections, University of Memphis; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, January 19, 1972, January 9, 1973, December 4, 1973; *Helmsman*, February 23, 1973; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, February 3, 1973; Clarence Jones, interview by the author, March 12, 2015.

²² *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 15, 1973; *Rightly Seasoned: The 1973 Memphis State Tigers*, produced by David Stotts, Paul Sloan, Tommy Brandt (Memphis, TN: WHBQ-TV, 2003).

²³ Curry Kirkpatrick, “A Slight Case of Being Superhuman,” *Sports Illustrated*, April 2, 1973, 18–21. Grogan was the former sports editor of the campus newspaper and had taken many jobs on the local sports scene, such as clubhouse manager for a minor league baseball team. He inflated the size of the media guides, and he asked his writer and photographers to showcase the local roots and popularity of the team’s stars, both on and off campus. Phyllis Massey, interview with the author, January 12, 2015; Memphis State University Basketball Guide, 1970–71, Special Collections, University of Memphis; Memphis State University Basketball Guide 1972–73, Special Collections, University of Memphis; *The Helmsman*, November 17, 1972, November 21, 1972.

²⁴ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, December 3, 1972, December 6, 1972, December 8, 1972, December 10, 1972, December 13, 1972; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, December 13, 1972.

²⁵ *Tri-State Defender*, January 13, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, December 3, 1972, December 4, 1972, December 11, 1972, December 13, 1972, December 14, 1972; December 24, 1972; *Rightly Seasoned*.

²⁶ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, December 17, 1972, December 24, 1972, December 27, 1972; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, December 21, 1972, December 27, 1972; *Helmsman*, January 9, 1973.

²⁷ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, December 30, 1972, December 31, 1972; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, January 1, 1973. The student body’s political leanings skewed between conservative and indifferent. In a mock poll for the 1972 presidential election, 53 percent of MSU students supported Richard Nixon and only 39 percent preferred George McGovern, a contrast to college students nationwide. On campus, there was little evidence of the election, despite campaign visits from state and local candidates. The Student Government Association elections in March 1973 also failed to arouse interest—less than 5 percent of the student body voted.

²⁸ Janann Sherman and Beverly G. Bond, with Frances Breland, *Dreamers. Thinkers. Doers.: A Centennial History of the University of Memphis* (Virginia Beach, VA: Donning Company Publishers, 2011), 50–53; *Memphis Statesman*, December 11, 1970; *Helmsman*, November 17, 1972, December 1, 1972, January 30, 1973, February 2, 1973, February 9, 1973. *Helmsman*, October 24, 1972, October 27, 1972, March 20, 1973, April 3, 1973. On student activism at MSU, see Jack Lorenzini, “‘Power Concedes Nothing without a Demand’: Student Activism at Memphis State University in the 1960s” (PhD diss., University of Memphis, 2013).

²⁹ *Helmsman*, December 5, 1972; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, October 16, 1972, February 13, 1973, February 14, 1973. Inspired by the basketball team’s run to the 1957 NIT Finals, then-mayor Edmund Orgill envisioned Memphis State sports as a vehicle for urban development. He organized a body of business and political leaders to fund more athletic scholarships, and the football team achieved Top 20 national rankings in 1962 and 1963. Gwilym S. Brown, “Out to Win Big in the City of Memphis,” *Sports Illustrated*, November 25, 1963, 77–79. Football also dictated the university’s decision to leave the MVC after the 1972–73 academic year. Memphis State was the only real southern team in the conference, and the football team wanted to go independent so it could keep scheduling regional powerhouses such as Ole Miss and Tennessee rather than second-tier midwestern programs. Although the MVC was a competitive basketball conference, Gene Bartow supported the move, because it allowed for a more flexible schedule with a higher national profile. *Helmsman*, October 24, 1972; *Nashville Banner*, April 3, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, December 6, 1972, January 10, 1973, January 20, 1973; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, January 11, 1973, March 16, 1973, June 2, 1973, June 3, 1973.

³⁰ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, October 19, 1972, October 26, 1972, November 3, 1972, November 11, 1972, November 15, 1972, November 21, 1972, November 22, 1972, February 23, 1973, March 3, 1973, March 18, 1973, March 22, 1973, April 1, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, November 11, 1972, January 2, 1973; *Helmsman*, December 1, 1972, February 27, 1973, March 2, 1973. On sport, place, and urban politics, see Michael N. Danielson, *Home Team: Professional Sports and the American Metropolis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997). Even the Memphis State mascot provoked a controversy. In November 1972, at Coach Pancoast’s suggestion, the football booster club known as the Highland Hundred procured an eight-week-old, eight-pound Bengal Tiger cub. As a few boosters initially raised the animal in their home’s garage, a mobile steel cage was built so it could be displayed at home football games. Concerned students and community members objected, as did Memphis Zoo director Robert Matlin, who said that using a tiger as mascot constituted “cruel and inhumane treatment. The cat is one of an endangered species, and the use of the tiger at the stadium will terrify it. The cat should never have been bought.” The zoo ultimately agreed to house the tiger, however, assuming responsibility for its care from the Highland Hundred. *Helmsman*, November 14, 1972, November 17, 1972, January 9, 1973, January 26, 1973; *Memphis Statesman*, November 15, 1972, January 24, 1973; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, January 6, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 12, 1973, March 24, 1973.

³¹ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, October 29, 1972, December 11, 1972, December 31, 1972, January 3, 1973, January 25, 1973, February 1, 1973, March 13, 1973, March 15, 1973, March 29, 1973, April 1, 1973; Peter Carry, “You Make the Most with What You Got,” *Sports Illustrated*, January 24, 1972, 59–60; *Tri-State Defender*, September 23, 1972, November 4, 1972, November 11, 1972; Morton Sharnik, “Once All-Didnip, Now All-Obscure,” *Sports Illustrated*, March 12, 1973, 68–69; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, January 6, 1973, February 2, 1973, February 3, 1973, March 10, 1973, March 29, 1973. Finley also installed retired Kentucky coach Adolph Rupp as team president.

³² *Helmsman*, December 1, 1972; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, November 29, 1972, December 6, 1972, January 17, 1973, March 14, 1973. Starting in January 1973, students could also watch the home games live on closed-circuit television at the University Center Ballroom. *Helmsman*, January 12, 1973.

³³ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, November 8, 1972; Brad Martin, interview with the author, Memphis, December 16, 2014. Martin had butted heads with Williams in the past, such as when Williams tried to intervene in MSU business by calling for the firing of football coach Billy Murphy or trying to stop the student production of the musical *Hair*.

³⁴ On the political trends of the era, see Edward D. Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 158–77; Thomas Borstelmann, *The 1970s: A New Global History From Civil Rights to Economic Inequality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 36–45; Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 106–14; Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt*

South (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006). On the 1972 congressional elections, see *New York Times*, October 27, 1972, November 9, 1972; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, October 31, 1972, November 8, 1972, November 10, 1972, November 26, 1972; *Helmsman*, October 21, 1972; *Tri-State Defender*, November 11, 1972.

³⁵ Brad Martin, interview with the author, December 16, 2014; *New York Times*, January 26, 1973. Maxine Smith of the NAACP charged, “Mr. Nixon’s new American majority is a majority of white racists who hate black people.” But neither party in Tennessee had cast any particularly favor upon African Americans, and the small number of blacks in the State House, though all Democrat, could serve as key swing votes. *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, October 22, 1972, November 6, 1972, November 9, 1972, December 10, 1972, January 14, 1973, March 14, 1973.

³⁶ Brad Martin, interview with the author, December 16, 2014.

³⁷ Williams also blasted the *Helmsman* for endorsing Martin, arguing that because the state subsidized the campus newspaper, it should refrain from any political endorsements.

³⁸ See *Helmsman*, October 31, 1972.

³⁹ Brad Martin, interview with the author, December 16, 2014; *Helmsman*, November 10, 1972.

Memphis Commercial Appeal, January 4, 1973, January 8, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, January 2, 1973, January 4, 1973; *Helmsman*, January 9, 1973.

⁴⁰ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, January 11, 1973, January 15, 1973, January 21, 1973, January 26, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, January 11, 1973; January 22, 1973, January 23, 1973, January 25, 1973, January 26, 1973; *Helmsman*, January 16, 1973, January 23, 1973.

⁴¹ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, January 28, 1973, February 1, 1973, February 4, 1973, February 6, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, January 29, 1973; February 2, 1973, February 5, 1973, February 14, 1973; *Helmsman*, February 6, 1973.

⁴² *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, February 5, 1973, February 8, 1973, February 12, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, February 7, 1973, February 9, 1973, February 12, 1973; *Helmsman*, February 6, 1973, February 9, 1973, February 13, 1973; *Tri-State Defender*, February 10, 1973, February 17, 1973.

⁴³ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, February 15, 1973, February 16, 1973, February 19, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, February 16, 1973, February 20, 1973.

⁴⁴ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, February 22, 1973, February 24, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 21, 1973, March 26, 1973; *Tri-State Defender*, March 2, 1973; Jack Eaton, interview with the author, January 7, 2015.

⁴⁵ *Helmsman*, February 27, 1973.

⁴⁶ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, February 5, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, January 24, 1973; *Helmsman*, December 5, 1972, January 12, 1973, February 9, 1973.

⁴⁷ *Memphis Statesman*, March 21, 1973; Shirletta Kinchen, “‘We want what people generally refer to as Black Power’: Youth and Student Activism and the Impact of the Black Power Movement in Memphis, Tennessee, 1965–1975” (PhD diss., University of Memphis, 2011), 183–234. Freshman Clarence Jones recalled that during one of the preseason exhibition games, members of BSA held a sign asking, “What Happened to Elton Hayes?,” referring to the 1971 murder of a black teenager by Memphis police. In the fall of 1970 the Black Student Association noted a few instances of racism in local sports in its newsletter, such as the sluggish recruitment of black athletes for the MSU football team and the erasure of records by athletes from black high schools upon the integration of athletic leagues. If the city “can’t deal with a small contradiction such as the one present in Memphis sports,” it asked, “how can it become a great place for both races?” Clarence Jones, interview by the author, March 12, 2015; *Did You Know?* (BSA newsletter), September 28, 1970 and November 3, 1970, in Folder “Did You Know, BSA, 1970-71,” Special Collections, University of Memphis.

⁴⁸ *Helmsman*, January 16, 1973, January 19, 1973. The playing of “The Star-Spangled Banner” during sporting events was becoming an object of controversy—a national track meet in Madison Square Garden had announced it would stop playing the anthem, only to rescind its policy after a public outcry. *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, January 18, 1973.

⁴⁹ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 19, 1973; *Helmsman*, December 5, 1972, March 3, 1973, March 13, 1973, March 20, 1973, April 6, 1973; *Memphis Statesman*, February 28, 1973; Sherman and Bond, *Dreamers. Thinkers. Doers.*, 66.

⁵⁰ Margo Bryant Wilson, telephone interview with the author, December 17, 2014; Sherman and Bond, *Dreamers. Thinkers. Doers.*, 66.

⁵¹ “Memphis: Pre-Summer Blues,” *Time*, March 15, 1968, 19–20; “Memphis Blues,” *Time*, April 5, 1968, 25; “Hurt Pride in Memphis,” *Time*, April 26, 1968, 44; “On the Brink in Memphis,” *Time*, August 16, 1968, 23; Henry P.

Leiferman, "A Year Later in Memphis," *Nation*, March 3, 1969, 401–03; "Memphis Blues," *Newsweek*, November 24, 1969, 38–39; "Memphis—How Assassination Changed a City in Three Years," *U.S. News and World Report*, April 5, 1971, 66–68; "Five Years Later: The Garbage Workers, Memphis and Dr. King," *Ebony*, April 1973, 46–54. On Memphis politics through 1968, see Laurie B. Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality: Memphis and the Black Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Michael K. Honey, *Going down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King's Last Campaign* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007); G. Wayne Dowdy, *Crusades for Freedom: Memphis and the Political Transformation of the American South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010). On Black Monday boycotts, see James David Conway Jr., "Moderated Militants in the Age of Black Power: The Memphis NAACP, 1968–1975" (PhD diss., University of Memphis, 2015), 73–180.

⁵² *New York Times*, January 26, 1973; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, November 22, 1972, December 21, 1972, January 3, 1973, January 29, 1973, February 18, 1973, February 25, 1973, March 4, 1973, March 10, 1973, March 19, 1973; *Tri-State Defender*, September 23, 1972, November 14, 1972, December 16, 1972, January 13, 1973, January 27, 1973, February 3, 1973, February 10, 1973, February 17, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, January 2, 1973, January 3, 1973, March 30, 1973. On the stalled and uncertain nature of the civil rights movement in this era, see David L. Chappell, *Waking from the Dream: The Struggle for Civil Rights in the Shadow of Martin Luther King Jr.* (New York: Random House, 2014), 62–64.

⁵³ *New York Times*, January 26, 1973; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, October 17, 1972, October 18, 1972, October 24, 1972, November 16, 1972, November 17, 1972, November 19, 1972; Floyd Montgomery Sharp, "The Desegregation of the Memphis City Schools under the Direction of United States District Judge Robert Malcolm McRae Jr." (Ph.D. diss., University of Memphis, 1997), 184–211.

⁵⁴ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, November 29, 1972, December 3, 1972, December 10, 1972, January 17, 1973, January 25, 1973, January 28, 1973, February 7, 1973, February 14, 1973, February 15, 1973, February 18, 1973, March 11, 1973, March 14, 1973, March 18, 1973; *Tri-State Defender*, February 10, 1973, March 3, 1973; *New York Times*, April 11, 1973. In a 1997 interview, Chandler stated: "The idea of integration, which . . . arose almost 'smoke-like,' came down in the buses, and then the city and so forth. . . . I was not an integrationist, to say the least. I was a person who felt . . . well it did my heart good to see Alabama's Governor stand up and tell the Federal Government to go jump in the lake!"; Sharp, "The Desegregation of the Memphis City Schools under the Direction of United States District Judge Robert Malcolm McRae Jr.," 248–49.

⁵⁵ *New York Times*, January 25, 1973; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, January 1, 1973, January 28, 1973, February 10, 1973, February 17, 1973, February 25, 1973, March 2, 1973, March 10, 1973, April 16, 1973; *Tri-State Defender*, November 4, 1972, January 27, 1973.

⁵⁶ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 4, 1973, March 5, 1973, March 13, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 5, 1973; Kirkpatrick, "Dr. K, Big Cat and Little Tubby," 24–25.

⁵⁷ *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 7, 1973, March 8, 1973; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, February 13, 1973, March 6, 1973; Phyllis Massey, interview with the author, January 12, 2015. Kenon, Finch, and Robinson all made the All-MVC first team. *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 14, 1973.

⁵⁸ Kirkpatrick, "Dr. K, Big Cat and Little Tubby," 24–25; Larry Kenon, telephone interview with the author, February 10, 2015; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 7, 1973, March 8, 1973.

⁵⁹ *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 15, 1973; Clarence Jones, interview with the author, March 12, 2015; Dexter Reed, interview with the author, January 28, 2015.

⁶⁰ Jack Schaffer, interview with the author, January 27, 2015; Phyllis Massey, interview with the author, January 12, 2015.

⁶¹ *Helmsman*, December 1, 1972; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 26, 1973; George Lapidés, telephone interview with the author, January 15, 2015.

⁶² Herb Hilliard, telephone interview with the author, February 10, 2015.

⁶³ Robert Gordon, *Respect Yourself: Stax Records and the Soul Explosion* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 236–39, 257–64, 286–88; Kirkpatrick, "Dr. K, Big Cat and Little Tubby," 24–25.

⁶⁴ *Helmsman*, March 2, 1973; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 8, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 19, 1973, March 23, 1973.

⁶⁵ *Houston Chronicle*, March 16, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 12, 1973, March 16, 1973; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 16, 1973, March 17, 1973.

- ⁶⁶ *Houston Chronicle*, March 16, 1973; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 4, 1973, March 17, 1973, March 18, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 17, 1973.
- ⁶⁷ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 15, 1973, March 18, 1973, March 19, 1973; *Rightly Seasoned: The 1973 Memphis State Tigers*.
- ⁶⁸ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 19, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 19, 1973.
- ⁶⁹ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 19, 1973, March 20, 1963; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 19, 1973; *Helmsman*, March 20, 1973.
- ⁷⁰ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 23, 1973, March 25, 1973; *Helmsman*, March 23, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 21, 1973, March 23, 1973. The athletic department saved only two hundred of the NCAA-allotted one thousand Final Four tickets for students, leading to gripes that the university courted boosters at their expense.
- ⁷¹ Charles Rafael, interview with the author, January 14, 2015; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 23, 1973.
- ⁷² *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 25, 1973, March 27, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 23, 1973, March 26, 1973.
- ⁷³ Jack Schaeffer, interview with the author, January 27, 2015; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 26, 1973; Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*, 297; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 24, 1973, March 26, 1973.
- ⁷⁴ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 25, 1973, March 27, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 26, 1973.
- ⁷⁵ Joe Jares, "Mad for Marvin B. and Ernie D.," *Sports Illustrated*, February 14, 1972, 18–19; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 19, 1973, March 23, 1973; *Helmsman*, March 23, 1973; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 23, 1973, March 24, 1973; Barry McDermott, "Baiting the Bruins," *Sports Illustrated*, March 26, 1973, 18–21.
- ⁷⁶ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 25, 1973; *New York Times*, March 25, 1973.
- ⁷⁷ Kirkpatrick, "A Slight Case of Being Superhuman," 18–21; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 25, 1973; *Helmsman*, March 28, 1973.
- ⁷⁸ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 25, 1973.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁰ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, January 28, 1973, March 22, 1973, March 25, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 15, 1973, March 16, 1973, March 25, 1973; *Tri-State Defender*, March 31, 1973; *Helmsman*, March 28, 1973, March 30, 1973.
- ⁸¹ Kirkpatrick, "A Slight Case of Being Superhuman," 18–21; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 26, 1973, March 27, 1973; *New York Times*, March 25, 1973.
- ⁸² *New York Times*, March 28, 1973; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, February 4, 1973; Curry Kirkpatrick, "The Ball in Two Different Courts," *Sports Illustrated*, December 25, 1972, 28–33; Kirkpatrick, "A Slight Case of Being Superhuman," 18–21. On Wooden and Walton, see also John Matthew Smith, *The Sons of Westwood: John Wooden, UCLA, and the Dynasty That Changed College Basketball* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 177–227; Seth Davis, *Wooden: A Coach's Life* (New York: Times Books, 2014), 380–401; Bill Libby, *The Walton Gang* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1974), 133–52.
- ⁸³ Kirkpatrick, "A Slight Case of Being Superhuman," 21; *New York Times*, March 26, 1973; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 26, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 26, 1973.
- ⁸⁴ *Memphis Statesman*, March 28, 1973; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, April 4, 2008.
- ⁸⁵ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 27, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 27, 1973.
- ⁸⁶ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 27, 1973, April 4, 2008.
- ⁸⁷ *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 27, 1973; *Helmsman*, March 28, 1973; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 27, 1973.
- ⁸⁸ *Rightly Seasoned: The 1973 Memphis State Tigers*; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 27, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 27, 1973.
- ⁸⁹ *New York Times*, March 28, 1973; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 27, 1973. Despite Wooden's anticommmercial image, he received some flak, as well, when he crassly touted his new memoir, *They Call Me Coach*, during the televised postgame interviews. Davis, *Wooden*, 399–401.
- ⁹⁰ *Tri-State Defender*, March 31, 1973; *Helmsman*, March 30, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, March 27, 1973; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 27, 1973, March 28, 1973.
- ⁹¹ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, March 20, 1973, March 29, 1973; *Tri-State Defender*, March 31, 1973; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, February 19, 1976.

⁹² *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, April 12, 1973, May 26, 1973, April 9, 2011; Maxine A Smith, "Report of Executive Secretary," 2 May–4 June 1973, Folder 13, Box 1, Maxine A. Smith NAACP Collection, Memphis/Shelby County Public Library.

⁹³ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, April 14, 1973.

⁹⁴ Arthur Hundhausen, "Memphis Tams," Remember the ABA, accessed March 21, 2016, www.remembertheaba.com/Memphis-Tams; Jack McCallum, "A Kid Pumps up the Tigers," *Sports Illustrated*, February 22, 1982, 48–49; Rick Telander, "He Ain't a Hound Dog," *Sports Illustrated*, January 17, 1983, 74; Curry Kirkpatrick, "Making Sweet Music in Memphis," *Sports Illustrated*, February 11, 1985, 76–81; Douglas S. Looney, "Troubled Times at Memphis State," *Sports Illustrated*, June 24, 1985, 36–38; *New York Times*, May 15, 1985, September 18, 1986; Frank Murtaugh, "Heroics and Heartbreak," *Memphis Flyer*, March 5–11, 2015, 14–16. The Tams also drafted Kenon, the team's finest pro prospect and MSU's single-season record-holder for field goals and rebounds, but traded his rights to the New Jersey Nets. Gene Bartow took the head job at the University of Illinois in 1974, and in 1975 he succeeded John Wooden at UCLA. Despite a 52–9 record and a 1976 Final Four berth, Bartow left UCLA after two years, never living up to the legend of a ten-time national champion. He later became basketball coach and athletic director at the University of Alabama-Birmingham. *New York Times*, April 3, 1973, September 13, 1973; *Tri-State Defender*, April 14, 1973; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, April 1, 1973; undated *Memphis Press-Scimitar* clipping from 1976 entitled "So Long, Big Time," Memphis State Basketball Clippings, Special Collections, University of Memphis; Moses, "Pursued By a Very Long Shadow," 32–34.

⁹⁵ *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, April 2, 2011, April 4, 2011, December 4, 2012; James Busbee, "A Season in the Sun," *Memphis Flyer*, March 13, 1997, March 19, 1997; Greg Russell, "Meet Me in St. Louis," *University of Memphis Magazine*, Spring 2003; Prosterman, "Larry Finch"; Davis, "The Legacy of Larry Finch"; Brad Martin, interview with the author, December 16, 2014; Charles Rafael, interview with the author, January 14, 2015; Dexter Reed, interview with the author, January 28, 2015; George Lapidés, telephone interview with the author, January 15, 2015; Herb Hilliard, telephone interview with the author, February 10, 2015; Jack Schaffer, interview with the author, January 27, 2015; *Rightly Seasoned: The 1973 Memphis State Tigers*.

⁹⁶ W. J. Michael Cody, interview by the author, Memphis, January 14, 2016; Clarence Jones, interview by the author, March 12, 2015. For more on Cody's civil rights experience, see W. J. Michael Cody, "King at the Mountain Top: The Representation of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Memphis, April 3–4, 1968," *The University of Memphis Law Review* 41 (2011): 699–707.

⁹⁷ Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*, 298–99; Wanda Rushing, "Memphis and Durable Inequality," in *The Dynamics of School District Consolidation: Race, Economics and the Politics of Educational Change*, ed. John Amis and Paul Wright (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, forthcoming); Sharon D. Wright, *Race, Power, and Political Emergence in Memphis* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 85–148; Steven A. Knowlton, "'A Democrat for All the People': The Historic Election of Harold E. Ford Sr. to the United States House of Representatives," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 280–311.

⁹⁸ On Chandler and busing, see *New York Times*, January 26, 1973; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, January 17, 1973, March 14, 1973. On Republicans and race in the South, see Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 4–5, 148–52, 211–21, 241–67. On Wal-Mart, see Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

⁹⁹ Wright, *Race, Power, and Political Emergence in Memphis*, 149–72; Conway, "Moderated Militants in the Age of Black Power," 260–74. On race and contemporary Memphis, see also Zandria Robinson, *This Ain't Chicago: Race, Class, and Regional Identity in the Post-Soul South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Wanda Rushing, *Memphis and the Paradox of Place: Globalization in the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

¹⁰⁰ Margo Bryant Wilson, telephone interview with the author, December 17, 2014.