



Moving the Chains

The Civil Rights Protest That Saved the Saints
and Transformed New Orleans

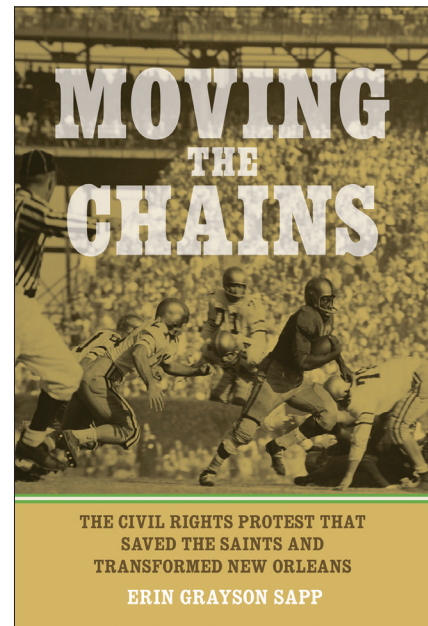
ERIN GRAYSON SAPP

We remember the 1966 birth of the New Orleans Saints as a shady quid pro quo between the NFL commissioner and a Louisiana congressman. *Moving the Chains* is the untold story of the athlete protest that necessitated this backroom deal, as New Orleans scrambled to respond to a very public repudiation of the racist policies that governed the city. In the decade that preceded the 1965 athlete walkout, a reactionary backlash had swept through Louisiana, bringing with it a host of new segregation laws and enough social strong-arming to quash any complaints, even from suffering sports promoters.

Nationwide protests assailed the Tulane Green Wave, the Sugar Bowl, and the NFL's pre-season stop-offs, and only legal loopholes and a lot of luck kept football alive in the city. Still, live it did, and in January 1965, locals believed they were just a week away from landing their own pro franchise. All they had to do was pack Tulane Stadium for the city's biggest audition yet, the AFL All-Star game. Ultimately, all fifty-eight Black and white teammates walked out of the game to protest the town's lingering segregation practices and public abuse of Black players. Following that, love of the gridiron prompted and excused something out of sync with the city's branding: change. In less than two years, the Big Easy made enough progress to pass a blitz inspection by Black and white NFL officials and receive the long-desired expansion team.

The story of the athletes whose bravery led to change quickly fell by the wayside. Locals framed desegregation efforts as proof that the town had been progressive and tolerant all along. Furthermore, when a handshake between Pete Rozelle and Hale Boggs gave America its first Super Bowl and New Orleans its own club, the city proudly clung to that version of events, never admitting the cleanup even took place. As a result, *Moving the Chains* is the first book to reveal the ramifications of the All-Stars' civil resistance and to detail the Saints' true first win.

ERIN GRAYSON SAPP holds a PhD in English and American history from Tulane University. She has served as a scholar-in-residence for the Historic New Orleans Collection, writing for their magazine, giving talks on local athletics, and researching the Sugar Bowl and Saints-related topics.



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