

# Historical Reports on OSU Building Names

## Amory T. “Slats” Gill and Gill Coliseum

### Research Coordination and Introduction

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### Building Historical Research Team

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**Oregon State**  
University

In August 2017, the Building and Place Names Evaluation Workgroup began the process of generating historical reports on four OSU campus buildings and their namesakes under consideration. These buildings/namesakes were Arnold Dining Center (Benjamin Lee Arnold), Avery Lodge (Joseph C. Avery), Benton Hall and Annex (Thomas Hart Benton), and Gill Coliseum (Amory T. “Slats” Gill). The purpose of these reports was to gather and analyze historical evidence to explore, reveal, and contextualize the lives and viewpoints of the namesakes, and the histories of the buildings.

## Research Team

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Dr. Stacey L. Smith (OSU history department) assembled a research team made up of scholars from OSU and the broader Oregon community and coordinated the research with the OSU Special Collections and Archives Research Center (SCARC). The research team scholars were chosen for their extensive professional credentials in history or related disciplines, their strong record of high quality research and publication, and their expertise on the eras in which the building namesakes lived or the controversies surrounding them.

The research team included:

**Dr. Thomas Bahde** (Arnold Dining Center): Thomas Bahde earned his Ph.D. in History from the University of Chicago, with an emphasis in the 19th-century United States and comparative slavery. He teaches in the Honors College at Oregon State University and is the author of *The Life and Death of Gus Reed: A Story of Race and Justice in Illinois During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Ohio University Press, 2014).

**Dr. Stephen Dow Beckham** (Benton Hall): Stephen Dow Beckham is the Pamplin Professor of History, Emeritus, Lewis & Clark College. A graduate of the University of Oregon (B.A.) and UCLA (Ph.D.), Beckham taught for 42 years. His courses covered U.S. History, the American West, Native Americans, and seminars in research methods. He is a former “Oregon Professor of the Year” and recipient of the Asher Distinguished Teaching Award, American Historical Association. He is the author of numerous books, articles, monographs, expert witness reports, and has served as the writer of museums exhibits and master plans from the Library of Congress to the Hong Kong Museum of History. Beckham and his wife reside in Lake Oswego. They are heavily involved in the Beckham Estate Vineyard growing and producing Pinot noir wines.

**Dr. Marisa Chappell** (Gill Coliseum): Marisa Chappell earned her Ph.D. in history from Northwestern University in 2002 and is an associate professor of history at OSU. Her expertise is in post-1945 U.S. history with an emphasis on politics, social policy, and the political economy of race and gender. She has published *The War on Welfare: Family, Poverty, and Politics in Modern America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010) and co-authored *Welfare in the United States: A History with Documents* (Routledge, 2009). She is currently working on a book about the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), which organized low- and moderate-income Americans in the last third of the twentieth century.

**Dr. Dwaine Plaza** (Gill Coliseum): Dwaine Plaza earned his Ph.D. in Sociology from York University, Canada, in 1996. He is a professor of sociology at OSU and Associate Dean of the OSU College of Liberal Arts. His research expertise is on migration in the English-speaking Caribbean, and he has also conducted and published extensive research on immigrant communities in Oregon and the history of race and athletics at Oregon State University. He has received research grants from the Canadian International Development Research Grant and the Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigrants and Settlement. He is also the winner of the Oregon Innovators in Education Award (2000) and the OSU College of Liberal Arts Bill Wilkins Teaching Award (1999).

**Dr. Stacey L. Smith** (Avery Lodge): Stacey L. Smith earned her Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 2008 and is an associate professor of history at OSU. Her scholarship focuses on connecting the history of the U.S. Civil War and Reconstruction with the history of the North American West. She is the author of *Freedom's Frontier: California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction* (University of North Carolina Press, 2013), which won the inaugural David Montgomery Prize in U.S. labor history from the Organization of American Historians. She has also published articles in the *Pacific Historical Review*, the *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, and the *Journal of the Civil War Era*. She is currently working on a book on African American abolitionists and civil rights activists in the Pacific West.

## Methods and Approaches

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There is a great deal of information and misinformation circulating about each of these OSU buildings and their namesakes. For this reason, the researchers agreed to adhere to rigorous research standards. Whenever possible, they documented their claims with primary sources, first-hand accounts of historical events, including newspaper articles, oral histories, census records, diaries, letters, and official institutional or government documents. They drew extensively on primary sources in the holdings of OSU SCARC. Archivists Larry Landis and Natalia Fernandez, and graduate student assistant Michael Dicianna, provided invaluable help in locating these sources. Dwaine Plaza and Marisa Chappell also reached out to longtime OSU and Corvallis community members to collect oral histories about Amory T. “Slats” Gill. Susan Hayes, a Corvallis community member, donated her time, expertise, and research materials to help the research team reconstruct the history of the Benton County citizens’ fundraising campaign to build Benton Hall.

The research team also relied on secondary sources, accounts written by historians. They avoided non-scholarly secondary sources such as anonymous or crowd-sourced websites, blogs, or non-scholarly history books without thorough citations. They depended, instead, on scholarly books with extensive citations. The researchers also tried to address apocryphal or unsubstantiated information circulating about each namesake. Finally, the research team extensively documented their own research with detailed footnotes. The team strongly encourages readers to examine the footnotes carefully for more information about the historical sources on which the reports are based.

## Historical Interpretation, Contextualization, and Conclusions

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History is an interpretative discipline. Historians gather as many primary and secondary sources as they can about a given topic. They then analyze these sources and read them against each other to construct interpretations of what happened in the past. For some topics, primary source evidence simply does not exist or it is very incomplete. For other topics, primary sources are abundant. Primary sources that survive from the past often have problems: they can be biased, one-sided, filled with inaccuracies, or silent on important issues. Some primary sources may directly contradict other primary sources. For this reason, historical research is not aimed at uncovering incontrovertible truths about the past; instead, the historian's job is to make well-reasoned conclusions based on a limited and often problematic pool of available primary sources. Historians evaluate which kinds of sources are likely to be more reliable than others. They make informed speculations, educated guesses, based on the quality and quantity of primary source evidence that they find.

The types of interpretations historians make, and the kinds of primary sources they look at, also depend on the time period in which they conduct their research. For instance, at the turn of the twentieth century, during the height of Jim Crow, few professional historians examined primary sources produced by African Americans or accorded African Americans much role in U.S. history. This changed during the civil rights movements of the 1950s and 60s. Scholars began to seek out accounts by African Americans and to argue that black civil rights activists were critical to remaking national politics. All historical scholarship is, then, a product of its time. Our interpretations of historical figures change over time as community values and ideals change. Historical scholarship is generally not aimed at evaluating whether a historical figure was mostly “good” or mostly “bad.” Rather, historians seek to contextualize individuals’ lives, to determine what views they held, why they held them, where they fit in the broader societies in which they lived, and what repercussions these views had for their communities (past and present). In seeking to contextualize the views and actions of historic building namesakes, the historical researchers attempted to address the following questions identified by the Building and Place Names Evaluation Workgroup:

- 1) Actions taken vs. viewpoints held: Do the historical figure’s actions differ from expressed viewpoints? Are these differences significant and meaningful?
- 2) Public vs. private persona: Did the figure express or act on exclusionary or racist views in public life? Or, did such acts or views primarily shape their private life?
- 3) The progression of an individual’s viewpoints and life as a whole: Did the figure’s actions or views change substantially over time? Did the person recant or attempt to rectify past behavior later in life?
- 4) Broader social/institutional context: Historical figures are shaped by the cultural values of the time in which they lived. Can you comment on whether the person’s views or actions aligned or did not align with the mission of OSU or the broader society of the period? It might help to consider whether the person’s views were widely held by other Americans, Oregonians, or OSU community members during their lifetime, or whether they were an outlier in their community. Comparison with other important or well-known figures of the period may be helpful.

The historical reports on OSU building namesakes show that people who lived in the past were complex. In some cases, it may not be easy to make cut and dry conclusions about whether these building namesakes held or acted on exclusionary views. The lack of primary sources, disagreement among sources, and contradictions in individuals' own behaviors, result in many “grey areas” where the evidence is inconclusive.

The research team members refrained from making recommendations about building names. It will be up to the OSU community—faculty, students, staff, administrators, and Corvallis residents—to discuss and debate the legacies of these historical figures. It is our hope that the historical reports will generate an honest, open dialogue about the past, and about OSU's present mission and values.

# Amory T. “Slats” Gill and Gill Coliseum

Prepared by  
Dr. Marisa Chappell and Dr. Dwaine Plaza  
Oregon State University

Oct. 19, 2017



**Oregon State**  
University

## **Amory T. “Slats” Gill**

**and**

## **Gill Coliseum**

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### **Gill Coliseum and the Career of Amory T. “Slats” Gill**

This report presents and contextualizes historical research on Amory Tingle “Slats” Gill, longtime Oregon State basketball coach (1928-1964) and namesake of Gill Coliseum. Gill Coliseum was built to accommodate Oregon State College’s burgeoning post-World War II student population. OSC basketball games before 1949 had been played in the Men’s Gym, which seated only 2,600, and the College lacked a facility large enough to hold graduation and other large-scale events. Construction on the \$1.8 million building began in 1948, made possible by bond funding authorized by the State Board of Higher Education. A state-of-the-art facility was designed by Jones and Marsh, a Portland-based architectural firm. It included 1,000 tons of structural steel and 14,000 yards of concrete and featured the second largest roof span in the nation.<sup>1</sup> Official documents initially referred to the structure as “the Pavilion,” but the public informally called it Gill Coliseum. OSC documents adopted the popular nickname at least as early as 1950, the year before the building’s official dedication.<sup>2</sup> After Amory T. “Slats” Gill’s

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<sup>1</sup> On the history and construction of the Coliseum, we are drawing from “Built for Beavers,” *This Earth* (publication of Henry J. Kaiser Company), 13; Irwin Harris, “Coliseum is a Dream Come True,” *Golden Jubilee of Basketball at Oregon State Souvenir Basketball Program*, January 12-13, 1951, 8, 19; George P. Edmonston, Jr., “If Gill Coliseum could talk, it might tell of a game in the 1955 tourney, or one of many other tales,” *Albany Democrat-Herald*, December 12, 1999, B1-B7, all in Memorabilia Collection, Box 27, Folder 3: Gill Coliseum, Special Collections and Archives Research Center, Oregon State University, Corvallis, Ore. (hereafter SCARC).

<sup>2</sup> Oregon State College Bulletin No. 1, Dad’s Day Newsletter, January 1950, Memorabilia Collection, Box 27, Folder 3, SCARC.

death in 1966, the State Board of Higher Education officially named the building “Gill Coliseum.”<sup>3</sup>

The building’s name reflected Gill’s long and impressive record as OAC's basketball coach and his popularity on campus and in the community. Gill was an all-state high school basketball player in Salem, Oregon (1919 and 1920) before pursuing a Bachelor of Science degree at Oregon State College, where he played basketball, and was recognized as an all-Coast player in 1922, 1923, and 1924 as well as All-American. Gill spent only one year away from OSC, coaching basketball at the YMCA and a high school in Oakland, California, before returning to his alma mater as an instructor in physical education and coach of the freshman basketball team in 1926. He became varsity basketball coach in 1928, and by 1950 had assembled an impressive record. Between 1930 and 1950, Gill’s teams had a record of 308 wins to 196 losses, and won seven divisional titles and three coast championships. Gill was also known for having mentored several all-American players. In 1949, Gill’s team placed fourth in the National College Athletic Association (NCAA) tournament and in 1950 Gill was named to the Helms Athletic Foundation Hall of Fame.<sup>4</sup> Several of Gill’s former players, interviewed recently, recall him as a man of integrity and character who cared deeply about his players’ education both on and off the court.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This was in accordance with a Board policy against naming buildings after living persons. James H. Jensen to Mr. Fred M. Weatherford, April 11, 1966, Gill Personnel Files, SCARC; “Amory T. Gill,” *Oregonian*, April 7, 1966, 36; “State Board Approves Name for Gill Coliseum,” *Barometer*, April 26, 1966.

<sup>4</sup> Johnny Eggers, “Slats Gill Compiles Great Record,” *Golden Jubilee of Basketball at Oregon State Souvenir Basketball Program*, January 12-13, 1951, 24.

<sup>5</sup> This report draws on interviews with Paul Valenti, Mel Counts, John Jarboe, Eric Johnson, Steve Johnson, Jim Jarvis, Craig Chambers, Connie (Kinser) Toole, Norm Monroe, Charlie White, and Richard Harr as well as letters from Jimmy Anderson and Donald Megale. Voices of Oregon State University Oral History Collection (OH 009), Box 1, Folder 16: Valenti, Paul, February 11, 2011, SCARC; Oregon Multicultural Archives Oral History Collection (OH 018), Series 1, Digital File 1: Monroe, Norm, May 18, 2011,



Gill continued his impressive record for the rest of his coaching career, which ended when he resigned and took the position of Athletic Director in 1964. He earned one of the best records in the nation, with 599 wins and 393 losses; won four Pacific Coast conference championships, plus one conference championship tie; and brought five teams to the NCAA tournament. He created the Far West Classic tournament, served as president of the National Basketball Coaches Association, and won the Hayward Award honoring a leading Oregon sports figure. According to articles in the *Barometer*, Gill was an active and respected community member, serving on the serving on the Corvallis School Board and the City of Corvallis Recreation Commission, and serving as president of the Rotary Club. The Corvallis Chamber of Commerce named him “first citizen of Corvallis” in 1963.<sup>6</sup> He died on April 5, 1966 after suffering a stroke.

Gill was survived by his wife, Helen, and their children, Jane and John.<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that John Gill had a significant hearing disability and strong speech impediment.<sup>8</sup> This piece of information may be significant because it may have indirectly affected Gill's outlook on the treatment of minority status individuals. He would have witnessed his own child being stigmatized, taunted, and excluded by other

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SCARC; Oregon Multicultural Oral History Collection (OH 018), Series I, Digital File 2: White, Charlie, May 18, 2011, SCARC; John Jarboe and Craig Chambers, interview by Jill Peters, Oct. 3, 2017; Connie (Kinsler) Toole, interview by Jill Peters, Oct. 4, 2017; Charlie White, interview by Dwaine Plaza, Oct. 6, 2017; Richard Harr, interview by Dwaine Plaza, Oct. 6, 2017; Steve Johnson, interview by Jill Peters, Oct. 5, 2017; Jim Jarvis, interview by Jill Peters, Oct. 6, 2017; Eric Johnson, interview by Jill Peters, Oct. 6, 2017. These interviews were collected as part of the building namesakes research process and copies of the interview notes will be incorporated into the collections of OSU SCARC; Jimmy Anderson to Whom It May Concern, September 26, 2017; Dr. Donald Megale to President Ray, September 26, 2017. OSU President Ed Ray received the two preceding letters as part of the building namesakes research process. They will be incorporated into the collections of OSU SCARC at a later date.

<sup>6</sup> “Gill Honored as 1<sup>st</sup> Citizen,” *Barometer*, January 22, 1964; “Tradition Lives On,” *Barometer*, April 8, 1966.

<sup>7</sup> Tom Bennett, “Helen Gill – Great Lady of Beaver Basketball,” *The Oregon Stater*, September 1996, Memorabilia Collection, Box 78, Folder 18, Gill, SCARC.

<sup>8</sup> Terry Baker and Jimmy Anderson, interview by Dwaine Plaza, Oct. 3, 2017.

children at a time when there was little cultural toleration or accommodation of disabilities.

### **Context: Racial Integration in College Basketball**

College sports in the United States integrated very gradually over the twentieth century. While a “handful of black players had appeared in uniform for northern basketball and football teams prior to 1930,” World War II marked a turning point, and “by the mid-1950s, most college teams outside the South had achieved a token level of integration.” Still, recruitment of black players nationwide “did not begin in earnest until the 1970s.”<sup>9</sup> During the 1940s and 1950s, universities outside the South began to reject the so-called “gentleman’s agreement,” under which they had kept their black players off the court when playing Southern all-white teams. Southern universities took longer to integrate their teams. Some Southern universities rejected segregated athletics in response to the Supreme Court’s 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which declared segregated schools unconstitutional. At the same time, some Southern state officials sought to prevent athletics integration with legislation, court injunctions, or informal agreements. For instance, Mississippi’s legislators and college administrators agreed to what the Jackson, Mississippi *Clarion-Ledger* in 1959 called an “unwritten, iron-clad policy” forbidding the state’s teams from playing against teams with black players.<sup>10</sup> That

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<sup>9</sup> Charles H. Martin, “Jim Crow in the Gymnasium: The Integration of College Basketball in the American South” in *Sport and the Color Line: Black Athletes and Race Relations in Twentieth Century America*, ed. Patrick B. Miller and David K. Wiggins (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 276, 279; Jeremy M. Deason, “Racial Integration and the Modernization of Men’s College Basketball,” Masters Thesis, Springfield College, December 2004, 4.

<sup>10</sup> The quotation comes from the Jackson, Mississippi *Clarion-Ledger* in 1959, quoted in Russell J. Henderson, “The 1963 Mississippi State University Basketball Controversy and the Repeal of the Unwritten Law: ‘Something More than the Game Will Be Lost,’” *Journal of Southern History* 63, No. 4 (November 1997), 830-1.

policy fell apart when Mississippi State University's basketball coach, James H. McCarthy, along with students and alumni, successfully demanded that MSU's basketball team be allowed to participate in that year's NCAA tournament in 1963, which included integrated teams. During the tournament, the all-white team lost to Loyola University's integrated team.<sup>11</sup> Another major breakthrough occurred in 1966, when Texas Western College broke a tradition of limiting the number of black starters; its all-black team beat the all-white University of Kentucky team for the NCAA championship.<sup>12</sup> These breakthroughs in the South, preceded by token integration outside the South, opened NCAA play to black athletes. However, African American players remained highly underrepresented on teams and among scholarship athletes through the 1960s.<sup>13</sup>

### **Controversy over Basketball Integration at Oregon State University**

Controversy about Gill's possible racial attitudes and practices emerged publicly in 1963, a contentious moment in American racial politics. Student sit-ins across the South in 1960 marked a new phase of mass protest. Civil rights activists challenged segregation, registered black voters, and fought through the legal system and on the streets against policies and practices that relegated African Americans to second-class citizenship. The moral force of the Southern movement catalyzed existing and new

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<sup>11</sup> Henderson, "The 1963 Mississippi State University Basketball Controversy," 827-54.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Martin, *Benching Jim Crow: The Rise and Fall of the Color Line in Southern College Sports, 1890-1980* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 113-16. Chapter 1 offers a detailed discussion of the rise and fall of the so-called "gentlemen's agreement" by which non-Southern universities benched black players when competing against Southern teams. Beginning in the 1930s, students and administrators at non-Southern schools began to challenge this unwritten policy. Texas Western College broke another so-called "unwritten rule" of college basketball, which was to limit the number of black players on the court. The rule was popularly stated as "two blacks at home, three on the road, and four when behind." Martin, *Benching Jim Crow*, Chapter 6; Deason, "Racial Integration and the Modernization of Men's College Basketball," 33.

<sup>13</sup> Kathryn Jay, *More Than Just a Game: Sports in American Life Since 1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 110-111. We were unable to locate specific numbers or percentages of black athletes playing for NCAA teams over time.

efforts outside the South to fight against police repression, residential and school segregation, and other manifestations of racial caste. It is in this context that Oregon state representative Berkeley Lent, a Portland Democrat, introduced a bill prohibiting athletic teams from Oregon State University and the University of Oregon from competing against the University of Mississippi. This university had been a center of controversy in September 1962, as violent white crowds sought to prevent the court-ordered admission of James Meredith, the school's first black student. In February 1963, Lent asked the House Education Committee to table his bill, stating that it had "come to [his] attention that we have situations in our own backyard that need correction before we can tell the University of Mississippi what to do."<sup>14</sup>

Lent's only specific charge was that "the Oregon State University basketball team never has had a Negro member of the varsity team in all the time the present coach has been there." Lent claimed that Gill's explanation was that no African American player had "turned out who was good enough to make the team."<sup>15</sup> The only recorded response we could find from Gill appeared in a *Barometer* article, which reported that Gill denied any charge of racial discrimination. Gill was quoted as saying: "I wish that these people who are making such charges would help us get a Negro on our basketball team that would measure up to our current players." Gill claimed to have sought out numerous African American players and insisted, "Negroes had been given the same opportunities as white boys – both in recruiting and in competition for the team . . . I'm looking for

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<sup>14</sup> "Demo Says OSU Coach Shows Bias" (AP), *Oregonian*, February 9, 1963, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Mervin Shoemaker, "Bill to Produce \$31 Million in Tax Revenues Nears Hopper," *Oregonian*, January 23, 1963; 1; "Demo Says OSU Coach Shows Bias" (AP), *Oregonian*, February 9, 1963, 1. Lent also charged that both universities had failed to address the fact that the national charters of some fraternities and sororities on their campuses included discrimination clauses.

good boys. If they are good, nothing makes any difference – race or anything.” Oregon State University administrators also denied any charge of racism against Gill. House Speaker Clarence Barton did not see the need for a legislative investigation and pointed to the State Board of Higher Education as the appropriate body to address the accusation.<sup>16</sup> We have found no evidence that the Board took any action.

That OSU’s basketball team remained all white is likely at least in part a reflection of Oregon’s small African American population. Many other university basketball teams in Oregon and Washington played their first African American player in the 1950s, but those teams remained all white during most seasons in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>17</sup> There are no extant documents detailing OSU’s recruiting schedule, but a survey of players’ hometowns shows that a very few came from West Coast areas outside of Oregon, usually California, whose African American population was substantially larger than Oregon’s.<sup>18</sup> However, the lack of large numbers of assistant coaches and other staff members meant that coaches in the 1950s and 1960s recruited from their own geographic region and relied primarily on recommendations from high school coaches and OSU alumni for leads on new recruits. This likely would have limited the pool of players in the networks to which Gill was connected.<sup>19</sup> Jimmy Anderson, who played for Gill and then served as freshman coach and later assistant coach, also remembered that “Gill did not really like to go outside the State of Oregon to recruit new players.” Anderson also went on to note that during the 1950s there was no such thing as “professional scouts.”

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<sup>16</sup> “Controversy Flares Over Charge of Gill Basketball Discrimination,” *Barometer*, February 13, 1963, 1.

<sup>17</sup> We reached out to archivists at universities in the Pacific Northwest. Of the ten institutions that provided information, all ten played their first black player sometime during the 1950s, with the earliest in 1952.

<sup>18</sup> Programs in Box 10, Folder 7, Intercollegiate Athletics Records, SCARC. According to Census data, African Americans were 1% of Oregon’s population and 5.6% of California’s population in 1960.

<sup>19</sup> Rod Commons personal communication to Jessica Schmick, September 29, 2017; Deason, “Racial Integration and Modernization of Men’s College Basketball,” 5.

Basketball scouting only developed into a profession in the early 1960s. Most of the recruiting visits were initiated by word of mouth, observing players in regional or local tournaments, and occasionally sending an assistant coach to meet a player. Once the player showed an interest, then Gill would become more involved in the effort to recruit the individual.<sup>20</sup>

OSU administrators in the 1960s cited numerous efforts to recruit African American players. Athletic news director Johnny Eggers pointed to several recruiting targets “over the last decade.” These included: Paul Lowe, who played on the freshman team in 1955 before dropping “at his own choice”; Glenn Moore, who went to the University of Oregon; Jim Dortch, who went to Portland University; Freddy Goss, who went to UCLA; and Ed Sims, who attended OSU during New Student Week in 1963 but then “chose to go elsewhere.” Eggers also described efforts to recruit Troy Collier, a black player from Phoenix, Arizona: “both Slat and his wife met the Negro player personally at the Portland International Airport,” took him to Gill’s daughter’s house, and gave him the “royal treatment.”<sup>21</sup> While we were unable to locate records of OSU’s recruiting efforts in this period and could therefore not confirm Eggers’s claims, several players and assistant coaches who worked with Gill recalled numerous efforts to recruit black players. We know, for instance, that Gill recruited Norm Monroe, an African American member of OSU’s track team, in 1960, and Charlie White, an African American player from California, in 1963. Jimmy Anderson recalled Gill’s effort to recruit several black athletes. He also remembered Gill responding positively to Anderson’s ideas about how to reach a broader talent pool, including subscribing to local

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<sup>20</sup> Jimmy Anderson, interview by Dwaine Plaza, Oct. 3, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> “Controversy Flares Over Charge of Gill Basketball Discrimination,” *Barometer*, February 13, 1963, 1.

California newspapers, in an effort to reach black players.<sup>22</sup> Dr. Donald Megale, who coached high school basketball in Klamath Falls in the 1960s, recalled Gill's substantial effort to recruit a star player, Glenn Moore, an African American, and attributed Moore's decision to attend the University of Oregon to "an influential black Duck alum from Eugene" who "convinced Moore that he would be happier in a larger town with a black population."<sup>23</sup>

As Megale's statement suggests, African American players may have been hesitant to attend Oregon State College/University because they would be one of very few black students and because Corvallis lacked a substantial black population. We have evidence that Corvallis was a difficult place for African Americans in the 1960s, which would help explain some of Gill's difficulty attracting black players. Both Charlie White and Norm Monroe described feeling isolated and facing consistent racism and hostility at OSU and in Corvallis; Richard Harr, who played football at OSU from 1967-1970, also recalled experiencing racist incidents. These incidents ranged from pejorative name calling on the streets to micro-aggressions felt in residence halls to the chilly reception from faculty and coaches.<sup>24</sup> More generally, black players at predominantly white institutions in the 1960s and 1970s faced numerous challenges, from outright racism to feelings of social isolation.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Jimmy Anderson to Whom It May Concern, September 26, 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Dr. Donald Megale to President Ed Ray, September 26, 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Oregon Multicultural Archives Oral History Collection (OH 018), Series 1, Digital File 1: Monroe, Norm, May 18, 2011; Oregon Multicultural Archives Oral History Collection (OH 018), Series I, Digital File 2: White, Charlie, May 18, 2011; Richard Harr, interview by Dwaine Plaza, Oct. 6, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Deason, "Racial Integration and the Modernization of Men's College Basketball," Chapter 4; Oregon Multicultural Archives Oral History Collection (OH 018), Series 1, Digital File 1: Monroe, Norm, May 18, 2011; Oregon Multicultural Archives Oral History Collection (OH 018), Series I, Digital File 2: White, Charlie, May 18, 2011.

We have some evidence of rumors that Gill would not be fair to black players, but we do not have evidence that Gill ever acted in a racist manner or spoke in a derogatory manner about African Americans or any other racial group. Interviews with Charlie White and Paul Valenti suggested that rumors about Gill being a racist circulated among coaches and players, and Valenti mentioned Gill having “a reputation of being a racist,” which Valenti called “unfair.” Charlie White, whom Gill unsuccessfully recruited in 1963, remembered other coaches telling him “some stories about him [Gill] – that I probably wouldn’t get to play much, sitting on the bench and that sort of thing.” We should take this with a grain of salt, as coaches sometimes denigrate other coaches in order to sway recruits. White recalled a “feeling pretty much amongst . . . athletes in California and different places, that [Gill] didn’t really want any African American players really . . . So I guess nobody wanted to be the first with him because there was not that good feeling about whether or not you’d be treated fairly.”<sup>26</sup> None of the individuals interviewed remember Gill ever commenting about racial politics or civil rights or making any pejorative statement about any racial group. When Gill’s team lost to University of San Francisco in the 1955 NCAA championships, Gill praised the team and singled out Bill Russell, the team’s star player, who was black, as the “key difference between the two teams.” Gill went on to highly praise Russell’s style of offensive play and the positive ways he rallied his team to defeat the Beavers.<sup>27</sup>

Charlie White’s recollections about Gill were not positive, but it is unclear if that uneasiness related specifically to race. White remembered that when Gill visited him, it

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<sup>26</sup> Oregon Multicultural Oral History Collection (OH 018), Series I, Digital File 2: White, Charlie, May 18, 2011.

<sup>27</sup> “Gill Praises Don Quintet,” *Oregonian*, March 14, 1955.



“didn’t feel good – just didn’t feel warm and fuzzy”; Gill did not look him in the eye and seemed more interested in talking with White’s roommate, who was white. White decided to come to OSU the following year, when Valenti became head coach. Valenti remembered calling White to recruit him and saying “listen up Charlie this is not Slats Gill calling this is Paul Valenti calling. And so we got him.”<sup>28</sup> White attributes his decision to attend OSU to Valenti’s assurance that he would get a degree and the specific advising he received that laid out a path to graduation in the College of Business. As for Gill’s strained interactions with White, numerous other players and colleagues have reported that Gill was not a warm person. Former players report that he was quite strict and demanded a great deal from his players both on and off the court.<sup>29</sup> Interviewee Terry Baker described Gill’s strict control and discipline over his players in great detail. Baker remembered an incident before a big game when one of Gill’s players was seen

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<sup>28</sup> Oregon Multicultural Archives Oral History Collection (OH 018), Series 1, Digital File 1: Monroe, Norm, May 18, 2011; Oregon Multicultural Oral History Collection (OH 018), Series I, Digital File 2: White, Charlie, May 18, 2011; Voices of Oregon State University Oral History Collection (OH 009), Box 1, Folder 16: Valenti, Paul, February 11, 2011, SCARC.

<sup>29</sup> Oregon Multicultural Oral History Collection (OH 018), Series I, Digital File 2: White, Charlie, May 18, 2011; Charlie White, interview by Dwaine Plaza, Oct. 6, 2017. On Gill as demanding: John Jarboe and Craig Chambers, interview by Jill Peters, Oct. 3, 2017; Connie (Kinsler) Toole, interview by Jill Peters, Oct. 4, 2017; Steve Johnson, interview by Jill Peters, Oct. 5, 2017; Eric Johnson, interview by Jill Peters, Oct. 6, 2017. Dick Bogle recalled in a 2008 blog post that when he arrived on campus in 1949 he asked Gill specifically why he had never had a black player on his teams. In his recollection, Gill responded that “Negroes run with a different rhythm than the rest of the players, and having one player running differently would throw off the rest of the team” and also expressed concern that “if I had one who wasn’t good enough to start and had to sit on the bench, I could be accused of discrimination.” We have no other sources confirming this conversation. Former coaches and players do report that Gill coached a conservative style of play and forbade long shots and dunking; in a 1951 Souvenir Program, Johnny Eggers described Gill as a “keen student of the game and a stickler for the fundamentals.” Norm Monroe, an African American runner who practiced with the team in 1960, reported in a later interview that he had grown up playing basketball on the playground and that Gill was frustrated with his style of play; Monroe and Gill agreed that Monroe should leave the team. Dick Bogle, “Six Decades of Racial Change, and a Renewal of Faith,” Pamplin Media Group, July 10, 2008, <http://cni.pmgnews.com/component/content/article?id=70880>, accessed October 4, 2017; Eggers, “Slats Gill Compiles Great Record,” Souvenir Program, January 12-13, 1951, 16. The notion that black players played a different style of basketball is often suggested but difficult to pin down. Deason, drawing on other secondary sources, writes of African American college teams: “black players played a more up-tempo style, while the traditional game, without a shot clock, was to slow the play down.” Deason, “Racial Integration and the Modernization of Men’s College Basketball,” 34.

riding his bike across campus eating an ice cream cone and whistling. Gill got wind of this capricious display and when the player arrived at practice, Gill wasted no time in chewing him out in front of the team. He felt that the player was disrespectful and not taking a big upcoming game seriously enough.<sup>30</sup> Given these testimonies about Gill's very stern demeanor, it is difficult to tell whether racial bias played a role in his uncomfortable interactions with Charlie White.

The timing of Gill's departure from coaching and appointment as Athletic Director, and the team's successful recruitment of an African American player the season after Gill retired as coach, could raise questions about whether administrators moved him aside to open the door for black players, but we do not have evidence to support this speculation. Lent's accusation came in February 1963; in January 1964 OSU president James Jensen announced that Gill would replace Roy "Spec" Keene as OSU's Athletic Director when Keene stepped down on July 1, 1964. At the same time, Gill announced he would step down as basketball coach at the end of the season.<sup>31</sup> According to reporters for the *Oregonian*, the other candidate for Athletic Director was Jim Barrett, 38, who served as business manager of athletics, an "idea man," and "Spec Keene's right arm man." OSU's Board of Intercollegiate Athletics was apparently divided between the two candidates, but we do not have Board minutes from this period.<sup>32</sup> It was clear from the beginning that Gill would follow "general policy" and step down when he reached age 65, meaning he would only serve for three years.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Terry Baker, interview by Dwaine Plaza, Oct. 3, 2017.

<sup>31</sup> "A.T. 'Slats' Gill Named New Director of Athletics," *Barometer*, January 28, 1964.

<sup>32</sup> L.H. Gregory, "Greg's Gossip," *Sunday Oregonian*, October 6, 1963, 6; Don McLeod, "Gill Gets Push for Athletic Director Chores," *Oregonian*, January 27, 1964, 23; "OSU Boosts Gill to Athletic Director Post," *Oregonian*, January 28, 1964, 17.

<sup>33</sup> James H. Jensen to "Slats," February 11, 1964, Gill Personnel File, SCARC.

It is possible that the Athletic Director appointment was a convenient way to move Gill out of coaching, but we have no evidence that this is the case or that Gill's resignation from coaching was in any way forced on him. The only suggestion we could find about Gill's feelings about the change is highly mediated. A *Barometer* article from February 1965 quotes Gill, who had recovered from a severe heart attack in 1960, as stating: "I could have coached longer, but not forever [and] this is a good way to stay in athletics." The article notes that the administrative position would offer a "relief from the emotionalism of basketball." Gill also "laughingly" noted "I didn't want to coach so long that Paul Valenti would someday be too old to coach."<sup>34</sup> It is impossible to determine whether Gill's retirement from coaching was voluntary due to his deteriorating health, or whether administrators encouraged it. Even if administrators did press Gill to transition out of coaching, we have no evidence that the reason behind this decision was his resistance to the racial integration of college basketball.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The evidence we have is incomplete and ambiguous, but it generally points toward the conclusion that Amory T. "Slats" Gill did not deliberately keep OSU's basketball team segregated. We have no evidence that Gill made derogatory statements about African Americans or opposed having black players on the OSU basketball team. We do have evidence that he tried to recruit several black players but was unsuccessful. It is unclear whether this lack of success was a result of the overall lack of diversity in the Pacific Northwest and Oregon in particular, Gill's limited recruiting networks, the unattractiveness of Corvallis and Oregon for black students, or because of some

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<sup>34</sup> "Slats Gill Finds Job Quite Busy," *Barometer*, February 3, 1965, 6.

intangible discomfort Gill expressed with black players. Unless new evidence emerges to the contrary, concerns that Gill held or acted on racist or exclusionary views cannot be substantiated.