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**The Color Line in Midwestern College Sports, 1890-  
1960**

Studies of segregation and racial exclusion in big-time college sports have mostly focused on either the exclusion of African Americans from major college sports in the American South or the conflict between northern and southern universities over the participation of black players in inter-sectional play. Very

little has been written about the color line inside the Midwest and the historic exclusion of African Americans from several major conferences there, especially in the sport of basketball. This paper will examine efforts to exclude African American students from athletics at predominately white universities in the greater Midwest, from the 1890s through 1960. Particular attention will be paid to the member schools of the athletic conferences commonly referred to as the Big Ten, the Big Eight, and the Missouri Valley. My research will demonstrate that the color line in *college* sports was not unique to the American South and that it functioned rather widely in the heartland region of the United States for half a century before slowly collapsing after World War II. The paper will further show that the color line and racial exclusion actually became more widespread in the prairie states of the Midwest in the 1930s at a time when some college athletic programs elsewhere in the North were abandoning racial restrictions.

The findings in this paper will help historians more fully appreciate the breath of racial exclusion in American college sports during the first six decades of the twentieth century. My research will also emphasize the role that World War II played in undermining the racial assumptions, which supported the maintenance of a color line in the Midwest. The paper will further reveal how in the prairie states athletic segregation actually replaced a more flexible system of race relations, which had existed at the turn of the century. The main sources for the study are newspaper clippings, personal correspondence, and other primary materials on file in college archives, published university histories, African American and mainstream white newspapers, a few oral history interviews, and secondary accounts. This material is part of a larger project by the author on race and college sports, 1890-1980.