INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

Bell & Howell Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA

UMI®
800-521-0600
IDENTITY AND CITIZENSHIP:
AFRICAN AMERICAN ATHLETES, SPORT, AND
THE FREEDOM STRUGGLES OF THE 1960s

DISESSATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
Maureen Margaret Smith, M.S., M.A.

*****

The Ohio State University
1999

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Melvin Adelman, Adviser
Professor Seymour Kleinman
Professor James Upton

Approved by
Professor Melvin Adelman, Adviser

College of Education Graduate Program
Copyright by
Maureen Margaret Smith
1999
ABSTRACT

The turbulent decade of the 1960's witnessed great changes in American society. The world of athletics was not immune from the strife. Athletics were becoming a viable forum for Black athletes to voice their opinions regarding their treatment in athletics, as well as their treatment as African Americans in a nation that was struggling with the issue of race. More specifically, they attempted to define themselves as African Americans within a white sporting culture that had previously defined them in very subservient and exploitative terms. The movements and actions taken by Black athletes during this decade merit attention as part of the larger discourse of race relations in the United States, both on the athletic fields, and more importantly as part of the broader civil rights struggle.

This study explores the role and voice of African American athletes as part of a discourse on self definition and American identity, which was characteristic of the Black intellectual and social movement in the 1960s. Their participation in one of our nation's most highly revered and glamorous professions, sport, during the 1960s when full participation in American society was a major goal of the civil rights movement merely provided a setting for these athletes to participate in the larger dialogue concerning race relations. These actions of protests undoubtedly placed them in an athletic civil rights
movement within the broader national civil rights movement, though no less significant, which could be titled "The Revolt of the Black Athlete." Specific examples of individuals and events that illustrate race consciousness and illuminate our understanding of these new demands expressed within the sporting arena are explored. These events include: the five boxing matches that pitted Floyd Patterson, Sonny Liston and Muhammad Ali against each other in the ring, the draft evasion of Ali, a number of boycotts and protests of college athletes, the victory stand demonstration of Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Mexico City Olympic Games, the participation of Black female in athletics, and the refusal of Curt Flood to be traded to the Phillies and his subsequent suit against major league baseball.
I have been writing this dissertation for almost five years and with that man
days and long nights come many thanks.

My family has been supportive of my studies from day one, even when they really
had no clue what it was I was studying. “Sport History?” To my Dad, thanks for
everything, and I mean everything. And to Laurel, who put it into my head that my name
could be in a book when I saw my name in her acknowledgments. To all my brothers
and sisters, Matt and Steph, the wolves in my pack, and to the second generation of Smith
kids, Jordan, Mercer, Witt and Pierce. A special thanks to my sister, Steph, who has been
my number one cheerleader throughout my life - maybe we couldn’t share a room as
kids, but your unconditional love is a godsend. I am still circling yes. To my Grandma
Tully, for her endless queries about when she’s finally going to have a doctor in the
family. Lastly, to my mom, for her sacrifices that came early on and paid off years later.
In my book, she’s okay with me.

To my friends, teachers, and teammates from Ithaca College. I would especially
like to thank Teresa Vossen-Bucci. Marianne Santoro, Coach Bill Ware, Dr. Deb Wuest.
and Dr. Steve Mosher. To my friends and teachers at The Ohio State University. I would
especially like to thank Dr. Paulette Pierce, Dr. James Upton, Dr. Sy Kleinman, Dr. Kate
Riffee, Chris Valentino, Alicia Eckhart, and Mike Lomax. A special thank you to a fellow New Yorker and now Buckeye, Virginia Goggin.

To all my friends and colleagues in the North American Society for Sport History and the North American Society of Sociology of Sport. Your encouragement over the last few years has been tremendous and more than helpful in some of my darkest days. Seeing everyone else finish ahead of me was terrific motivation. A special thanks to Nancy Bouchier, Rita Liberti, Tina Parratt, Jim Coates, Jerry Gems, Shelley Lucas and Dan Nathan. Over the last four years in Sacramento, I have been fortunate to have the cheering support of the American River College Athletic Department. My students at California State University, Sacramento have been patient, supportive and tremendously encouraging. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the faculty and staff at California State University, Sacramento. To be hired before the completion of this monumental project is a testament to their faith in my abilities.

I would like to give a heartfelt thanks to Colonel George and Nancy Kemen, who have opened their house and hearts to me. Your emotional encouragement, free dinners, and good company have been greatly appreciated. And finally, to my very best friend and possibly (OK – you are) my most favorite person, Kimberly Kemen. Kipper, could you ever know how you motivated me? I give special thanks for all your support and for teaching me the real meaning of commitment to a task - that some jobs take past midnight to get done and that patience is a virtue. Your friendship and company are absolutely the tops. YiB, YiB. I can’t forget to mention the unconditional love of my animules. Bear, Chance, Eli, and Seamus. Meow and Bark.
Lastly, to my advisor, Mel Adelman, who at times had the feeling that I would never complete the mission, but who gave me great insight and support through the years. He once sent me an e-mail that warned, "The problem of writing about recent events is that everybody thinks they know something about it and older historians are even worse since they lived through it." The discussions and advice and critiques and yammering will never be forgotten and I can only hope to be half the master.
VITA

June 7. 1967 ................................................. Born – Oneonta, New York

1989 ............................................................... B.S., Physical Education, Ithaca College

1990 ............................................................... M.S., Physical Education, Ithaca College

1994 ............................................................... M.A., Black Studies, The Ohio State University

1991-1995 .................................................... Graduate Teaching Associate, The Ohio State University

1995-present .................................................. Assistant Professor, Health and Physical Education, California State University, Sacramento

PUBLICATIONS


FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Education

Specialization: Cultural Studies in Sport
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract \hspace{2cm} ii

Acknowledgements \hspace{2cm} iv

Vita \hspace{2cm} vii

Chapters:

1. Introduction \hspace{2cm} 1

2. A Dialogue of Black Liberation \hspace{2cm} 27

3. ‘Nobody Knows My Name’: Utilizing Works by Black Activists and Intellectuals of the 1960s to Understand the Participation of Black Athletes During the Civil Rights Movement \hspace{2cm} 70

4. ‘The Evolution of a Champ’: The Tricky Triad of Floyd Patterson, Sonny Liston, and Muhammad Ali \hspace{2cm} 105

5. Draft Day for Ali has him as Top Pick \hspace{2cm} 157

6. The Revolt of the Black College Athlete \hspace{2cm} 192

7. Tommie Smith and John Carlos Salute Black America at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics \hspace{2cm} 233

8. Invisible Woman - Black Female Athletes and the 1960s \hspace{2cm} 260

9. Curt Flood and the Challenge to America’s Pastime \hspace{2cm} 288

10. Epilogue: Identity and Citizenship – The Legacy of the 1960s in the Last Decade of the Twentieth Century \hspace{2cm} 311

Selected Bibliography \hspace{2cm} 374
The historian who is most conscious of his own situation is also more capable of
transcending it, and more capable of appreciating the essential nature of the
differences between his own society and outlook and those of other periods and
countries...Man's capacity to rise above social and historical situation seems to
be conditioned by the sensitivity with which he recognizes the extent of his
involvement in it. - E.H. Carr, *What Is History*

In the world revolution now under way, the initiative rests with people of color.
That growing numbers of white youth are repudiating their heritage of blood and
taking people of color as their heroes and models is a tribute not only to their
insight but to the resilience of the human spirit. - Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul On Ice*
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The exploitation and suffering of the black athlete in America is no more a recent development than is the inhumanity and deprivation suffered by Afro-American non-athletes. Nor do these recent athletic protests mark the first instances of black athletes speaking out. The difference in this instance is that they are speaking out not only on their own behalf, but also on the behalf of their downtrodden race, and the world and the nation are listening. America's response to what the black athlete is saying and doing will undoubtedly not only determine the future course and direction of American athletics, but also will affect all racial and social relations between blacks and whites in this country.¹

In his 1969 book, The Revolt of the Black Athlete, Harry Edwards addressed the role of Black athletes in a growing number of boycott movements and protests on college and university campuses across the nation. Edwards, himself, was an active participant in many of the actions and was a vocal leader in protests at San Jose State University and the Olympic Project for Human Rights efforts to boycott the 1968 Mexico City Olympic Games. Donald Spivey rightfully cites Edwards as "the embodiment of the black protest spirit in collegiate sports."² Edwards' book detailed the processes of several protests and campus disturbance. It also established a foundation for a better comprehension of the

---


²
problems Black college athletes faced in their college experiences. Many of these problems were not new to the 1960s, but the reactions and actions of Black college athletes were quite different than their predecessors. Still, other problems were a direct result of predominantly white colleges and universities desegregating their campuses and their athletic programs.\(^3\)

Edwards' book is one example of how athletics were becoming a viable forum for Black athletes to voice their opinions regarding their treatment in athletics, as well as their treatment as African Americans in a nation that was struggling with the issue of race.\(^4\) Representative of new ideas regarding "Blackness," Edwards, and others aligned with the young professor, asserted themselves in a dialogue about the definition of race and what being Black in America meant in the 1960s. More specifically, they attempted to define themselves as African Americans within a white sporting culture that had previously defined them in very subservient and exploitative terms. At a time when the


The civil rights movement was dominated by images of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Freedom Riders, and film clips made famous by the evening news and the documentary, *Eyes on the Prize*. The movements and actions taken by Black athletes during this decade merit attention as part of the larger discourse of race relations in the United States, both on the athletic fields, and more importantly as part of the broader civil rights struggle.

This study explores the role and voice of African American athletes as part of a discourse on self-definition and American identity, which was characteristic of the Black intellectual and social movement in the 1960s. Their participation in one of our nation’s most highly revered and glamorous professions, sport, during the 1960s when full participation in American society was a major goal of the civil rights movement, merely provided a setting for these athletes to participate in the larger dialogue concerning race relations. There were several instances of African American athletes asserting their rights as full participants in American sport culture. These actions of protests undoubtedly placed them in an athletic civil rights movement within the broader national civil rights struggle.

---

movement, though no less significant, which could be titled "The Revolt of the Black Athlete," a phrase coined by Harry Edwards and used as the title for his 1969 book. My intent is not to explore the large number of protests by African American athletes; rather, I have chosen specific examples of individuals and events within this tumultuous decade that illustrate race consciousness and illuminate our understanding of these new demands expressed within the sporting arena. These events contextualize the expressions of the Black athletes who were brave and courageous enough to identify and ally themselves with the ideals and principles of Black Power: not the political movement, but the concept that identifying oneself as Black does not eliminate one's American rights or identity, but is an act of empowerment, pride, and dignity and is a critical element of owning one's cultural heritage.

The 1960s were a politically charged and turbulent time; newspaper headlines and television screens covered daily doses of student movements, free speech movements, urban riots, assassinations and killings, the Vietnam war, women's rights demonstrations and the various factions within the civil rights struggle for Black rights and citizenship.

---


^ See “Chapter 2: Black Power: It’s Need and Substance,” in Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Black Liberation* (New York: Random House, 1967), 34-56. While African American is currently the politically correct phrase used in writing and popular culture, Black was the popular choice during the time period of the 1960s. It is argued that it is largely an individual personal preference among African Americans as to how they choose to identify themselves. I have chosen to use the labels African American and Black interchangeably throughout this study.

Chong, Collective Action and the Civil Rights Movement (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991);
A combination of these movements and a changing ideology of traditional roles and values created a climate that encouraged a greater expression of oneself. The political climate allowed for the intersection of civil rights and the involvement of athletes within such movements.

This investigation looks at the various images and expressions of race consciousness by Black athletes during the politically charged decade of the 1960s. A new phase of actions and efforts towards gaining civil rights for Black Americans started in the years following the 1954 Brown versus the Board of Education decision and the Rosa Parks incident and subsequent Montgomery Bus boycott. It was during the 1960s that larger numbers in the Black community and the Civil Rights Movement sought to enact changes in social, political, economic, and legal aspects for Black American citizens. Moreover, the focused attention on integration efforts by the media informed white Americans to a greater extent. While legislation that was written in the years following the Emancipation Proclamation guaranteed African Americans the right to vote, own land, and enjoy the same opportunities as white Americans, the enforcement of such laws was slow in coming. At the turn of the century and even mid-century, inequities remained entrenched for the Black community. Signs indicated that the collective unity of the Black community was positioning itself to challenge American laws, values, and long held prejudices that collectively worked to restrict the citizenship...
rights of Blacks in America. Led into the decade by Martin Luther King, Jr. and his fight for integration, the struggle for freedom evolved into a more politically active and liberating movement with Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam, the Black student movement, and in the second half of the decade, the Black Power movement. There was an undeniably strong link between the sports world of the 1960s and politics, both nationally and globally. Still, few leaders of the decade made any mention of sports as being part of the larger political scene, except to state that it was not an appropriate arena for political discourse.

Just as the civil rights movement gained momentum and progressed from gradualism to direct action, so, too, did the behaviors and efforts of Black athletes. Previously silent and seemingly accepting of the status quo, most Black athletes who had been integrated into the white sporting arena had maintained a low profile, staying away from controversy, and presenting an image of gratitude for the opportunity to participate.

The image of Jackie Robinson, with his ability to endure racial harassment from teammates, opposing players and spectators, presented the country with an acceptable and ideal image of a Black athlete. The significance and symbolism of Robinson begins with his breaking the color barrier in a team sport, not just any team sport, but America's national pastime. In many ways, he helped to support the stereotypes of other Black athletes who had previously been accepted by the white sporting public, such as Jesse Owens and Joe Louis. Both Owens and Louis excelled in individual sports, experienced victories that were cheered on by blacks and whites, and rarely said a challenging word about racial inequalities in sport or society. Their successes were guaranteed by their
ability to meet the standards of white America and limited in that they were unable to
determine their own identity outside that of the identity placed on them by the American
sport establishment and American culture.

Jesse Owens was hailed as an American hero by both white and Black Americans
after he won four Olympic gold medals in the track and field competition at the 1936
Berlin Olympic Games. What made Owens appealing as a figure of American popular
culture, in spite of his skin color, was his ability to positively represent America, b
winning his four gold medals, in what has been referred to as the “Nazi Olympics.” With
the rhetoric of Hitler’s Aryan race superiority surrounding the Games, Owens, a Black
man in stark contrast to Hitler’s ideal soldier, emerged as the victor. To Americans,
Owens symbolized the great democracy which opposed the racism of Nazi Germany. In
a similar stand of symbolism. Joe Louis fought German Max Schmelling twice. Losing
the first bout, Louis trained for a rematch and was able to beat the German in the first
round. Louis’ victory was celebrated by whites and blacks alike as a victory for
American democracy, as well as a victory symbolic for all Black Americans. Louis was
the first Black boxer since Jack Johnson to hold the heavyweight title and much of Louis’
success came from creating an image that was in direct contrast to the troubling image

\* For more on the 1936 Olympics, including the racial rhetoric of the Games, see Richard D. Mandell. The
278-292.
Johnson set forth years before. Joe Louis, Jesse Owens, and Jackie Robinson presented themselves to the American sporting public, white and black, in a much more positive light than the dark negative images of Black boxer Jack Johnson.

Robinson’s image was used by the sporting public to measure other Black athletes that followed; an image and standard set by white America about the type of Black athlete that was acceptable and could fit comfortably into the American ideology. Robinson’s on-the-field success, his strength to endure, and his ability to turn the other cheek, reflected upon the white sporting establishment and the changing American culture in a positive light. White Americans could see themselves as liberal minded, they could believe that sport presented equal opportunities for Blacks when even restaurants and schools did not admit them, and they could believe that Horatio Alger was alive and well in sport and America - nothing that hard work and perseverance could not handle.

Robinson fit into these categories that helped white America to feel better about the

---

inequities that remained firmly entrenched in other parts of society. This is not to say that Robinson did not suffer for his silence. Indeed man claim his early death was partly due to the harassment he endured during his first years in organized baseball. Robinson spoke up, but did so in his later years, both as a player and in retirement. Perhaps more so than any other Black athlete of his era, Robinson embodied the spirit and belief that he was doing something for the greater good of all Black athletes. Should one man be representative for a community of people; probably not. Clearly without having that one person to clear the path, the entrance of Blacks in professional sport could have remained blocked for many more years to come.11 In examining the image of Robinson and how he presented himself to white America, just as Joe Louis patterned himself opposite the image of Jack Johnson, Gerald Early recalls how Robinson learned from Louis's successful image.


Robinson was heavily influenced to behave in the way he did by Joe Louis, the major black athlete who preceded him as a dominant figure in American popular culture. Louis's devotion to American ideals, his patriotism, in short, was never questioned; Robinson may have felt that Louis's example was a proper one. Certainly, prominent blacks at the time were afraid to have their loyalty questioned for good reason: the only result from any criticism of the United States would be the wreckage of their own lives.\(^{12}\)

The compromises Robinson made to succeed in major league baseball certainly came at a dear price. Early's assessment of Robinson seems accurate, when he writes that

Robinson's life,

so rich with grandeur and a valiant heroism in the face of his compromises, seems so devoid of any humanity because he seemed so obsessed with overcoming the degradation of his blackness without understanding and further without being humbled by (not humiliated, which in truth he was) his acceptance of terms that were to be destructive for him. What killed Robinson ... was the acceptance of the athletic code of intense competitive jousting, the morality of acceptance and mobility in the meritocracy in which, because he had been a successful athlete, Robinson so fervently believed. The code he hoped so much would fulfill and prove his life ultimately denied him life.\(^{13}\)

This belief in meritocracy, that an individual's efforts and perseverance could lead to success, was held in high esteem by Robinson, and the white sport fans who witnessed his entrance in the democratic national pastime. Robinson's silence, when his voice could have made a profound statement, set the stage for a new generation of Black athletes that would follow him into professional athletics. Some of these athletes would mold their images in the ideals of Louis, Owens and Robinson, and few, very few, would begin to break free of the "model" black athlete in America.


\(^{13}\) Ibid., 213-214.
The image of Black athletes in the 1950s, and the gains they had seemingly made, along with the injustices they continued to face, laid the groundwork for the athletes that followed them in the next decade. What emerged out of the 1960s was a Black athlete who contrasted sharply with Robinson and the public had grudgingly come to accept. Sports were popularly believed to be apolitical and very separate from the race conflict that was tearing the country apart. And yet, within this sporting world emerged a number of Black athletes whose race consciousness had been raised, and unlike their predecessors, they acted upon this new consciousness. In this transition, they were willing to risk their careers, their personal safety, their financial security, and their image and status as athletes for a meaning that many could not comprehend, much less respect.

Why were these athletes willing to sacrifice so much at this time in the nation’s history? They lived in an age when there was much to protest and there was also much room to express one’s ideas. The setting of the larger civil rights movement allowed for

---

14 All-star teams dominated by Black players. Black players set records, amount of money they were making, the increasing total number in professional sports. In 1954, 5% of the NBA was black, by 1970, 56%. In 1957, NFL was 14% black, by 1971, 34%. (Hutchinson, *The Black Athletes’ Contribution*, 16); Between the years 1947-1964, 11 of the 18 National League MVP’s were black. Between the years 1954-1964, the National League batting leader was black 7 of the 11 years and the home run leader, 8 of the 11 years (Hutchinson, *The Black Athletes’ Contribution*, 152); In 1967, the first college All-American teams was named for the 1966-67 year and the starting five were black (Hutchinson, *The Black Athletes’ Contribution*, 163); During the 1967-68 season, the NBA had 71 blacks out of 139 players and in 1972, rival league ABA, 63 of 110 athletes were black (Hutchinson, 164). Bill Russell was paid $19,500 in December 1956 to become the highest paid rookie in NBA history (Hutchinson, 179); In track and field, of the 15 gold medals won by Americans at the 1968 Olympic Games, 10 were won by black athletes, with 8 world records being set (Hutchinson, *The Black Athletes’ Contribution*, 246); 1957-58, the first time that more than two “Negroes” were named to first team All-American team, 5 black players predicted to be All-Americans the next season; 1966-67, Look magazine named 6 of 10 All-Americans black and the nest year named 8 out of 10 spots black — “The domination of basketball by blacks was not accompanied by an fanfare on behalf of race relations.” (Grundman, “Image of Intercollegiate Sports,” 345).

the voices of rising black athletes to speak out. Of course, individuals’ decision to speak out put them at a great personal risk. Why would they choose to speak up? These athletes would not risk being treated poorly, they were already faced with daily discriminations from little playing time, playing with injuries, and being the target of opponents. These athletes did face the loss of great financial rewards, especially since most African Americans were impoverished and living at an income level much lower than most white Americans. These Black athletes, who were finally finding some economic upward mobility through sport, risked a great deal. Moreover, in a decade that saw several prominent men, including Malcolm X, Medgar Evers, and Martin Luther King, Jr., brutally assassinated, killed for speaking out for the rights of African Americans, it appeared that no one was safe from the violence that faced African Americans. And perhaps one of the more important and curious questions to ask is why have these Black athletes largely been ignored by Black Studies scholars when their actions certainly merit inclusion in the fight for civil rights and the protest movements of the 1960s?

The events and individuals selected in this study capture the tension between the long “accepted” (at least by mainstream white America) image of the Black athlete and the “new” Black athlete, who was often in direct contrast to the images of past Black athletes. While members of the Black community were attempting to explain the significance of Black athletes in American sport and their protests to other Blacks and to

---

white America, some members of the white community were left to explain the actions of Black athletes as either reasonable based on past injustices or as unacceptable behaviors in the sporting world, where success was not believed to be race-based. Within both communities, diverse within themselves, there were individuals and situations that many Americans could live with and that many others could not. By the early 1970s, the race issue in the sporting world, like the civil rights movement, had lost much of its momentum, and an attitude of grudging acceptance seemed to prevail, leaving the sporting nation with the "acceptable" belief that while African Americans were superior athletes and could help their team climb to the top of the standings, they were still inferior in every other way, politically, socially, economically, and legally.

Review of Literature

African American sport participation as a subject of scholarly inquiry has increased over the last thirty years. Themes emerge from the research including Negro League baseball, biographies of individual athletes whose accomplishments have been noteworthy, the integration of mainstream sport, and the discrimination and inequities faced by Black athletes. More recently, scholars have written on the sporting experiences of African American athletes since World War II. Several works specifically address the time period of this study and their investigations and inquiries add much to the understanding of the experiences of Black athletes during the 1960s.

The first generation of authors to look at Black sport participation appeared in the 1960s. Several books written during the decade chronicled the successes and accomplishments of African American athletes. Works such as Negro Firsts in Sport.
Famous Black Athletes, The Black Athlete: His Story in America, and Black College Sport are examples of books that herald the accomplishments of Black athletes, but fail to analyze the deeper meaning of the victories, the sport experiences, and the context of Black sport participation. Orr’s book is more critical than his contemporaries in the sense that he attempts to analyze the participation of Black athletes in sport, as opposed to mere encyclopedic descriptions and lists of achievements. These works targeted a popular audience and intended to merely expose the public to the talents and victories by African American athletes. In contrast to the more popular, but less critical works, a second generation of authors, predominantly scholars, began to produce articles and books that addressed the critical issues surrounding the participation of Black athletes in American sport.

David Wiggins has perhaps added the greatest number of, as well as some of the more critical, works regarding the history of African American participation in sport. Wiggins assessed the sub-discipline of Black sport history and indicated that with several major works in the field of African American sport history the field is voluminous and growing, but by no means complete. In his judgment, several themes have emerged from it: Black baseball, biographies of Black athletes, Black involvement in intercollegiate athletics, the role of the Black press in sport, the role of sport in the Black community.

---

and the portrayal of Black athletes from other disciplinary perspectives. Wiggins concludes that several themes in African American sport history that have yet to be developed. Some of these themes include the Black sport experience from emancipation to the beginning of the twentieth century, the African American female athlete, the urban Black sporting experience, and the Black athletes' revolt during the 1960s. Since Wiggins' assessment over ten years ago, there has been an increase in the number of articles and books written about the African American sport experience.

One of the dominant themes that emerge from the articles is the integration of white sporting institutions and events surrounding efforts to desegregate sport. Protests occurred at both the collegiate and professional levels in many sports, as well as specific case studies of certain players and institutions. Throughout this process of desegregation the increasing efforts and actions taken by individual Black athletes becomes apparent. Wiggins is at the forefront in the undertaking of such inquiries.

David Wiggins provides the most thoughtful overview of the protests and concerns of Black athletes. His investigation focuses on one critical year, 1968, in a turbulent decade wrought with changes for American society, the Black community, and the Black athlete. Noting that some 37 athletic protests, rebellions, and boycotts occurred in intercollegiate athletics in that year alone, Wiggins expands his scope to include professional athletics. He links the actions taken by Black athletes largely to events occurring in the civil rights movement. He also credits Muhammad Ali with having

---

made one of the more profound impacts upon other Black athletes. Coupled with an increasing Black student population on campus, and the beginnings of Black Studies Departments, Black athletes received support from Black non-athletes. It was also Black non-athletes that placed a great amount of pressure on athletes to speak out against their discrimination and unfair treatment. Wiggins cites several incidents that occurred during the long year: Ali’s challenge of the draft board, the NYAC boycott of over 100 Black athletes, the Olympic Project for Human Rights, racial problems within the St. Louis Cardinals football team within the Cleveland Browns.

In another investigation of college athletics. Wiggins examines Black athletes and racial turmoil on three predominantly White universities from 1968 to 1972 and connects the protests of Black athletes to the student movement of the late 1960s and their rebellion towards university administrations. Simultaneously, Black students were challenging university administrations to improve the educational conditions. Black athletes began to play a large role in the Black student protests on college campuses across the country. The treatment of white coaches and teammates and the unspoken rules that applied only to Black players were the impetus for several rebellions of Black athletes, who had the increasing support of other Black students, but at the same time were pressured by the students to be involved in protests. While analyzing the specific charges of the Black athletes, he looks at the reactions of white teammates, the coaches, the administration, as well as other Black athletes who chose not to be involved.20

20 Wiggins, ""The Future of College Athletics is at Stake,"" 304-332. For a collection of Wiggins' essays on African American sport participation, see Glory Bound: Black Athletes in a White America (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997).
Thomas Smith contributes to the research on the integration of professional football by exploring the pressures the federal government placed on George Marshall to desegregate his Washington Redskins, the only NFL team by the 1960s to lack a black player.\textsuperscript{21} Despite its losing record, the Redskins front office refused to believe that Black athletes could help improve the team. It wasn't until threats of public boycotts and what Smith refers to as pressure from the Kennedy Administration, that the Redskins finally signed a Black player. Ironically, the first Black player signed, was traded before he played in a game. Smith pays close attention to the policies of owner George Marshall and the efforts of members of Kennedy's Administration in the desegregation process, marking the first time the government had interfered in professional sport race relations.

Even after all professional teams had been fully integrated, Black athletes continued to face discrimination. Jack Davis analyzes the racial segregation of baseball's spring training sites in Florida and the efforts of Black players and the Black community to end the Jim Crow practices. Despite that the color line had been crossed over a decade earlier, owners failed to challenge the segregation that continued to exist in Florida. Though Black players played a role in the attempts to end these practices much of the protests came from the Black communities within the cities where spring training occurred. St. Petersburg, for example, known as the center of spring training, had been the site of several lunch counter sit-ins in 1960. Recognizing their power, the city's Black community decided to focus on the segregation practices of hotels, restaurants, ballparks, and landlords in the city. The NAACP actively worked to integrate facilities in

\textsuperscript{21} Smith, "Civil Rights on the Gridiron." 189-208.
the South, which would face a great loss of income if they lost Black business. Bill Veeck, owner of the Chicago White Sox, would become the first owner to take action to end segregation when in 1961 he canceled reservations for his players to stay at a segregated hotel. After Veeck's initiative, other owners followed. Yet, even after the integration of facilities, Southern practices seemed to prevail.22

Randy Roberts and James Olsen, in their analysis of sport after World War II address the contradictions between the conditions of Black people in the United States and the national ideology of opportunity in American sport. They use Joe Louis and Jesse Owens, the Harlem Globetrotters and their symbolism as clowns to examine the background of the Black athlete and American ideology and racism: showing how the fell into stereotypical performer roles. They also pay attention to the integration of professional and college athletics, and the pressures and various roles integrated Black athletes faced.23 In their chapter, "The Black Rebellion in American Sport," they address the role of Muhammad Ali in the 1960s Black athlete rebellion, the influences of Black Muslim religion, and the 1968 Olympic boycott. Roberts and Olson illustrated the important role Black athletes have played in the development of sport in the post-World War II period, as well as documenting the integration process and noting the impact integration of sport has had on the Black athlete.24

24 For another book that is a survey of one sport, boxing, but addresses specifically the Black boxing experience and several Black boxers, see Jeffrey Sammons. Beyond the Ring: The Role of Boxing in American Society (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1988). For an especially good chapter that
A more recent work on an individual Black athlete who altered American sporting landscape is Elliot Gorn’s collection of essays on Muhammad Ali. Several articles in Gorn’s book are worthy of mention and one is not coincidentally another product of David Wiggins. Wiggins’s chapter on Ali’s religious ties to the Nation of Islam details the young fighter’s conversion to the Islamic religion and the subsequent consequences to his boxing career in the press and the ring. Othello Harris and Jeffrey Sammons, in separate chapters, examine the impact of Ali on other Black athletes of the time period, as well as Ali as a symbol of protest during the 1960s.

Susan Cahn offers the best analysis of Black women’s sport during the years following World War II. Cahn notes that it was not until Althea Gibson and Wilma Rudolph in the late 1950s and 1960s that a Black female achieved social and cultural status because of their athletic success. Cahn links the athletic participation of Black women to the role of Black women in the community, as well as the stereotypes held by white society. Track and field was one sport where race became central to the cultural construction of female beauty and womanhood. The great success of Black females in track and field attested to the reality of African American cultural achievements, but also confirmed the oppressive stereotypes of Black women as animalistic, sexually deviant.

looks at the connections between the civil rights movement and the boxing world, see “Civil Rights to Rebellion to Reaction: The Era of Muhammad Ali.” 184-233.


and ugly.²⁷ Cahn, although her book focuses on the experiences of female athletes, has done a tremendous job in her research and analysis of the role of Black women in American sport, as well as making important connections between larger Black community and Black sport with Black female athletes.

A more recent work on women in sport is Mary Jo Festle’s Playing Nice: Politics and Apologies in Women’s Sports. Festle pays great attention to the struggle of African America tennis star Althea Gibson and the class issues of women in American sport. Similar to Cahn, Festle details the participation of Black women in her chapter, “Members Only: Class, Race, and Amateur Tennis for Women in the 1950s.” Her work aids in the analysis of women’s participation in sport, though the inclusion of race in the analysis is quite brief.²⁸

Recently, there have been more efforts to link the sporting practices of African Americans in Black History and Black Studies. This is among both sport historians and Black historians. I see this connection as crucial to not only the development of a deeper and more informative field of study, but also a greater understanding of the African American sporting experience. While several historians have made efforts to link sport incidents to the larger societal patterns, they are often simplified and minimized.

In assessing what direction the field of African American sport history should move itself, it seems imperative that one critical factor would be the linkage of Black History and Black Studies to the study of the African American sporting experience.

²⁷ Cahn. Coming on Strong. 160, 167, 171, 175.
Wiggins and Cahn have made tremendous contributions to a growing number of works that examine intersections of race, sport, and cultural issues. Still, several themes emerge in need of additional research and analysis, including the role of Black women in sport, the role of the Black press, an examination of primary documents and college archives as legitimate and rich sources, Black sport as separate from integrated sport, and lastly, African American sport before integration. This study will focus on several of these themes, including the role of Black women in sport, the use of the Black press as primary sources, and more significantly, the intersections of sport and the larger civil rights movement and the relationship between the political, social, cultural and economic influences upon the identity and expressions of Black American athletes.

Conclusion

A greater understanding needs to occur regarding the importance and impact of Black philosophies of consciousness in the sport setting. Rather than marginalizing sport from the "field of play" and dismissing it as an area not academic enough to merit attention, focus must be given to the political dialogue that occurs in the sport setting and the impact of such issues. In specific response to this call for a greater understanding of such topics, this study examines the participation of Black athletes in expressions of protests within a framework that explores their American identity in athletics. The framework of achieving American citizenship and identity, as prescribed by W.E.B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, Marcus Garvey, and those that followed will act as a foundation for a later analysis of the acquisition of American citizenship for African Americans in the latter half of the twentieth century; more specifically African American
athletes during the 1960s. Wiggins initially introduced DuBois and his framework of
duality and double-consciousness to the analysis of sport participation and while this
framework borrows modestly from that, there are distinct differences. This framework
will not address the dualistic tensions that did exist, but will analyze how these tensions
presented themselves in the growing discussion of Black self-definition and
consciousness. 29

Chapters two and three establish the framework to be utilized in our
understanding of American identity within the sporting arena, specifically that of
American citizenship and how Blacks in the United States were to achieve equality in a
country that had for centuries kept them shackled and enslaved with no rights or
privileges as Americans, much less human beings. The writings of Washington, DuBois
and Garvey begin the discussion of American citizenship for African Americans and
while each wrote specifically to their contemporaries, their writings and philosophies
have made significant contributions to our understanding of race relations of twentieth
century America. Additionally, each was a prophet in his own right in their analysis of
the status of African Americans in the United States and offer incredible insight into the
acquisition of American national identity sought by African Americans during the
nineteenth century and early twentieth century and tragically, still seeking such
citizenship and American national identity during the Civil Rights Movement of the
1950s and 1960s.

DuBois explained the concept of double-consciousness as the desire to be an American citizen, but also the conflict between becoming American and assimilating and sacrificing your African heritage and Black culture identity to achieve this American status. Similarly, the twentieth century Black athlete had to sacrifice his Black identity, not challenge any inequities, mistreatments, and support the sporting caste system to gain a spot on the roster and to be able to play. These sacrifices do not guarantee acceptance, but one is more likely to gain entrance into the white sporting arena. Participation in sport encourages the erasure of identity, of culture, and individualism. It also earns them their "status" as professional athletes, but at what costs? Perhaps their own identity or more likely the freedom to express that identity. After the 1968 Olympic protest Tommie Smith made a comment that reporters would call him a Negro, but not a Black American. His actions were measured not as any expression of himself, but as against the system that had "made him" what he was - successful and able to participate as an American in the Olympic Games. The press, and most Americans, was uninterested in recognizing or legitimizing Smith's identity. The concept that he could not be both Black and American and that the expression or claim that one excludes the other is a clear example of the duality in sport.

The liberation from DuBois' duality is examined by Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton some sixty years later in their book, Black Power: The Politics of Liberation. Other scholars of the twentieth century will be utilized to emphasize and illuminate the tensions that existed as well as the rise in Black consciousness as a logical
extension of dualistic tensions. Additionally, this discourse will conclude with the stage of American sport as the setting for the remainder of the study. These authors express themselves along a continuum which illuminate our understanding of the transition from being a Negro to becoming Black within the African American experience in social, political, economic, and civil rights within the American society in the twentieth century.

The individual act of self-definition as liberation, as a personal act of freedom, is crucial to development of own self-image as a Black man, race pride, and race consciousness. Many of the Black athletes, though they may have come into sport before the writing of the book or may have never read it, their actions were simply statements of self-redefinition, though they were often misinterpreted as ungrateful athletes, malcontents, and often militant. Still, few were viewed in the same light as other Black leaders or students involved in the movement. During this time period, there was a transition, or rather a means of solution, from DuBois and the desire to be accepted with the inherent conflicts, to Carmichael and Hamilton, who emphasized the need to and the power of redefinition of oneself the ways in which one desires to be seen and to stand for. DuBois and Carmichael and Hamilton establish the framework - in essence, the actions and expressions of Black athletes in the 1960s were a natural progression in the acquisition of liberation, of becoming both American and Black, of taking control of one's image and role.

The remaining chapters explore in great depth specific events and individuals that illustrate the expressed changes in race consciousness by Black athletes during the 1960s. In their vocal and active efforts to bring attention to the continued inequality and
discrimination they confronted, they consciously and unconsciously were part of a
discourse about the direction of the civil rights movement. The actions of Black athletes,
the vocabulary they presented and their growing awareness of their position within the
sporting world combined to articulate a new vision of liberation - one which placed the
Black athlete's ability to define themselves at the center of this process.
CHAPTER 2

A DIALOGUE OF BLACK LIBERATION

Many whites could look at the social position of blacks and feel that color formed an easy and reliable gauge for determining to what extent one was or was not American. Perhaps that is why one of the first epithets that many European immigrants learned when they first got off the boat was the term “nigger” – it made them feel instantly American. But this is tricky magic. Despite his racial difference and social status, something indisputably American about Negroes not only raised doubts about the white man’s value system but aroused the troubling suspicion that whatever else the true American is, he is also somehow black.¹

During the years of America’s Reconstruction, several legislative actions were enacted which profoundly impacted on the status of Blacks in the South. In the years following the Civil War, several laws were passed that increased the political power of Blacks, and extended rights of American citizenship. The 14th Amendment, ratified in 1868, forbid states to abridge the rights of any citizen and the 15th Amendment, enacted in 1870, gave African-Americans the right to vote. Blacks found seats on both state and national legislative branches and experienced a new participation in the political system.
of the nation. In response to this new participation, Southern whites and the government acted to halt any further progress and to return the social, political, and economic climate to pre-Civil War conditions.2

The removal of soldiers from the South in 1879, a result of the Compromise of 1877 and part of President Rutherford B. Hayes’ “let-alone” Southern strategy, had a significant impact on the safety of African-Americans. Though the Great Migration did not reach its peak for another thirty years, the abandonment of the government’s soldiers prompted many Blacks to leave the South for fear of their lives. The target of hate and violence, and virtually unprotected without the recourse of a judicial system, put African-Americans in a most vulnerable position and many responded by leaving their homes for the perceived safety and optimistic hope of unknown cities.3

The Southern economy experienced tremendous changes following Emancipation. With the end of slavery came the end of free labor for Southern elite whites. Newly freed slaves, for over two centuries used, exploited, and abused as labor, were now able to receive some compensation for work performed. Because of their perceived inferior status, it was easy for employers to continue to exploit Black labor for low wages. With

---

3 For a collection of essays on Black migration, see Harrison, ed., Black Exodus.

28
the increase in the number of cotton mills, labor was even cheaper. There were now too many people and too few jobs. Slavery had created Black monopolies in many trades and these monopolies were not allowed to continue, with many whites replacing Black workers. In many cases, Blacks were banned from certain crafts even though they were the most skilled workers, and by 1890, Black monopolies in most crafts had disappeared. By 1895, many Southern states had completely disenfranchised blacks through constitutional amendments and legislative statutes.

In the years following the 1896 Supreme Court ruling on Plessy versus Ferguson that legalized and legitimized the Jim Crow caste system of "separate, but equal," the acquisition of American identity and citizenship by African Americans became a topic that was under great debate within the African American community. The ruling legalized the already inferior social position of Blacks, affected their ability to work within the economic system of the South, and acted to restrict their power in the political spectrum in which they had previously gained some momentum. In a sense, the Pless versus Ferguson ruling halted what little progress that freed African Americans had made towards full citizenship in America following the Emancipation Proclamation.

Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois emerged as the two leading intellectual forces among African Americans at the turn of the twentieth century. In the first few years of the new century, each authored a book that emphasized his philosoph on how Africans in America could achieve American citizenship. Washington's *Up From Slavery* was a popular autobiographical account of his life, while DuBois'. *The* 

---

4 Carole Marks. "The Social and Economic Life of Southern Blacks During the Migration." in Harrison. 29
Souls of Black Folk, was a collection of essays on the “Negro condition.” The great leaders, who stood in dramatic contrast to each other in many fundamental ways, both addressed “the problems of adjustment such Negroes faced as they attempted to live as normal, intelligent, well-educated Americans.” John Hope Franklin reflected that both leaders reveal “the deep apprehensions and the troubling dilemmas that virtually every sensitive Negro American has experienced,” and in their own but different ways sought “to overcome the crippling obstacles that every Negro in the United States has confronted.”

In the years following Washington’s 1915 death, Marcus Garvey assumed a leadership position in the African American community advocating a Back to Africa movement. These three intellectuals espoused philosophies of race which profoundly influenced their respective communities, and were part of a dialogue of ideas and beliefs expressed by African American forefathers decades and centuries before, such as Frederick Douglass and Martin Delany. The respective legacies of DuBois and double-consciousness, Washington and integration, and Garvey and Black nationalism shaped the philosophies of Black intellectuals and leaders in the decades that followed, including the Civil Rights Movement. This chapter utilizes the writings and philosophies of W.E.B.

ed., Black Exodus, 41.


The theme of gaining entrance into American citizenship dominated the writings of both W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington. Marcus Garvey focused less on assimilating into white American society and directed his efforts into creating an independent Black community. While he echoed sentiments of Washington's economic self-sufficiency, Garvey was explicit in his desire to remain separate from white America.

The majority of white Americans believed race to be the most determining variable in the achievement of full citizenship. Many Southern politicians, as well as American citizens in general, believed that the end of slavery had little to do with citizen rights, in part because slaves had always been counted as 3/5ths and would remain second class citizens. These prescribed race privileges prompted each scholar to ask important questions. How do you become an American citizen? What should African Americans expect to happen as far as reparations? The meaning of citizenship, as defined by DuBois and Washington, can be interpreted from their writings in their respective works. Both Washington and DuBois authored classic works; Washington's autobiography, *Up From Slavery* and DuBois's collection of essays, *The Souls of Black Folk*. For the purposes of this chapter, these two books will provide the foundation for the exploration of their philosophies and ideas. Nationality, or being able to identify as an American and enjoy the rights and privileges

Robison Delany, 1812-1885 (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1971); Victor Ullman. *Martin R. Delany: The*
that came with such an identification, equaled first class citizenship. The creation of an American and African American identity was a critical issue for DuBois, Garvey, and Washington.⁸

Each leader viewed the attainment of entrance into American citizenship from a different perspective. DuBois thought some attributes were necessary for citizenship, such as the right to vote, education, and the development of his race. Washington believed that the attainment of citizenship should not have anything to do with race, but be based on individual merit and standing as an individual, regardless of skin color. Individualism, as prescribed by Washington, was the foundation for citizenship, with such attributes as character, thriftiness, moral standards, and deferred gratification helping to build the foundation. Washington’s belief in meritocracy went so far as to ignore past injustices, as well as current inequities that clearly indicated such a principle could not be effective. Washington wanted to contribute necessary skills and needs to the nation in order to gain entrance and believed that if an individual, regardless of his race, worked hard and achieved good standing within his community, he was entitled to a piece of the “American pie.” DuBois saw the entrance of Africans into American citizenship as an

---

achievement that would occur as the entrance of an aggregation that had developed itself into its own nation prepared to participate fully in another that they had helped to create and develop.

**Booker T. Washington**

Booker T. Washington was born in a slave cabin in 1856 and his birth into this social caste system made his rise to leadership and power even more remarkable. Washington was the most influential spokesman for Black Americans from his famous Atlanta Compromise speech in 1895 until his death in 1915. Washington profoundly influenced Black America for over 20 years and "like a reigning monarchy, he issued an annual message "To My People."

Washington had an early fascination with learning and his pursuit of an education was fundamental to his later philosophies on the conditions of Negroes in American society. From his youth and his own education at Hampton Institute, Washington was instilled with work habits that honored "dedicated service and attitudes of good will and cooperation toward his white neighbors."

Washington's methods of achieving equality, were in fact, to denounce social equality as he did at the Cotton States Exposition in Atlanta 1895, the site of his Atlanta

---


Compromise Speech. He "urged Negroes to make friends with the whites and to pursue careers in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the professions." He seemed to forgive or chose to overlook the wrong doings of slave owners and other whites, not only by fitting into their standards and seeking their approval and acceptance, but by the very policies and rights he sought.

With God's help, I believe that I have completely rid myself of any ill feeling toward the Southern white man for any wrong that he may have inflicted upon my race. I am made to feel just as happy now when I am rendering service to Southern white men as when the service is rendered to a member of my own race. I pity from the bottom of my heart an individual who is so unfortunate as to get into the habit of holding race prejudice.  

Although Black scholars have generally been critical of Washington, he was a popular spokesman for Negroes and enjoyed a power in "determining the future course of Negroes," and was seen as an "arbiter in Negro-white relations." Historian Lerone Bennett captured Washington's leadership position when he noted that he was "the court of last appeal on black political appointments in America and white political appointments in the South." Without his approval, no black institutions received substantial amounts of money and he "made and broke men and institutions with a word or a nod of his head and his silence, in the face of a request for 'information' could ruin a career."  

11 Washington, Up from Slavery, 117.
12 Franklin, "Introduction," Up From Slavery, x-xi; Bennett, Before the Mayflower, 327.
Washington sought prescribed methods to achieve citizenship, and though the differences with the beliefs and methods espoused by DuBois, he was sincere in his efforts and desire to achieve greater status in America. In contrast to DuBois, Washington believed in non-racial standards for the achievement of American citizenship and did not believe in racial preferences for Blacks or whites. He saw the ownership of property and thriftiness as two key components in attaining acceptance as an equal citizen. A dominant theme that reverberates throughout his writings is the Great Human Law, that merit, not skin color, is what should be recognized and rewarded. The Great Human Law stated that "No man who continues to add something to the material, intellectual, and moral well-being of the place in which he lives is long left without proper reward." Washington sincerely believed that "the whole future of my race hinges on the question as to whether or not it can make itself of such indispensable value that the people in the town and the state where we reside will feel that our presence is necessary to the happiness and well-being of the community." 13

Washington’s solution was to become indispensable and to fit into the society as society demanded, not as he demanded. If you take care of yourself within set parameters, you will find success within those parameters. He believed that the Great Human Law would eventually rule, this rags to riches, Horatio Alger type of ascension within America, that success and fortune could happen to anyone willing to work for it. Washington had an immense amount of faith in the Great Human Law and the optimism that it offered to him and other members of his race. He felt that "mere connection with

what is regarded as an inferior race will not finally hold an individual back if he possesses in intrinsic, individual merit.” Washington even went so far as to say that African Americans “should get much consolation out of the great human law, which is universal and eternal, that merit, no matter under what skin found, is in the long run, recognized and rewarded.” He duly notes that he wishes to “not to call attention to myself as an individual, but to the race to which I am proud to belong.”

Washington reinforces his basic philosophy of self-help and racial solidarity. He saw the Great Human Law as a means to enter into a society that worked against his entrance. To achieve a position within the community, he advocated learning skills and crafts that would make the individual indispensable to his community. How could a community turn away a laborer whose skill was so vitally necessary to the workings of the community? This sort of assimilation into the white society was one method Washington believed to be effective in succeeding in American society.

Washington sought not the vote, nor the right to an education, but the respect of his fellow American, the white man, and his actions and efforts were geared towards gaining the acceptance and approval. It was this acceptance that he presumed crucial to the entrance of members of his race into the American society - finding out what white society needed and molding oneself to these ideals, ideals that he preached would lead African Americans to this prized citizenship. Washington concluded that if one made himself indispensable to his community, in terms of developing his worth as a contributing member of society, both economically and materially, then the individual

\[14\] Ibid., 50.
could and would enjoy all the rights and privileges of any American citizen. He formulated his educational program as a vocational training of the necessary skills that would meet the needs of the white community. He saw skin color not as criteria for status or lack thereof, but as a starting point which allowed the gains made by African Americans to appear even more a result of hard work, effort and perseverance. "M experience is that there is something in human nature which always makes an individual recognize and reward merit, no matter under what colour skin merit is found. I have found, too, that it is the visible, the tangible, that goes a long ways in softening prejudices."\(^{15}\) Washington's theme of meritocracy resonates throughout his writings and underlies much of his philosophies concerning the attainment of citizenship rights for African Americans.

Washington preached the ownership of property to be important, as well as the possession of several moral characteristics, almost at the expense of the right to vote. "I believe it is the duty of the Negro - as the greater part of the race is already doing - to deport himself modestly in regard to political claims, depending upon the slow but sure influences that proceed from the possession of property, intelligence, and high character for the full recognition of his political rights." Washington was willing to compromise certain "rights" for what he conceived as more attainable and useful "privileges," such as his visits to the White House as special guest of President Theodore Roosevelt. Such an invitation was not only a privilege, but an expression of "public patronage" by Roosevelt. Selected by the President as an ambassador and spokesman for "an overshadowed nation"

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 11.
and "looked upon as the chiefest of ten million," Washington's general prominence and world wide esteem were main reasons for such an honor. His "Tuskegee Machine" had the support of Roosevelt and leading white philanthropists of the times, and he commanded great financial resources. Andrew Carnegie gave Washington $600,000 in U.S. Steel bonds. Ironically, the man "who advised Black America to forget about politics wielded more political power than any other Black American."  

Washington's autobiography, *Up From Slavery*, was published in 1901. It was certainly his most successful book and his rags to riches life story appealed to millions of readers. Many found in this work assurances that the "Negro would not make a serious bid for political and social equality." This is reiterated when he wrote, "I believe it is the duty of the Negro to deport himself modestly in regard to political claims, depending on the slow but sure influences that proceed from the possession of property, intelligence, and high character for the full recognition of his political rights."  

Historian Lerone Bennett assessed Washington's program as one "of conciliation and racial submission," as he was unwilling to attack Jim Crow directly and urged blacks to subordinate their political, civil and social strivings to economic advancement. "The implication of his vision was a continued acceptance of segregation and a concentration on a program of industrial education." While he conceded that the country he wanted to

---

17  *Three Negro Classics*, xviii.  
18  Franklin, "Introduction," *Up from Slavery*, xviii.  
19  Bennett, *Before the Mayflower*, 328.
be a part of denied him of an ancestry and therefore a foot in the door. Washington sensed
that he had been given a rare opportunity, specifically naming himself, creating his own
history, and being given a "clean slate" to shape his own destiny.

I think there are not many men in our countr who have had the privilege of
naming themselves in the way that I have. More than once I have tried to picture
myself in the position of a boy or man with an honoured and distinguished
ancestry which I could trace back through a period of hundreds of years, and who
had not only inherited a name, but a fortune and a proud family homestead; and
yet I have sometimes had the feeling that if I had inherited these, and had been a
member of a more popular race, I should have been inclined to yield to the
temptation of depending on my ancestry and m colour to do that for me which I
should do for myself.\textsuperscript{20}

Washington’s personal experience, one that saw him improve his life conditions, were
used as a standards for others to aspire. If he could overcome the struggles of his
ancestry, his race could overcome the same burdens with enough effort and perseverance.

Washington adhered to the principle that labor, the use of one’s own body and
effort, could be an effective means to change one’s status and thus, achieve such entrance
into "America." He preached that one’s merit and hard work could be the determining
factor in becoming a citizen. Being such a strong advocate of labor, he warned of
becoming too lazy or hardened by the slavery experience, that no matter how far down the
scales, the rise to the top is that much better. In some respects, Washington was so
optimistic, he was almost ignorant of his compromising. He feared that “in the great leap
from slavery to freedom,” African Americans would overlook that they would most likely
labor in a service job, and that as a community they needed to keep in mind that the
could “prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labour and put

brains and skill into the common occupations of life; shall prosper in proportion as we learn to draw the line between the superficial and the substantial, the ornamental gewgaws of life and the useful.” Washington tried to convey the idea that there was “as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem. It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top. Nor should we permit our grievances to overshadow our opportunities.” Again, Washington clearly reminded his readers that despite the past struggles and hardships they have been faced with, through enough effort, hard work, perseverance and even a little sacrificing, they clearly could gain access to a better life.

Washington believed that many African Americans in the post slavery period depended on the government for their entrance into society. He claimed that this group looked to the government to solve their problems and to ease their troubles with some sort of judicial ruling or legislature that would give them an advantage based on their race and their previous status as slaves. The end of slavery created a new relationship between the government and the new citizens. He lamented that the newly freed Africans “looked to the Federal Government for everything, very much as a child looks to its mother” and criticized the government for failing “to make some provision for the general education of our people” so that these new citizens “would be better prepared for the duties of citizenship.” Noting that the “Nation had been enriched for more than two centuries by the labour of the Negro,” Washington was still critical of his own community for being so

---

21 Ibid., 147.
dependent on the government and believed that they had “little ambition to create a position for themselves, but wanted the Federal officials to create one for them.”

While Washington did not see the government as the appropriate means to achieve citizenship, he envisioned the individual as responsible to himself and his community to become an integral member of that society through his employment, whether it was in a job that required skilled training or simply a job that made the employee self-sufficient. Too often, he believed, one would get an education and feel too proud and above menial tasks. He saw this dislike for labor to be problematic in that it encouraged a lack of respect for hard work. “The idea, however, was too prevalent that, as soon as one secured a little education, in some explainable way he would be free from most of the hardships of the world, and, at any rate, could live without manual labor.”

While Washington admitted that slavery left African Americans ill-prepared to take care of themselves and contributed to their great amount of dependence on the government, this contradicted his thinking about being indispensable. Does being indispensable as a slave mean that you will be indispensable as a free man? Recognizing that this labor class had worked for someone else’s advantage for so long, he sought to encourage labor for the benefit of oneself and role in the community.

Washington’s own industrial education system was designed to develop a population of African Americans that would be contributing members of a community and that would reward and value labor. There were three main factors of his industrial teaching. The first was that “the student shall be so educated that he shall be enabled to

---

22 Ibid., 73. 76.
meet conditions” and be able to “do the thing which the world wants done.” Second, “every student who graduates from the school shall have enough skill, coupled with intelligence and moral character, to enable him to make a living for himself and others.” Finally, he subscribed to the view that every graduate would leave with the belief and knowledge that “labour is dignified and beautiful - to make each one love labour instead of trying to escape it.” Washington truly believed in the development of each individual as a skilled worker who had moral character, intelligence, and valued labor as a glorious occupation. It is this thinking, that race is not a determining factor in Washington’s mind, that really represents his deep belief in the American dream.

Washington viewed his sacrifice as a means to achieve greater things, and despite criticisms of his ideological positions, he seemed to be sincere in his efforts to develop his own race. Unfortunately, it seems as if he set standards for his race lower than many other great leaders, such as DuBois, advocating industrial labor and the indispensability of Black labor as a means to remain in good standing with the Southern whites.

Washington urged Blacks to use their skill, intelligence and character to become “of such undeniable value to the community in which he lived that the community could not dispense with his presence.” He preached that the “individual who learned to do something better than anybody else - learned to do a common thing in an uncommon manner - had solved his problem, regardless of the colour of his skin,” and that their reward for such hard work would be the color-blind respect of these white communities.  

21 Ibid., 71.  
24 Ibid., 200.  
25 Ibid., 137.
Washington's advocacy of hard work and effort in part to gain this entrance and also to perhaps neutralize his own race are significant because it allowed him to overlook tensions between the races and to see any tensions as a result of other means of attempting to achieve this citizenship, such as forcing the issue or focusing on race as the central issue. Any successes achieved, Washington was quick to attribute much of the progress to the aid and generosity of white Americans. "While we take pride in what we exhibit as a result of our independent efforts, we do not for a moment forget that our part in this exhibition would fall far short of your expectations but for the constant help that has come to our educational life, not only from the Southern states, but especially from Northern philanthropists, who have made their gifts a constant stream of blessing and encouragement." Washington recognized the protest element advocated by others such as DuBois, but dismissed such methods as unwise and ineffective, especially in securing the help of his white donors. "The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremist folly, and that progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing." He returns to his belief that race is not and should not be a factor in the determination of one's position or role in the society. And he readily concedes, without any shame or remorse, that his position forces him to cater to the needs and beliefs of the white man in order to gain acceptance, or some sort of limited entrance.

26 ibid., 149.
into their society. "The Negro is a much stronger and wiser man than he was thirty-five years ago, and he is fast learning the lesson that he cannot afford to act in a manner that will alienate his Southern white neighbors from him." 27

The move away from Washington

During the same era that Washington rose to power within American race politics, there was a growing anti-Washington spirit. William Trotter, a Harvard graduate and the founder of an anti-Washington newspaper, The Guardian, called for "total opposition to Washington and his program of economic equality." 28 If Booker T. Washington is thought of as the father of Black conservatism, W.E.B. DuBois could very well be seen as a radical opponent to Washington's philosophies. His writings on the Negro condition in The Souls of Black Folk continued the dialogue of race in America. Even if the two schools of thoughts shared the same goal of African American citizenship in the United States, their methods, philosophies and supporters polarized the two sides.

Abraham Chapman considered DuBois "the intellectual father of modern Negro scholarship, modern Negro militancy and self-consciousness, and modern Negro cultural development." 29 DuBois advocated full political, social, cultural, and economic equalit for African Americans. Believing that Washington's strategies served to perpetuate oppression for African Americans, DuBois utilized alternative methods to improve the position of African Americans. He conducted empirical research into the condition of American Blacks and felt that his findings could be used to enact necessary changes. He

27 Ibid., 74-75.
soon realized that the changes he sought would only come with agitation and protest.

DuBois founded the Niagara Movement in 1905, to fight racial discrimination and segregation, but also largely as a direct attack on Washington's platform. The Niagara Movement was the forerunner of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, a group DuBois established in 1909. DuBois served as editor of the NAACP's magazine, *The Crisis*. In such a position, he had unequaled influence with middle class Blacks from 1910 to his resignation in 1934. One reason he resigned was his belief that the organization was helping the black bourgeoisie, but not the black masses. His failure to address the Black masses had actually been a criticism of DuBois in his early years at the helm of the organization. Instead, DuBois advocated a Negro renaissance, a cultural revolution mentored by Alain Locke that occurred in Harlem in the 1920s. Both Locke and DuBois saw race pride and consciousness as positive forces that would highlight contributions and values of Blacks in America, with Locke believing that Black Americans must be a "collaborator and a participant in American civilization."
DuBois often addressed the differences between himself and Washington, noting that their differences "deserve" "more careful statement than it has had hitherto, both as to matters and the motives involved." He acknowledged "the ideological controversy" and "believed in the higher education of a Talented Tenth" who would "guide the American Negro into a higher civilization" through their knowledge of modern culture. Without such leadership, DuBois felt African Americans "would have to accept white leadership, and that such leadership could not always be trusted to guide this group into self-realization and to its highest cultural possibilities." DuBois countered that Washington "believed that the Negro as an efficient worker could gain wealth and that eventually through his ownership of capital he would be able to achieve a recognized place in American culture and could educate his children as he might wish and develop his possibilities." As such, Washington's efforts were focused on the "training in the skilled trades and encouragement in industry and common labor." The Talented Tenth was DuBois' program to improve the status of Black Americans with the aid of intellectual elite, envisioned a class of Black American university graduates who would direct the majority of the poor and distressed to new heights.

James Weldon Johnson, first executive secretary of the NAACP, wrote about the expanding division between literate Black Americans as a result of the Washington-DuBois conflict and emphasized that for someone unfamiliar with this phase of "Negro life" in the nearly fifteen years after 1903 "cannot imagine the bitterness of the antagonism between the two wings." He noted the "incessant attacks and counter

---

attacks" between the two parties, with Washington accusing DuBois and his group of being "visionaries, doctrinaries, and incendiaries," and DuBois countering that Washington and his supporters with "minifying political and civil rights, with encouraging opposition to higher training and higher opportunities for Negro youth, with giving sanction to certain prejudiced practices and attitudes toward the Negro, thus yielding up in fundamental principles more than could be balanced by any immediate gains." Clearly, the two men and their philosophies regarding the national identity and American citizenship of Black Americans were not in agreement.

Schooled at Harvard, DuBois and his educational training was much different from Washington's and the two had varying approaches to improving the condition of their race in America. DuBois pressed for "legal and political recognition of the rights of Negroes" and believed that "the most important contribution he could make toward the improvement of the Negro's position in the United States was to undertake a series of studies of the Negro. - 'primarily scientific - a careful search for Truth conducted as thoroughly, broadly, and honestly as the material resources and mental equipment will allow.'"\footnote{Franklin. "Introduction." Up from Slavery, xiii.}

A deeper analysis of DuBois' classic essays are critical to a comprehensive understanding of his ideologies concerning black liberation in the early twentieth century. DuBois and his passion, the study of race and the development of his race, led to a greater understanding of the issues that divided our country. For DuBois, the study of race and

\footnote{NH: Ayer Co., 1969), 764.}

\footnote{James Weldon Johnson cited in Bennett. Before the Mayflower, 332.}

\footnote{Franklin. "Introduction." Up from Slavery, xiii.}
efforts made to gain a better understanding of it were his solution to the racial divide.

The theme of race permeates his works and he viewed its study as a substantive area. For DuBois it was a puzzling dilemma - what am I after all

Then it dawned on me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil. I had thereafter no desire to tear down that veil, to creep through; I held all beyond it in common contempt, and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows...Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house

---

DuBois became aware of the differences in race at an early age and began to experience this survival in America from within what he terms, the veil, this separation between the two races. Race and the differences between the races prompt him to painfully ask, "How does it feel to be a problem?" in reference to the tensions and struggles faced by Black Americans within a white society.

W.E.B. DuBois was most prophetic when he wrote in his introduction, "Herein lie buries many things which if read with patience may show the strange meaning of being black here at the dawning of the Twentieth Century. This meaning is not without interest to you, Gentle Reader: for the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line." This statement, written in 1903, predicted the state of affairs that has gone through periods of great change and tremendous strife: that the issues that would tear this nation apart would be based on skin color. DuBois' *The Souls of Black Folk* is considered to be his most important work and for young black intellectuals, the collection of essays filled a void that Washington's program held. John Hope Franklin saw the book as "a deeply moving statement on the consciousness of color, a searching criticism of the philosophy of Washington, a quite scholarly examination of certain phases of the history of the Negro, and an evaluation of some of the mainsprings of the culture of the Negro American."
The theme of double consciousness and duality resonate throughout DuBois' collection of essays. With the white race defining and setting the ideal standards, as well as the rules for membership and citizenship in the country, African Americans are forced to fit these defined roles, and thus faced with a tension that pulls on their desire to become American without losing their African heritage.

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—a Negro: two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings: two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife: this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. This, then, is the end of his striving: to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to husband an use his best powers and his latent genius.

The theme of the double consciousness of the African American and the mask worn for survival in the nation permeate throughout his writings and help to explain his belief that African Americans were in constant struggle to achieve some sense of identity in this

---


country at the expense of some aspect of their culture. This tension between being both African and American lay at the very heart of DuBois' efforts and desires to have his race attain citizenship and entrance in American society and culture. Moreover, he persisted that for a true democracy to exist, both races had to contribute to each other in order to fulfill what each race lacked. The attainment of such ideals could not be done by sacrificing the true spirit and soul of the race.

This waste of double aims, this seeking to satisfy two unreconciled ideals, has wrought sad havoc with the courage and faith and deeds of ten thousand thousand people. - has sent them often wooing false gods and invoking false means of salvation, and at times has even seemed about to make them ashamed of themselves.  

DuBois saw a great need for a heightened sense of race consciousness, not in contempt for other races, but as a methods to a truly democratic society. At the same time, he recognized that such heightened consciousness was incongruent with becoming more acceptable within white American society. He saw that the younger generation of African Americans seeking success in American society were forced to "flatter and be pleasant, endure petty insults with a smile, shut his eyes to wrong." Such a sacrifice in identity, DuBois felt, could lead Blacks to economic prosperity, but at a painful price in cultural and racial identity. "His real thoughts, his real aspirations, must be guarded in whispers; he must not criticise, he must not complain. Patience, humility, and adroitness must, in these growing black youth, replace impulse, manliness, and courage." Having to be

---

41 Ibid., 216.
untrue to yourself and your race were an unacceptable price to pay for limited success and his opposition to such conciliatory behavior was adamant when he wrote, "The price of culture is a Lie."^{42}

DuBois certainly did not see assimilation as the goal, but rather the development of the African race and the creation and development of an African American heritage as his priority. He presumed that to adopt the standards, ideals, and values of the dominant white culture would not lead one into the American citizenship that the African desired, but would only result in a mass of second-class citizens striving for full equality and justice. Unlike Washington, DuBois ushered in a century that promoted cultural nationalism and he was a pioneer of the concept of Pan-Africanism. This international theme of brotherhood between the darker race would be the rallying cry for DuBois' contemporary, Marcus Garvey.

DuBois saw the African American race as starting out near the bottom in terms of economic and social status, and believed this low rung on the economic ladder meant a long road to travel and in some sense, this position laid the groundwork for the hardships that continue to exist. "A people thus handicapped ought not to be asked to race with the world, but rather allowed to give all its time and thought to its own social problems."^{43} He simply asked "How can I be expected to race with someone who is already at the finish line?" "To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships."^{44} DuBois is asking that instead of requiring his race to keep

^{42} Ibid., 348.
^{43} Ibid., 218.
^{44} Ibid., 218.
up with the standards of a white nation, why not allow his people to develop as a race and to make their own unique contributions to this great nation that they have helped build. He was a great supporter of Black capitalism and saw the need to build up Black institutions, with the energy of his race turned inward, so as to not support and perpetuate the capitalistic enterprises of the white nation because such support would hurt the development of the Black community. DuBois did not seek the Jim Crow segregation caste system, but a separation of the two races until they could join together and contribute to each other as partners in the civilization. He saw America as not a democracy for Black people, in large part due to the veil, and flatly rejected the meritocracy principle. Moreover, he knew that America could never be a democracy until racism was eliminated and was not willing to sacrifice equality for justice. DuBois thought the problem could be solved by the elevation of the race, by his integration into citizenship, believing the destinies of two races lay together, stating that we rise as you rise and fall as you fall. His solutions were laid in the belief that the development of his race would lead to greater freedoms, in the political, social, and economic realms.

DuBois noted that his ancestors had been living on American soil long before an members of the white race. He wrote, “Your country? How came it yours? Before the Pilgrims landed we were here.” DuBois established his own claim to the land that his forefathers help to build and develop into the country that it had become at the time of his writing. Unlike Washington, DuBois neither thanks nor recognizes white philanthropists as the cause for Black success, but instead comments on how fully his

race had been allowed to participate in this building of the country, including the wars, the raising of children, the mixing of cultures. "Actively we have woven ourselves with the very warp and woof of this nation. - we fought their battles, shared their sorrow. mingled our blood with theirs, and generation after generation have pleaded with a headstrong, careless people to despise not Justice, Mercy, and Truth. lest the nation be smitten with a curse. Our song, our toil, our cheer, and warning have been given to this nation in blood-brotherhood. Are not these gifts worth the giving? Is not this work and striving? Would America have been America without her Negro people?"

DuBois alleged that the culture of Africans was fully integrated into the American culture, but was not recognized as originating from Africa. nor was any credit or welcoming into the nation offered when it came time to recognize the growth of the nation and who was participating as full American citizens. The experience of slaver would forever leave African Americans in a position of not only overcoming the image of being an inferior race, but having to begin again as a race entering the nation as free men. At the ending of the Civil War and with emancipation, free slaves were now "citizens" of an America that did not welcome them as such. With the emancipation of slaves in America, the American government created a new society for African Americans: "a government of millions of men, - and not ordinary men wither, but black men emasculated by a peculiarly complete system of slavery, centuries old; and now, suddenly, violently, they come into a new birthright, at a time of war and passion, in the

46 Ibid., 386-387.
One means of controlling these new "citizens," while maintaining a guise of reparations or new rights, was the vote. After all they had suffered as slaves, many white Americans felt that some type of settlement needed to be made, both to appease their own problems with the past and to maintain some sense of control over those they had once owned. The ending of slavery brought new possibilities of new freedoms and rights and privileges, while it raised some fears in whites that these new opportunities could possible result in the sharing of some of their "wealth." Reparations, such as forty acres and a mule, were slow in coming to fruition for most African Americans. With ownership of property being one means of attaining citizenship status in the nation, the concept of "giving" former slaves land was a low priority and impossible to enforce. Many former slaves were kept on their masters' property because there was no land available and they were needed as labor and could be easily exploited in a region that had done so for over two centuries.

DuBois deeply understood white resistance to the entrance of African Americans into full citizenship or any type of citizenship that offered the freed slaves any type or means of power, opportunity, or possible advantage in the nation that had prospered in the caste system. He noted the resistance of the Southern legislature to allow African Americans the right to vote and their perspective that never could "free Negro labor" be possible "without a system of restrictions that took all its freedom away; there was scarcely a white man in the South who did not honestly regard emancipation as a crime, and its practical nullification as a duty." As far as reparations, DuBois rationalized that

47 Ibid., 227.
"the granting of the ballot to the black man was a necessity, the very least a guilty nation could grant a wronged race, and the only method of compelling the South to accept the results of the war." He concludes that "Negro suffrage ended a civil war by beginning a race feud," a feud wrought with indifference and contempt, and ultimately the sacrifice of national integrity.  

This race feud he acknowledges put the free Black man in a position of dual existence, that he must please the white man or be faced with consequences. Survival in the South came at the expense of one's own identity with the race DuBois was trying so hard to build and develop. While he realized that the vote alone could not solve all the problems, he maintained that in the development of his race as fully participating members of their own society, they could gain easier entrance into the larger American society as American citizens. DuBois viewed the vote realistically, knowing that it came in large part as an effort on the part of whites to alleviate their own guilt and shame surrounding an evil system, but maintained that the ballot offered an entrance into the civilization and as a means to achieve the liberty he trusted he was entitled to and so desperately sought.

DuBois goes on further in his explanation of the dire need for the right to vote, but the obstacles that lay before in his struggle for equality and justice in a nation that he rightly suspected owed him in many ways.

---

28 Ibid.. 233-234.
29 Ibid.. 238.
The ideal of liberty demanded for its attainment powerful means, and these Fifteenth Amendment gave him. The ballot, which had before he had looked upon as a visible sign of freedom, he now regarded as the chief means of gaining and perfecting the liberty with which war had partially endowed him.\(^{50}\)

Even after achieving the right to vote and even gaining some seats on legislatures, DuBois was able to assess the new found freedom in the Reconstruction and Post-reconstruction eras as only slightly different from the decades of slavery. This new economic slavery bound the African American to land owned by someone else, left him in daily fear by the threat of violence as a means of controlling the new freedom, and again left at the bottom rung of a caste system designed to keep African Americans in their inferior position to white Americans. Despite “freedom” and the promises of enjoying American democracy they fought for in the war, totalitarianism rules the political, social, and economic aspects of the African Americans lives. Even to refer to the African Americans with American as part of the label seems inconsistent with what seemed to occur at the time. Virtually, there was no recognition of the shared American status among whites and Blacks.

Other African Americans, such as William Trotter and James Weldon Johnson, agreed with what DuBois sought in attaining American nationality, including culturally, socially, economically, and politically. Still, DuBois found a staunch opponent to his ideas and methods in Washington. DuBois believed that Washington voluntarily gave up any and all claims and rights to participating as a full American citizen in exchange for an

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 217.
easier and softer relationship that allowed both races to stay within what had been in place for too long. DuBois argued for the right to vote, the right to education, and the right to be treated with respect as attributes of citizenship.

...they are absolutely certain that the way for a people to gain their reasonable rights is not by voluntarily throwing them away and insisting that they do not want them....the way for people to gain respect is not by continually belittling and ridiculing themselves....Negroes must insist continually, in season and out of season that voting is necessary to modern manhood, that color discrimination is barbarism, and that black boys need education as well as white boys. 51

DuBois viewed the ballot and books as primary means of gaining entrance into claims of citizenship and saw both as methods that can be done within the race until it can be achieved between the races. He eloquently praised the sweat and toil African Americans had given to the nation as laborers and participants in the building of their own country.

He had a profound desire to achieve so many ideals - brotherhood, the American Republic, unity. Beyond education, the vote, and his own commitment to developing his own race, not in contempt for whites, but to truly develop his own. DuBois sought to achieve a deeper relationship between the two races that would offer fuller participation as citizens for both parties, that each could offer the other what they so sadly lacked.

51 Ibid., 249.
Freedom, too, the long-sought, we still seek, - the freedom of life and limb, the freedom to work and think, the freedom to love and aspire. Work, culture, liberty, - all these we need, not singly but together, not successfully but together, each growing and aiding each, and all striving toward that vaster ideal that swims before the Negro people, the ideal of human brotherhood, gained through the unifying ideal of race; the ideal of fostering and developing the traits and talents of the Negro, not in opposition to or contempt for other races, but rather in large conformity to the greater ideals of the American Republic, in order that some day on American soil two world-races may give each to each those characteristics both so sadly lack. We the darker ones come even now not altogether empty-handed: there are to-day no truer exponents of the pure human spirit of the Declaration of Independence than the American Negroes.

The political realities forced DuBois to discuss the differences that existed between white and Black Americans. He concluded that unless modern civilization was a failure, that we must develop side by side, and that each race has a contribution to make. Still, he was faced with great opposition from whites and such opposition caused him to confront his dual existence on a daily basis. The tensions that existed between the races, along with the constant fear of violence and retaliation on the part of whites, forced DuBois to either concede to their "demands" or to follow the path he chose, the study and development of the African American community.

This desire to be recognized as both a Negro and as an American, for DuBois, were the crux of achieving American citizenship, which would ensure legal, economic, political, and social equalities. Nowhere did he state his wishes only to honor his African ancestor, rather he sought to combine the positive elements of both worlds to create a better one.

---

52 Ibid., 220.
From the double life every American Negro must live, as a Negro and as an American....from this must arise a painful self-consciousness, an almost morbid sense of personality and a moral hesitancy which is fatal to self-confidence. The worlds within and without the Veil of Color are changing, and changing rapidly, but not at the same rate, not in the same way; and this must produce a peculiar wrenching of the soul, a peculiar sense of doubt and bewilderment. Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretence or revolt, to hypocrisy or radicalism.  

DuBois struggled with the duality of being an African in America and this struggle was critical to his philosophy regarding the advancement of his race. As DuBois worked to improve the status of African Americans, a non-America arrived onto the scene of American race relations. Marcus Garvey did not struggle with the issues of becoming American or assimilating into American culture or even improving the relationships between white and Black Americans. Garvey sounded a philosophy of racial separation and a larger world view of the plight of the darker race.

An alternative to DuBois and the NAAC

Marcus Garvey was born in Jamaica in 1887, and grew up there at a time when there were three very distinct groups: white elites, mulatto middle class, and a great discriminated against black underclass. Moreover, these class distinctions were based largely on skin color, with the darkest shade of Blacks being members of the Black underclass. As a member of this underclass, Garvey resented the lack of opportunity and leadership for his group, with a result his membership in the Black fight being one for the Black masses.

---

53 Ibid., 346.
Representative and educated negroes have made the mistake of drawing and keeping themselves away from the race, thinking that it is degrading and ignominious to identify themselves with the masses of the people who are still ignorant and backward; but who are crying out for true and conscientious leadership, so that they might advance into a higher state of enlightenment whence they could claim the appreciation and honest comradeship of the more advanced races who are to-day ignoring us simply because we are so lethargic and selfish.  

Educated in Jamaica and England, Garvey came to America as a result of his work in the shipping industry and as a guest of Booker T. Washington. Garvey had written to Washington after reading and being inspired by Washington's autobiography, *Up From Slavery*. Garvey had hoped to build an institution similar to Washington's Tuskegee Institute. He moved to Harlem in 1916 and started the American branch of the Universal Negro Improvement Association. At its zenith, the UNIA boasted a membership of over four million.  

Americans, Garvey "preached a new gospel of a united Africa under the rule of black men. In the process he recruited hundreds of thousands of blacks and stirred Black America as it had never been stirred before." His famous slogan was "Africa for Africans at home and abroad. Up you mighty race, you can accomplish what you will." Garvey echoed Washington's cry for self-sufficiency, but expanded on this theme adding dimensions of cultural and political self-sufficiency. He viewed DuBois as a rival, largely due to their differences in their educational backgrounds, but mostly because of their audiences. Garvey's movement appealed to ordinary Black people, from "the 'field Negroes' -- to the residents of the northern U.S. ghettos, and to the southern class of poor Black farmer and workers. It likewise appealed to the oppressed and impoverished Black people of the third world. Its appeal was less effective with the 'house Negro's' of the Black educated classes," who were more attracted to the work of DuBois and the NAACP. While DuBois sought similar concepts of uplifting the race and educating a Talented Tenth to help the Black masses, Garvey spoke specifically to the masses of Black Americans and had little regard for how Black Americans should fit into American society. He viewed Black Americans as "members of one international race stretching from the Black urban ghettos and sharecroppers shacks of America to the sugar workers of the Caribbean and the tribes people of Africa," and as such, they could easily relate to "his view that all Black oppression flowed from common sources in the European conquest and colonization of Africa and the forcible dispersal and murder of millions of

56 Bennett, Before the Mayflower, 354-355.
Black Africans by European enslavement.” They readily accepted his “practical program for immediate steps linking the liberation of Black Americans with the liberation of Africa.” As a result, his followers enjoyed a new dignity and understanding of their place in the world through his conception of Africa as the natural home of Black people.”

Marcus Garvey was a symbol of Black freedom, hope and pride to working class Blacks and was a critical link in America’s struggle for freedom, justice, and equality. Decades before “Black is beautiful” rang out, Garvey’s message echoed a racial pride that was unparalled. He outlined his plans for Africans in his book, *Aims and Objectives of Movement for Solution of Negro Problem Outlined*. “To us, the white race has a right to the peaceful possession and occupation of countries of its own and in like manner the yellow and black races have their rights. It is only by an honest and liberal consideration of such rights can the world be blessed with the peace that is sought by Christian teachers and leaders.” Garvey encouraged black emigration to Africa and championed a “Back to Africa” campaign that for many Blacks represented “liberation from the psychological bondage of racial inferiority.” Garvey’s philosophy held that inter-marriage was a “race destroying doctrine.” He further subscribed to the view “that the white race should uphold its racial pride and perpetuate itself, and that the black race should do likewise. We believe that there is room enough in the world for various race groups to grow and develop by themselves without seeking to destroy the Creator’s plan by the constant introduction of mongrel types.” His solution for a regulation between the races was for a

---

57 Ibid., 355.
return to Africa. “Let the Negro have a country of his own. Help him to return to his original home – Africa, and there give him the opportunity to climb from the lowest to the highest positions in a state of his own.” He recognized that “this race of ours that can not get recognition and respect in this country where we are slaves, by using our own ability, power and genius, would develop for ourselves in another country in our habitat a nation of our own.” and such a nation, Garvey felt, would be accorded the rights, privileges, and respect that other nations enjoyed with the United States. Garvey’s desire to create his own African homeland caused a stir in America with other Black leaders, who had always advocated working within the established American society or even promoting the assimilation of Africans into white America. Garvey, however, alleged that little could come from working for assimilation in a nation where the Black race had already been enslaved and continued to be ruled by a white power structure. The establishment of an independent Black nation was consistent with his cry for racial pride and brotherhood. Many assumed that his “idea of an African homeland was always more potent than an actual desire to abandon the United States. The Back-to-Africa part was not important. Pride was. Negroes should have something of their own.”

Gifted with oratorical skills, Garvey preached an unfamiliar gospel of racial pride. Garvey’s movement was the “first large Black organization to strongly promote the notion that Black people are beautiful in their own right, and that they must adhere to a

---

Black – not a white – standard of beauty."

He was among the first to pronounce blackness as a source of price, rather than it being a stigma. Simple statements such as “Black men, you were once great; you shall be great again.” and “The world has made being black a crime...I hope to make it virtue” revealed his deep pride and ability to appeal and reach out to his followers. Marcus Garvey was the quintessence of nationalistic pride for Black Americans and historian Lerone Bennett called him “one of the most talented mass leaders in the history of black protest.” Garvey pushed for economic and cultural independence and worked for Negro independence by establishing the Black Star Shipping Line and supporting other Black-owned businesses. He stressed the “importance of separating themselves intellectually, spiritually, and socially from the White European society that oppressed them.” and urged Blacks all over the world to “get power of every kind.” Recognizing the commercial and financial power held by the United States, Garvey advocated that Blacks achieve power in “education, science, industry, politics and higher government.” Acquisition of such power, he felt, would signal to the nations of the world, including the United States, that Africans worldwide deserved such power and respect.

Garvey used pageantry and parades to entertain his followers, but also to enhance their racial pride and lend it significance. “He not only promised the despised Negro a paradise on earth, but he made the Negro an important person in his immediate

---

environment. He invented honors and social distinctions and concerted every social invention to his use in his effort to make his followers feel important. The African Legion dressed in blue and red uniforms. His organization's flag was "black (for the race), red (for the blood of the race) and green (for the hope of the race)." Garvey was a brilliant fund raiser and entrepreneur—operating chains of cooperative enterprises such as grocery stores, restaurants, hotels, factories. The Black Star Line, a steamship company established in 1919, fostered Black trade between the United States, the Caribbean, and Africa.

The Universal Negro Improvement Association became non-operational in 1925 when Garvey was arrested on charges of using mail to defraud. Convicted and sentenced to prison in Atlanta, Garvey was deported to Jamaica in 1927, where he lived the remainder of his life. "In life or death I shall come back to you to serve even as I have served before. In life I shall be the same; in death I shall be a terror to the foes of Negro Liberty....Look for me in the whirlwind of the storm. look for me all around you, for. with God's grace. I shall come and bring with me countless millions of black slaves who have died in America and the West Indies and the Millions in Africa to aid you in the fight for Liberty, Freedom and Life."


Bennett. Before the Mayflower. 355.

Despite Garvey's failure to create an African homeland and to achieve the separation of the races in the United States, he felt his message and his approach was different than his predecessors. Never before, in his mind, did Africans in America even recognize that they were partly responsible for their inferior position in American society.

"All peoples are struggling to blast a way through the industrial monopoly of races and nations, but the Negro as a whole has failed to grasp its true significance and seems to delight in filling only that place created for him by the white man." Noting that America had never intended for Blacks to achieve any type of power or citizenship, Garvey exposes the falsehoods offered by white America.

"That we suffer so much under whatsoever flag we live is proof positive that constitutions and laws, when framed by the early advocates of human liberty, never included and were never intended for us as a people...."

Moreover, despite all the gains that Blacks had made in America, such as the right to vote, Garvey knew that all the legislature in the world could not grant Africans in America any rights, privileges, respect, or power, unless it came from the people of America, specifically white Americans.

---

Do they lynch Englishmen, Frenchmen, Germans or Japanese? No. And Why? Because these people are represented by great governments, mighty nations and empires, strongly organized and ever ready to shed the last drop of blood and spend the last penny in the national treasury to protest the honor and integrity of a citizen outraged anywhere. Until the Negro reaches this point of national independence, all he does as a race will count for naught, because the prejudice that will stand out against him even with his ballot in his hand, with his industrial progress to show, will be of such an overwhelming nature as to perpetuate mob violence and mob rule, from which he will suffer, and which he will not be able to stop with his industrial wealth and with his ballot. You may argue that he can use his industrial wealth and his ballot to force the government to recognize him, but he must understand that the government is the people. That the majority of the people dictate the policy of governments, and if the majority are against a measure, a thing, or a race, then the government is impotent to protect that measure, thing, or race.  

His call for the advancement of the race was that only when "the Negro by his own initiative lifts himself from his low state to the highest human standard he will be in a position to stop begging and praying, and demand a place that no individual, race or nation will be able to deny him."  

Certainly, similarities exist between the efforts and philosophies of Booker T. Washington and Marcus Garvey as leaders within the African American community during the first decades of the twentieth century. Their differences allow for the creation of an evolution of racial philosophies that address the status of Africans in America, including what Black should aim for in economic, cultural, political, and social aspects of American society. Each man can be singled out for his individual message and legacy. DuBois and his duality emphasized the existence of warring ideals within the Black man, the tensions that existed between wanting to fit in as an American, but the hesitancy to  

---

sacrifice that part of their national identity to achieve this status that offered them discrimination and prejudice regardless of their identification with America. DuBois believed that the races needed to cooperate in efforts to build a country together that both could enjoy and that this enjoyment of citizenship could only occur when all were offered the same rights and privileges. While Washington advocated a betterment of self, he did so at the expense and sacrifice of the identity DuBois wanted to maintain. While both saw the grave problems created by skin color, each had different ideas on the solution of the problems created by the color line. Garvey advocated a Black return to Africa and promoted a racial pride that extended well into the civil rights movement. The varying philosophies and efforts of W.E.B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, and Marcus Garvey continued to resonate into the decades that followed. Leaders, writers, and scholars that inherited the roles of their cultural ancestors maintained aspects of all three men and the themes of double consciousness, assimilation, agitation and protest, and cultural nationalism continued to dominate the thoughts and writings of Blacks into the 1960s.

---

Black people in the United States must raise hard questions, questions which challenge the very nature of the society itself: its longstanding values, beliefs and institutions. To do this, we must first redefine ourselves. Our basic need is to reclaim our history and our identity from what must be called cultural terrorism, from the cultural depredation of self-justifying white guilt. We shall have to struggle for the right to create our own terms through which to define ourselves and our relationship to the society, and to have these terms recognized. This is the first necessity of a free people, and the first right that any oppressor must suspend.1

The ideas of Black scholars and leaders during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s serve to contextualize the political actions, behaviors, and acts of race consciousness of Black athletes in sport during the 1960s. While their writings rarely referred specifically to sport, they critically analyzed the significance of national identity in the acquisition of full participation as an American citizen in a country divided by race and add tremendously to the discussion of race and sport. Through their writings and speeches, Black intellectuals and activists of the Civil Rights Movement illuminated the
cultural, political and social tensions that existed, as well as the rise in Black
consciousness as a logical extension of dualistic tensions. As a result, their visions lay a
foundation for a more thorough comprehension of the political implications of the
participation of Black athletes, both as athletes in the sport arena and as "American
citizens" in the everchanging political arena.

During the late 1960s there were a variety of protests and actions on the part of
Black athletes, indicative of their changing awareness of their own identity and status as a
Black athlete within the Black community and within the sportin2 community.2 It is
through these protests that many Black athletes exhibited a sense of increasing racial
consciousness, which is the focus of the writings: gaining and exhibiting an increased
awareness of one's role in the larger struggle. This larger struggle during the tumultuous
decade of the 1960s was the Civil Rights Movement, which evolved from a non-violent
integrationist movement to one that called for Black power and Black nationalism. These
movements and evolutions raised critical questions of American citizenship - more
specifically, who is an American and what is the value and price of wearing that name

American citizenship and identity through the writings of Black scholars

The color of one's skin and the way in which individuals identify themselves is a
critical part of the discussion of citizenship rights and the Civil Rights Movement of the
1960s. James Baldwin wrote "Color is not a human or a personal reality: it is a political

2 For more on protests and actions taken by black athletes during 1968 see David K. Wiggins, "'The Year of Awakening': Black Athletes, Racial Unrest and the Civil Rights Movement of 1968," International Journal of the History of Sport 9 (1992): 188-208. Chapters in this study will specifically address other
reality."³ Claude Brown expresses the everchanging climate of self-identification in his 1965 autobiography, *Manchild in the Promised Land*. "Damn, Floyd, this thing seems to have happened to a whole lot of people. Nobody's colored anymore, and nobody's Negro. It seems as though everybody is a black man." "Well, what's wrong? Are you afraid of being a black man? We're all black men." ⁴ The dialogue between Claude and Floyd addresses the labels white population put onto African Americans and the power that comes from shedding the labels and naming oneself. Floyd, attempting to educate Claude about Elijah Muhammad and the Muslim religion, explains the importance of how one identifies himself. In response, Claude compares Floyd to Adam Clayton Powell, wondering how someone so light-skin can get away with so much talk about being a Black man

> Look, I'm dark-skin. They got me on all the records, on the statistics, as a black man. If I go down to City Hall and ask for a marriage license and put down there 'colored,' they'll make me put down 'black,' man. They don't want to hear none of that colored thing or Negro. They got the race there, and they want 'white' or 'black.' So whether you like it or not, Claude, we are all black men in this country, and that's all we're gon be.

Floyd's narrative continues into a monologue about who names whom and the implications of the labels, even recognizing that some African Americans have bought into the inferiority status of the names.


Man, you know what's wrong with the people out here? They don't realize who they are. They don't realize what they are. We're not Negro, and we're not colored. These are words that somebody else gave us, that the white devils gave us...to help us rob us of our own identity. We're black men, and we've even been taught to be ashamed of it. When actually, we should be proud of it.  

Claude and Floyd speak a conversation that resonates across the nation - a discussion of who names whom, the power of naming oneself, and of acquiring membership in the American community. Resisting the shameful labels placed onto him by "the white devils," Claude expresses a pride in identifying himself as a black man.

James Baldwin, in Nobody Knows My Name, attempts to understand the national image of Americans and the status of American minorities within this national self-image. He believes that the color of one's skin will determine their position, but will also have a significant impact on the privileged Americans.

To speak in my own person, as a member of the nation's most oppressed minority, the oldest oppressed minority, I want to suggest most seriously that before we can do very much in the way of clear thinking or clear doing as relates to the minorities in this country, we must first crack the American image and find out and deal with what it hides. We cannot discuss the state of our minorities until we first have some sense of what we are, who we are, what our goals are, and what we take life to be. The question is not what we can do now for the hypothetical Mexican, the hypothetical Negro. The question is what we really want out of life, for ourselves, what we think is real.  

Baldwin continues his quest to comprehend the role of his people in American society. He is able to recognize the history that ties the "American Negro" to "Americans;" the hundreds of years of struggle for freedom, for citizenship, for identity, for a place at the American table.

---

5 Ibid., 331.
No one in the world— in the entire world— knows more— knows Americans better or, odd as this may sound, loves them more than the American Negro. This is because he has had to watch you, outwit you, deal with you, and bear you, and sometimes even bleed and die with you, ever since we got here, that is since both of us, black and white, got here— and this is a wedding. Whether I like it or not, or whether you like it or not, we are bound together forever.  

This shared identity that Baldwin refers to, the history that forever links Blacks and whites in America to each other, is a reality that few were willing to acknowledge. It is a sentiment echoed by others. Martin Luther King, Jr., in a 1957 speech, spoke of the linkages between the all Americans. “We are challenged to rise above the narrow confines of our individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity. The new world is a world of geographical togetherness. This means that no individual or nation can live alone. We must all learn to live together, or we will be forced to die together.”

---

1 Baldwin, “East River, Downtown,” in ibid., 136-137.
King thought freedom to be one of the most valuable elements of American citizenship and its achievement was at the root of his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. To King, there was nothing in the world greater than freedom. "It is worth paying for; it is worth losing a job; it is worth going to jail for. I would rather be a free pauper than a rich slave. I would rather die in abject poverty with my convictions than live in inordinate riches with the lack of self-respect." He was famous for echoing the cries of his forefathers, "Before I'll be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave and go home to my Father and be saved."^9

Beyond freedom, King spoke of a self-respect and knowledge of one's ancestors and their struggles. His references to the toil and labor of his ancestors to build America echoed the earlier writings of W.E.B. DuBois. And like Booker T. Washington, King appears to be an accommodationist when compared to his contemporary, Malcolm X. King and his fight for freedom, a quality deemed so critical to American livelihood, was fought from a platform that sought full integration into American society. African Americans had long been seeking freedom and King was another leader on the seeming endless footpath.

---


^9 King. "Facing the Challenge of a New Age." [Have a Drea]. 27.
We will reach the goal of freedom in Birmingham and all over the nation because the goal of America is freedom. Abused and scorned though we may be, our destiny is tied up with the destiny of America. Before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth we were here. For more than two centuries our foreparents labored in this country without wages; they made cotton king; and they built the homes of their masters in the midst of brutal injustice and shameful humiliation— and yet out of a bottomless vitality they continued to thrive and develop. If the inexpressible cruelties of slavery could not stop us, the opposition we now face will surely fall. We will win our freedom because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands.\(^{10}\)

King goes on to state that despite all the legal changes and the efforts of African Americans, they remain outsiders in their own country. Despite all the gains that African Americans had made, they were not viewed as Americans per se, but colored, Negroes, Black and Afro-Americans. Even within the Black community, the name of representation was a matter of personal choice and the cause of much debate. Perhaps they were part American, but another identifying term was always attached somewhere to help distinguish the important difference. Part of that difference remained the issue of freedom and its linkages to the experiences of the enslaved African people and the caste system that remained in effect despite the abolition of slavery. King noted that even one hundred years after the freedom of enslaved African Americans, “the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination…the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity…the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself in exile in his own land.” Speaking in terms of reparations for African Americans, King accuses America of defaulting on “this promissory note” and instead of fulfilling its “sacred obligation, American has given the Negro people a bad check; a

\(^{10}\) King, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” I Have a Dream. 98.
check which has come back marked ‘insufficient funds.’” King refused to accept that there were insufficient funds in this wealthy country and “so we’ve come to cash this check, a check that will give up upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.” And this check, which certainly seemed to still bounce, was symbolic of the request for American citizenship rights, claims to American nationality and all that came with it - equal housing, equal pay, the vote, opportunities, freedom from discrimination and oppression, and perhaps most importantly, freedom from the power of white Americans. This request was a challenge to the American way that had prevailed for so long. Eldridge Cleaver, in Soul on Ice, wrote “We went on to notice how thoroughly, as a matter of course, a black growing up in America is indoctrinated with the white race’s standard of beauty. Not that the whites made a conscious, calculated effort to do this, we thought, but since they constituted the majority the whites brainwashed the blacks by the very processes the whites employed to indoctrinate themselves with their own group standards.” Cleaver and his awareness of the indoctrination of both White and Black Americans allows one to break free of the group standards placed on those trying to “become American.” “For all these years whites have been taught to believe in the myth they preached, while Negroes have had to face the bitter reality of what America practiced.”

11 King, “I Have A Dream.” I Have a Dream, 102.
Baldwin also challenged America, specifically White America, to prepare for change. He asserted that Blacks could no longer be expected to wait for change. He demanded that African Americans immediately cease to “continue to adjust themselves to the cruel racial pressures of life in the United States but that the United States readjust itself to the facts of life in present world. One of these facts is that the American Negro can no longer, nor will he ever again, be controlled by White America’s image of him.”

Echoing his opposition to the accommodationist stance of Booker T. Washington, Baldwin’s writings challenged his readers to examine their own role in the struggle. King, along with Cleaver and Baldwin, felt strongly that until this freedom was fully achieved the country would remain in turmoil. “There will be neither rest nor tranquillity in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.” While many disagreed with King’s methods of non-violent passive protest and his attempts at integration, he certainly had many similar goals expressed later in the decade by Malcolm X and the Black Panther party, that of freedom and the opportunity to be able to define oneself. Cleaver, not usually cast in the same image as King, was able to speak of another freedom, a “coin of freedom” that incited white America to pay attention to the daily struggles of the Civil Rights Movement. “When white freedom riders were brutalized along with blacks, a sigh of relief went up from the black masses, because the blacks knew that white blood is the coin of freedom in a land where for four hundred years black blood has been shed unremarked and with

---

14 Baldwin, “East River, Downtown,” 79.
impunity." Tragedy to fellow White Americans peeked the interest and the anger of whites to become involved in the fight for "integration," however such a word can be defined to make it an acceptable cause worthy of effort and concern. Even White supporters of integration wondered how far King's movement for a mixed America would go. King was adamant that he held high standards for integration and that he and other African Americans would not be satisfied as long as they were victims of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality, unable to gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities, have their children "stripped of their selfhood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating, 'for whites only,'" and "as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which he can vote."\footnote{Baldwin. The Fire Next Time. 126-127.}

There was no half freedom for King, only the dream of achieving full American citizenship and the same enjoyment of this citizenship celebrated by White Americans. Baldwin's desire for freedom was also without compromise. "The price of this transformation is the unconditional freedom of the Negro; it is not too much to say that he, who has been so long rejected, must now be embraced, and at no matter what psychic or social risk. He is the key figure in his country, and the American future is precisely as bright or as dark as his. And the Negro recognizes this, in a negative way. Hence the question: Do I really want to be integrated into a burning house\footnote{Baldwin. The Fire Next Time. 126-127.}
A new phase of self-redefinition and changing identity

The discussion of American citizenship and achieving the rights of citizenship are important, especially when the African American identity seemed to be constantly changing. Whereas there certainly were changes in names and identifications prior to the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement lent itself to encouraging people to reassess who they were, what they stood for, what they wanted for themselves, and essentially, challenged them to ask about the American dream that had been promised for so long, what is that dream and how can it become part of my reality? During these years, Black scholars, many of the same that addressed the same issue of citizenship, spoke of self-redefinition and naming oneself.

The Negro will only be free when he reaches down to the inner depths of his own being and signs with the pen and ink of assertive manhood his own emancipation proclamation. And, with a spirit straining toward true self-esteem, the Negro must boldly throw off the manacles of self-abnegation and say to himself and to the world, “I am somebody. I am a person. I am a man with dignity and honor, have a rich and noble history. How painful and exploited that history has been. Yes, I was a slave through my foreparents and I am not ashamed of that. I’m ashamed of the people who were so sinful to make me a slave.” Yes, we must stand up and say, “I’m black and I’m beautiful,” and this self-affirmation is the black man’s need, made compelling by the white man’s crimes against him.”

Martin Luther King, Jr., who was harassed within factions of the Black community for his peaceful protests, used rhetoric that would become popular during the decade. He stated, “I’m Black and I’m beautiful,” a phrase popular before the Black Power movement of the latter half of the decade and echoing the sentiment held by Marcus Garvey some forty years earlier. King expressed a pride in himself, in his heritage, in his culture and of the power he exercises to define himself as he so desires, whether it be as a Negro, a Black
man, or as an American. Realizing that African Americans could never really be “free”
until they themselves asserted themselves, King also recognized the reaction of man
Southerners to the “Negro’s new and courageous thinking and his ever-increasing
readiness to organize and act. Conflict and violence were coming to the surface as the
white South desperately clung to its old patterns.” He attributes the tension in race
relations to the “revolutionary change in the Negro’s evaluation of himself and of his
destiny and by his determination to struggle for justice. We Negroes have replaced self-
pity with self-respect and self-depreciation with dignity.” 20 This radical transformation of
one’s thinking, from self-pity to self-respect, from self-depreciation to dignity: this
transformation signified a change in thought, but more importantly it represented a shift
of power in the liberation struggle. Representative of such a shift in thought, James
Baldwin wrote, “I was icily determined- more determined, really, than I then knew- never
to make my peace with the ghetto but to die and go to Hell before I would let any white
man spit on me, before I would accept my “place” in this republic.” He was further intent
on not allowing white people to tell him who he was or be limited by them in any way.
And yet, he realized he “was being spat on and defined and described and limited, and
could have been polished off with no effort whatever.” 21

Baldwin traveling his own journey of identity eloquently states the basic premise
of equality and status - that it is tenuous at best. “People are not, for example, terribl
anxious to be equal (equal, after all, to what and to whom?) but they love the idea of

19 King, “Where do we go from here?” I Have a Dream . 171.
20 King, “Our Struggle,” I Have a Dream . 5.
being superior. And this human truth has an especially grinding force here, where identity is almost impossible to achieve and people are perpetually attempting to find their feet on the shifting sands of status." He continues to maintain his belief that there was a strong connection between the state of White America and Blacks in America.

"The price of the liberation of the white people is the liberation of the blacks - the total liberation, in the cities, in the towns, before the law, and in the mind." Of course, such liberation challenged the "American way." "The truth about the black man, as a historical entity and as a human being, has been hidden from him, deliberately and cruelly: the power of the white world is threatened whenever a black man refuses to accept the white world's definitions. So every attempt is made to cut that black man down - not only was made yesterday but is made today." 22

Malcolm X and the Black Muslim religion were a large factor in the transformation of how Black people saw themselves in relation to America and White Americans in the 1960s. 23 Commenting on the political, as opposed to religious, power

22 Ibid., 119, 130, 95-96.
of Malcolm X with the Black community. Muslim and non-Muslim, Eldridge Cleaver notes that "The Black Muslim movement was destroyed the moment Elijah cracked the whip over Malcolm’s head," since the Black Muslim movement itself was not irresistibly appealing to the true believers. Rather, it "was the awakening into self-consciousness of twenty million Negroes which was so compelling," and Malcolm X enunciated "their aspirations better than any other man of our time. When he spoke under the banner of Elijah Muhammad he was irresistible. When he spoke under his own banner he was still irresistible." Malcolm X spoke to the masses of African Americans and echoed the sentiments articulated decades earlier by Marcus Garvey. Both Garvey and Malcolm X recognized the class struggles that Blacks faced in America and both saw the strength and power they could have as a collective – a collective that was committed to action to bring about the necessary changes. Certainly Malcolm X had a religious power by his very nature as a minister in the Nation of Islam, but his true political power came from his ability to relate to the Black masses who did not want to wait for King’s dream of integration or believed that it could be achieved.

Malcolm was irresistible because he was able to speak to his people in a language that enabled them to fully comprehend the history of American race relations and the implications of this struggle on their daily lives, while at the same time he offered a valid and realistic solution for personal change and a way to improve their lives and their own feelings about themselves and their role in America. Malcolm was neither the first to

---

speak of Black Nationalism nor the first to have people listen, but he was able to promote
Black Nationalism not as an alternative but as the way of living and methods of liberation
from the institutionalized racism that had existed for too long. Harry Edwards saw that
Malcolm X had four essential directives, which included that Black people had to control
their communities, resources and institutions; not hesitate to use any means necessary to
achieve those goals; develop an ethic (he proposed Black Nationalism) that would unif
them and prevent outsiders from usurping Black movements and communities; and, “that
Black people must recognize that their primary enemy was, is, and has always been the
legally established institutions and government of the United States of America and
anyone- negro or white- who supports those institutions or that government in its efforts
to maintain the status quo.”25 Just as King and Baldwin had used the concept of freedom.
Malcolm X had freedom on his agenda as well. And just as King sought such freedom.
Malcolm X valued freedom in his fight for equality. “That’s our motto. We want
freedom by any means necessary. We want justice by any means necessary. We want
equality by any means necessary. We don’t feel that in 1964, living in a country that is
supposedly based upon freedom, and supposedly the leader of the free world, we don’t
think that we should have to sit around and wait for some segregationist congressmen and


84
senators and a President from Texas in Washington, D.C. to make up their minds that our
people are due now some degree of civil rights. No, we want it now or we don’t think
anybody should have it. “26

For as many differences as there were in King’s and Malcolm’s opposing styles
and methods of achieving freedom and equality, both spoke many of the same words and
thoughts, as they reminded Black Americans to claim their heritage with pride and to take
action in the movement. Malcolm X envisioned and was at the forefront of a cultural
revolution, the liberation of Black Americans.

We must recapture our heritage and our identity if we are ever to liberate
ourselves from the bonds of white supremacy. We must launch a cultural
revolution to unbrainwash an entire people. A cultural revolution. When you let
the Black man in America know where he once was and what he once had, why.
he only needs to look at himself now to realize something criminal was done to
him to bring him down to the low condition that he's in today ....This cultural
revolution will be the journey to our rediscovery of ourselves. 27

Similar to Baldwin, Malcolm X not only resisted the standards defined by White
America, he loud and clearly voiced his belief that Black people should represent
themselves. “We should never let the white man represent us to them. and we should
never let him represent them to us. It is our job today to represent ourselves, as they are
representing themselves. We don’t need someone else representing us. We don’t want
anybody to tell somebody how we think. We will let the world know how we think.”28

---

26 Malcolm X. “OAAU Founding Rally.” By Any Means Necessary: Speeches, Interviews and a Letter By
27 Ibid., 54-55.
28 Ibid., 146.
Another powerful figure of the 1960s and the Black Power movement was Stokely Carmichael, whose book, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*, co-authored with Charles Hamilton, expressed the critical importance of a Black person shedding the White image of American identity and redefining themselves as they believe and the resulting power from this liberating act.\(^9\) Carmichael expressed his vision of Black liberation, taking the confines of W.E.B. DuBois' double-consciousness and emerging out of it with his own definition of himself. Understanding double-consciousness and the implications of identifying oneself presents a unique framework to better understand the political and social significance of self identification during the 1960s. Written over 50 years prior to the civil rights movement, DuBois clearly recognized the inherent problems African Americans faced in their attempts to achieve citizenship rights and assimilation into American society without sacrificing their African heritage and culture. Furthermore, he was able to state in no uncertain terms that the national identification of his community, as Americans, lay in the powers of the majority white society, despite most efforts of African Americans to meet the prescribed standards for citizenship. Carmichael’s words are crucial to the understanding of the protest of many Black athletes during the 1960s, a decade of self-definition, freedom, and liberation.

Through a broader understanding of Carmichael’s theory of overcoming oppression, it can be interpreted how black athletes began re-defining themselves in their own image of what they desired, not what the white society dictated. The protesting

Black athletes were breaking from their double-consciousness, protesting the definition white society placed on them. Their actions allowed them to be both Black and American, and not have the two be conflicting terms within their identity.

With the concept of double-consciousness as a beginning point in determining the grounds for national identification, the expected tensions from such dualities lend themselves to the transformations written about by Carmichael and Hamilton. This concept of self-identification, of re-definition, of re-naming oneself and the consequences of such a transition becomes another significant building block to understanding the consciousness of a people experiencing a sense of pride and importance that had previously been denied in so many ways. Along with this new sense of pride and power, changes were occurring in the civil rights movement that moved the direction of this movement not only towards identification and citizenship, but full utilization of such citizenship rights. Carmichael and Hamilton aimed to define and encourage a new consciousness among black people that "might be called a sense of peoplehood: pride, rather than shame, in blackness, and an attitude of brotherly, communal responsibility among all black people for one another." Both asserted that the "racist assumptions of white superiority have been so deeply engrained into the fiber of the society that the infuse the entire functioning of the national subconscious." Carmichael and Hamilton utilized the ideas of Lewis Killian and Charles Grigg expressed in their book, Racial Crisis in America, to illustrate the racism of white America, as well as the difficulties and


racism Black Americans continued to face with the move towards integration. Killian
and Grigg wrote that for integration to act "as a solution to the race problem" it demanded
"that the Negro foreswear his identity as a Negro. But for the lasting solution, the
meaning of 'American' must lose its implicit racial modifier, 'white.'....integration
requires a sincere acceptance by all Americans that it is just as good to be a black
American as to be a white American." This redefinition, Killian and Grigg believed, to
be the greatest challenge in race relations. They called for the redefinition of African
Americans in such a way that "the status advantage of the white man is no longer an
advantage, so that an American may acknowledge his Negro ancestry without apologizing
for it." Black people "live in a society in which to be unconditionally 'American' is to be
white, and to be black is a misfortune."32

Carmichael and Hamilton defined integration from another viewpoint, one that
stressed the definition of Black people by Black people, which is certainly much different
from how they perceived they had been defined by the white culture. While white
culture defined integration as black men marrying white women and "race-mixing."
Carmichael and Hamilton thought it critical that integration be defined by black people.
Accordingly, they felt that Black people sought to use integration as "a way to improve
their lives- economically and politically." Unfortunately they felt for blacks, too man
people had already bought into the white definitions of integration. They urged blacks to
shed the definitions and labels white society placed on them. Even with the term Negro,

31 Ibid., 31.
32 Lewis M. Killian and Charles Grigg, Racial Crisis in America: Leadership in Conflict (Englewood Cliffs,
such a ridding of the label could be empowering. "There is a growing resentment of the word 'Negro,' for example, because this term is the invention of our oppressor; it is his image of us that he describes. Many blacks are now calling themselves African-Americans, Afro-Americans or black people because that is our image of ourselves." As blacks asserted their new definitions of who they were and reclaimed their culture and heritage, there was an underlying effort to shatter the stereotypes and myths that society had bought into. As a result, blacks would enjoy an identity created by themselves and for themselves which reflected on their community in a positive manner.\footnote{Carmichael and Hamilton, Black Power. 37.}

The theme of redefining oneself in a proud and positive manner reoccurs in Carmichael and Hamilton's writings. Beyond the goal of integration, or the desire to achieve American citizenship without having to "integrate", which means "assimilating" into how white Americans have compartmentalized Black Americans, Carmichael and Hamilton continue with their criticism of the efforts towards integration, a status the believe would not be an improvement of their life conditions. "The goal of Black people must not be to assimilate into middle-class America, for that class- as a whole- is without a viable conscience as regards humanity."\footnote{Ibid.. 40.} Carmichael and Hamilton rejected the goal of assimilation into "middle-class American because the values of that class are in themselves anti-humanist and because that class as a social force perpetuates racism."\footnote{Ibid.. 41.} Clearly, integration into a fraudulent white society could offer no hope of advancement and any real progress.

\footnote{Carmichael and Hamilton, Black Power. 37.}
\footnote{Ibid.. 40.}
\footnote{Ibid.. 41.}
As Carmichael and Hamilton denounced the efforts of integration and its adverse effects on the identity of African Americans, their rhetoric is reminiscent of the double consciousness that DuBois, the sacrifice of the African part of yourself for the acquisition of the new American citizenship that was so highly valued and critical to success in the nation. In defining oneself and assuming an identity, again this self-concept or self-identification issue arises and notes the tensions that exit for Blacks living in America. Carmichael and Hamilton adamantly opposed the sacrifice of black identity to achieve American status, a status that would maintain their inferiority. Their solution is not to whitewash the identity of blacks or to accommodate to the ideals and directives of white America, instead they seek to rectify the causes of the second class citizenship they have been assigned. They seek to abolish the dependent colonial status inflicted upon Black Americans by white society.

The racial and cultural personality of the black community must be preserved and that community must win its freedom while preserving its cultural integrity. Integrity includes a pride-in the sense of self-acceptance, not chauvinism-in being black, in the historical attainments and contributions of black people. No person can be healthy, complete and mature if he must deny a part of himself: this is what “integration” has required thus far. This is the essential difference between integration as it is currently practiced and the concept of Black Power.\(^{36}\)

It is important to note the differences between integration and Black Power as Carmichael and Hamilton have defined both. Just as DuBois did not want to sacrifice his African self or his American self, one at the expense of the other, the same mentality of valuing all parts of oneself remained. Black Power meant “the total control of every Black community in America by the Black people who lived in them. It meant that Black

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 55.
people should control and decide their own social, economic, and political destinies.

Black Power became the password of the Meredith freedom march." It was the answer to institutional racism that Malcolm X had identified earlier in the decade and had sought to eradicate "By any means necessary." No, Carmichael did not think that the central problem for Black Americans was "that Black people were unprepared for Full citizenship and rights," or "a problem of individual racists, red-necks, honkies, and crackers." The problem was that racism was embedded in every aspect of American culture and the American power structure. Black Power appealed to young blacks as a passionate rallying cry and as an alternative to Martin Luther King Jr. non-violent integrationist methods. In reality, Black Power was non-violent, but the cry for Power was forceful. Black Power offered a bandwagon that encouraged black separatism and a new strategy in the fight for Black liberation.

Truly, Black Power, as defined by Carmichael and Hamilton, was a movement that encouraged and embraced empowerment and self-definition. Some Americans labeled those who advocated Black power as "racists," and saw the "call for self-identification and self-determination" as "'racism in reverse' or 'black supremacy.'" Carmichael and Hamilton countered that racist in America were those who had fought to "keep black people on the bottom." Their movement had a goal "of black self-determination and black self-identity- Black Power- is full participation in the decision-

37 Edwards, Revolt of the Black Athlete, 53-55.
making processes affecting the lives of black people, and recognition of the virtues in themselves as black people.” It was a movement that emphasized Black liberation through new and powerful strategies that involved the Black masses.

Another revolutionary of the 1960s, by his own definition, was H. Rap Brown. Harry Edwards highlighted a key quote from Brown’s book, Die Nigger Die. “All Black people are involved in the same struggle. If you don’t begin to tell your own story, you will always be Aunt Jemima; you will always be "rioting." You must begin to articulate a position of your own.” Again, the critical concept of being able to define oneself.

Eldridge Cleaver, about his own process of self redefinition during the movement for integration, realized that he needed to play a role in his future. “It became clear that it was possible for me to take the initiative: instead of simply reacting I could act. I could unilaterally—whether anyone agreed with me or not—repudiate all allegiances, morals, values— even while continuing to exist within this society. My mind would be free and no power in the universe could force me to accept something if I didn’t want to.” Like other Blacks of his generation, Harry Edwards encountered similar opportunities to assess and re-assess his beliefs about being Black in America. He notes that American society teaches that everything black is bad and that Black nationalism is not a viable option. Still, he urged blacks to take the time to redefine themselves in their own terms, echoing the sentiments of Carmichael, Hamilton, Brown and Cleaver. You must begin to define for yourself; begin to define your Black heritage; and, begin to investigate and learn on

---

38 Carmichael and Hamilton, Black Power, 47.
your own. The "education that a Black college student gets will be irrelevant, fruitless and worthless unless he uses it to define and articulate positions that are relevant to Black people...You are involved in the struggle whether you want to be or not. Your badge of involvement is your skin." 41

The 1960s was a decade of change for all Americans, White and Black, male and female, rich and poor, educated and unemployed. A decade of cultural revolution, gender liberation, freedom of speech, burn, baby, burn, and peace and love. Despite all the change and upheaval, it was a time that alterably shifted the hopes and dreams of most Americans, offering a vision of what phoenix could rise from the ashes of our troubled streets and homes. Cleaver captured the spirit in his writings. Black America was changed forever.

It was all too late. It was too late because it was time for the blacks ("I've got a Mind of my own!") to riot, to sweep through the Harlem night like a wave of locusts, breaking, screaming, bleeding, laughing, crying, rejoicing, celebrating, in a jubilee of destruction, to regurgitate the white man's bullshit they'd be eating for four hundred years; smashing the windows of the white man's stores, throwing bricks they wished were bombs, running, leaping whirling like a cyclone through the white man's Mind, past his backlash, through the night streets of Rochester, New Jersey, Philadelphia. Hot Dogs and Malted Milk, with blood now splattered over the white shoes, would still strike out in the dark against the manifestations of the turning, showing the protocol of Southern Hospitality reserved for Niggers and Nigger Lovers- SCHWERNER-CHANNEY-GOODMAN- it was still too late. 42

---

African American Citizenship and Sport

Few Black scholars and leaders of the 1960s thought sports to be a serious arena worthy of inclusion within the larger Civil Rights Movement and the emerging field of Black Studies. Even with the recognition that sports and politics are inextricably linked, there has been a relatively small effort to include the protests and activism of Black athletes in the 1960s as major events and the athletes as key figures and change agents in the Civil Rights Struggle, and thus worthy of inclusion in Black Studies curriculums and American history books.

The rise and subsequent dominance of Black athletes in several professional sports helped bring to the forefront some critical issues that were relevant to society and sport. The perceived success and wealth many Black athletes enjoyed presented a picture of African Americans that contradicted the image, held by White and Black Americans, of what level of success was attainable for African Americans. James Baldwin had once written that skin color essentially determined your lot in life, establishing not only your future, but your limited ambitions. "You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being. You were not expected to aspire to excellence: you were expected to make peace with mediocrity." Baldwin’s vision, while never mentioning sport, is representative of the widely held belief among African Americans and liberal whites that the Jim Crow caste system in America left little room for upward mobility and the achievement of the American dream. This routine exclusion led to the creation of separate leagues and

---

43 Baldwin. The Fire Next Time. 18.
sporting events for African Americans to compete and strive for excellence until the white organized sport leagues were desegregated. Eldridge Cleaver addressed the aspirations of African Americans who had every intention of disproving the premise of Baldwin’s statement. He insisted that the unwritten rules of Jim Crow “marked the last stage of the white man’s flight into cultural neurosis, and the beginning of the black man’s frantic striving to assert his humanity and equalize his position with the white. Blacks ventured into all fields of endeavor to which they could gain entrance.” with the goal of performing at a level that was equal to or better than that of their white counterparts. It was a long held belief that they had to be twice as good as any white to gain any type of “grudging recognition from the whites.”

Many Black athletes in the 1960s also felt they needed to be twice as good as their white teammates to even make the team, much less earn a starting position. Cleaver’s statement regarding this pressure on performance adds another element to the equation - the tension between Whites and Blacks that is often a result of Black success in a previously White dominated or White controlled field, regardless of the sport context. One such device that white society used to identify black performance and to qualify their success in an arena was the use of the prefix Negro. Cleaver notes that they had used this prefix in “Negro literature. Negro athletes. Negro music, Negro doctors, Negro politicians. Negro workers.” He notes that the prefix is essentially accurate in describing the performer’s biological and sociological status in America, but stressed that it also

---

effectively "concealed the paramount psychological fact: that to the white mind,
prefixing anything with "Negro" automatically consigned it to an inferior category."^45

The distance between whites and Blacks that Cleaver referred to becomes more
clear when it is placed within the sporting context - in an American game, the success of
Blacks challenged the status of whites. Theoretically, sport allowed for and encouraged
upward mobility, offered an opportunity to compete with and against Whites, and
represented the American dream. To label athletes as "Black" athlete or "Negro"
ballplayer helped to alleviate the increasing fear of losing control that many whites faced
with the growing number of Black athletes and their dominance of sports. For decades
doctors had measured and scientifically studied the physical makeup of Black athletes to
determine what could possibly account for their superior athletic skills, often coming at
the expense of their intellectual ability. The need to scientifically explain the success of
Black athletes in comparison with their White counterparts was partly in response to the
discomfort whites felt about the changes on all the professional leagues rosters. To find a
scientific reason as to how African Americans, a group believed to be inferior in so man
ways in society, could exhibit such physical superiority and success on the playing fields
was important in determining the intellectual superiority of White Americans and the
sports that they would choose to pursue.\footnote{Ibid., 79-80.}^46

\footnote{For more on the scientific investigations into racial differences in athletic performances, see Harr
Hoberman, Darwin's Athletes: How Sport Has Damaged Black America and Preserved the Myth of Race
(Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997); James A. Mathisen and Gerald S. Mathisen, "The Rhetoric of Racism,"
Cleaver comments on the physical dominance of Black athletes and the reactions of White sport followers to the success of Black Americans in the sporting arena. He pondered. "Haven't you ever wondered why the white man genuinely applauds a black man who achieves excellence with his body in the field of sports, while he hates to see a black man achieve excellence with his brain?" The duality of body and mind made them mutually exclusive and there was a safety in the cheering of someone who was deemed inferior. As Cleaver noted, "There can be no true competition between superiors and inferiors." It is for that very reason that Cleaver attributes the barriers faced by Black athletes upon their entrance into mainstream sport. "This is why it has been so hard historically for Negroes to break the color bar in sport after sport. Once the color bar falls, the magic evaporates, and when the black man starts to excel in a particular sport the question starts floating around: "Is boxing dying?" "Is baseball through?" "What happened to football?" "What is basketball coming to? In fact, the new symbol of white supremacy is golf, because there the Brain dominates the Body. But just as soon as the Body starts ripping off a few trophies, they will be asking the question. "What happened to golf?"

His point is clearly that when Blacks, or the Body, begin to dominate a sport white athletes traditionally controlled, such as baseball until the late 1940s, the status and of the sport is ultimately diminished in the view of white sport fans because they are no longer the victors and the dominant images within the sport. To conclude his statement, and to

---

47 For an excellent essay on the Black male body, see Cornel West, Race Matters (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 83-91.

97
support his belief that white fans will cheer on "white" sports, he uses golf as a more intellectual pursuit still worthy of participation and spectatorship by whites since they are still the masters of this game. Cleaver sarcastically refers to other sports, such as baseball, football, boxing, and basketball as less Brain, therefore less white and ultimately, less valuable, less of a sport, and thus, less American. He continues with his comments concerning sport and the participation of Black athletes. Just as the prefix Negro had been successfully used in identifying the successes of various Black workers, Cleaver believes that Black athletes were successfully used as images of non-threatening Blacks in a time of trouble. He comments that by "inflating the images of Uncle Toms and celebrities from the apolitical world of sport and play, the mass media were able to channel and control the aspirations and goals of the black masses." The use of athletes neutralized the real issue, out a "political and economic and philosophical context" and placed the issue into a safer and more controlled environment. These incidents were placed on "the misty level of 'goodwill,' 'charitable and harmonious race relations,' and 'good sportsmanlike conduct.'" Cleaver recognized it as an effective "technique of 'Negro control.'" So effective that "the best-known Negroes in America have always been- and still are- the entertainers and athletes (this is also true of white America)." Cleaver accurately exposes it as an American tradition that "whenever a crisis with racial overtones arises, an entertainer or athlete is trotted out and allowed to expound a predictable, conciliatory interpretation of what's happening."

98

The media had routinely used Black athletes to support the status quo: maintaining the claim that sport offered them equality and if Black Americans had any doubts or disbelief about their status based on the color of their skin, these athletes countered such claims. During the 1960s, several Black athletes served as mouthpieces for all the goodwill of sport and how White America has seemingly embraced them as one of their own. American, at least while the athlete was in uniform. "The black athlete was always expected by the honkie to play the role of the responsible Negro, the good Negro, no matter what else was going on in the black world," says Harry Edwards. "The black athlete was the institutionalized Tom, the white man’s nigger." Still, the decade of civil rights struggles produced a significant number of Black athletes that challenged this traditional role as they began to create a new image of the Black athlete. An image that demanded off the field actions beyond their perfunctory on the field display. Sports Illustrated also looked to Black athletes as messengers from the White sport world to their respective communities and that sport should take the opportunity to provide them with an appropriate message.

Every Negro athlete is a potential messenger from the white world to the ghetto - a messenger who can help bridge the intolerable communications gap that exists today. Sport and the universities and business must all ask: What news do we want these messengers to deliver? News that in this field, at least, a black man is recognized as a man, that exploitation has been replaced by human consideration and that equality is more than just a word? Or do we want the message to be: burn, baby, burn?51

What emerged in the 1960s was a Black athlete in sharp contrast to Jackie Robinson and to what the public had grudgingly come to accept. Jack Olsen, of Sports Illustrated, wrote

the first major critique in a mainstream sport journal which addressed the plight of Black athletes in white American sport.52 Traditionally, Black athletes had been expected to “stand fast and take it, keep his mouth shut and perform valiantly in front of cheering white audiences.” With every knockout or homerun or exciting long run from scrimmage, Black athletes and Black communities across the country saw a tiny step forward in their everyday relations with the white majority.” The Black community “tended to regard individual achievements as progress for the race as a whole,” failing to realize that the majority of white Americans were able “to compartmentalize his attitude about the Negro, to admire his exploits on the field but put him in the back of the bus on the way home.” Olsen recognized that though Black athletes were now allowed to play on the same playing field, white America “expected the Negro to perform, to put out, but after he had showered and shaved, he was supposed to know his place.”53 The integration of the sports field and arena was of mythic proportion.

Sports had been believed to be apolitical and certainly very separate from the race conflict that was tearing the country apart. Black athletes were beginning to be seen by some as “dominant figures in the Negro struggle for equality.” due in part to their proud new attitude and their superior athletic abilities. Novelist Ronald Fair, who made the hero in his book, Hog Butcher, an 18 year old Black male athlete, believed that Black athletes “have a commanding position in all of Negro society.” The hero is of Fair’s novel

is bold and speaks out. "It's sad, but the Negro athlete used to be afraid to do this. He was afraid he'd lose his position. He's not afraid anymore." Echoing Fair's sentiment that Black athletes held positions of power in the Black community, prominent Black scholar E. Franklin Frazier, chairman of Sociology at Howard University, maintained that Negro major leaguers occupied a special position in Negro society at large and were "an important part of the bourgeoisie elite." The Black community began to demand more from the athletes, not in their on the field performance, but the actions they took off the field. "There is a growing demand that the athlete take part in the affairs of the Negro community, that he use his prestige, the position he's acquired, to make himself a force in the improvement of the position of all Negroes." said Bob Wheeler, assistant superintendent of the Kansas City public schools. "Negroes are apt to show hostility to a Negro athlete who doesn't take full advantage of his opportunities." There was respect for the athlete's physical abilities, but more and more Black athletes were expected to help the status of all Black Americans, athletes and non-athletes.

The first requirement of this new Negro athlete with his new attitude of Negro instant is a pride in things black, in black ways of acting and thinking - not the old fictionalized darky stereotypes with their laziness and duplicity and connivory, but the new verve and grace that the black man brings to sport.

Many African American athletes, even if they were not actively involved in any political movements, often echoed similar thoughts and ideas that were articulated by Black

scholars and leaders of the period. Articulating the same political ideologies spoken by Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver, Stokely Carmichael and other Black figures, Black athletes and the dialogue they engaged in has been looked at from within sport history to a degree and largely ignored by Black scholars. And yet, these athletes had a platform that allowed their message to be just as far-reaching and heard by America. Olsen saw the sport setting of the 1960s as a "revolt by the black athlete against the framework and attitudes of American sport," a revolt that has "astonished the white sport follower." This astonishment at the outspoken behavior of Black athletes is a result of "the man in the grandstand knows nothing about the Negro athlete whom he professes to understand, appreciate and ennoble as a symbol of the enlightened attitude of the world of sport toward segregation and intolerance." White America had felt comforted by the slow integration of the playing fields, an arena that was non-threatening to their daily lives, and much more safe certainly than the integration of public facilities, schools, and places of employment. Sport could be compartmentalized as an aspect of American life that offered democracy that could possibly make up for other areas unprepared for such change. With each protest and each Black athlete speaking out on sport and non-sport related issues, this haven of American life was disturbed and challenged.

Within the sporting world emerged a number of Black athletes who exhibited a change in their race consciousness, and in the exhibited consciousness of the athletes that preceded them. As a result of this transition they willingly risked their careers, personal safety, financial security, and image and status as athletes for a meaning that many could

---

57 Ibid., 18.
not comprehend, much less respect. Bernie Casey of the Los Angeles Rams stated that for too long the Black athlete had privately said “I’ll just play the game and get my money and be a good nigger. But now he knows the house nigger is dead. I’m not speaking of physical death, but of spiritual death, which could be the worst of all.”

Mike Garrett, another Black football player, also recognized his unique position in American society as a result of his athletic. Termed marginal by some, meaning he was a in limbo between white and Black worlds, Garrett started to “take firm stands on black and white matters” and “made a personal commitment to his race.” Garrett asserted, “As a Negro celebrity, I know that I must go back and help less fortunate Negroes, even though in my heart I might not want to.” Jack Olsen, in his 1968 Sports Illustrated series on the Black athletes, wrote of Garrett, “He is becoming the proud new black who is reworking the future of his race, rendering the “house nigger” all but obsolete, and turning the world of sports upside down in the process.”

The thoughts expressed by Black athletes in the 1960s were not new to America. Jack Johnson and Paul Robeson had both been ostracized for similar expressions of racial pride and assertive behavior during the first half of the century. Likewise, the dialogue concerning American citizenship and Black nationalism by 1960s scholars, such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, and Eldridge Cleaver, had all been spoken decades prior by Black scholars such as W.E.B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, and Marcus Garvey. These Black athletes of the 1960s. Muhammad Ali.

---

58 Ibid., 18.
59 Ibid., 18.
60 Ibid., 18.
Tommie Smith, John Carlos, and Jim Brown, along with many others active in fighting for equality in sport and America, represent a similar regeneration of ideology concerning the status of Blacks in America.
CHAPTER 4

THE EVOLUTION OF A CHAMP:
THE TRICKY TRIAD OF FLOYD PATTERSON, SONNY LISTON AND
MUHAMMAD ALI

The heavyweight champion is a symbol of masculinity to the American male. And a black champion, as long as he is firmly fettered in his private life, is a fallen lion at every white man's feet. Through a curious psychic mechanism, the puniest white man experiences himself as a giant-killer, as a superman, a great white hunter leading a gigantic ape, the black champion tamed by the white man, around on a leash. But when the ape breaks away from the leash, beats with deadly fists upon his massive chest and starts talking to boot, proclaiming himself to be the greatest, spouting poetry, and annihilating ever gunbearer the white hunter sics on him (the white hunter not being disposed to crawl into the ring himself), a very serious slippage takes place in the white man's self-image — because that by which he defined himself no longer has a recognizable identity. "If that black ape is a man," the white hunter asks himself, "then what am I?" ¹

During the first half of the 1960s, three African American boxers held the coveted title of Heavyweight Champion of the World, with Floyd Patterson winning in 1960. Sonny Liston claiming it two years later, and Cassius Clay entering the ring as the underdog challenger to Liston in Miami Beach in 1964 and exiting as Muhammad Ali, the new Heavyweight Champion of the World. The reign of these three champions, during a particularly volatile time in American history, offers a unique perspective from which to

view the intersection of the civil rights movement and the Black athlete. In many ways, each champion mirrored the changing philosophies and politics of the Black struggle for freedom, gradually becoming more outspoken and militant. This chapter examines the images of Patterson, Liston, and Ali during the 1960s and analyzes the dialogue between the three fighters. Four themes emerge in the discourse between them. "Rags to Riches" details the troubled background of each fighter and how boxing served as their means of redemption and instrument of personal transformation. "A Credit to His Race" examines how each boxer identified himself in the surrounding discussion of civil rights, how others identified the fighter, and what each fighter saw as his role as titleholder.

"Discourse in the Ring" looks at the issues of religion and race and the use of the heavyweight title and the boxing ring as the titleholder's platform for joining in the larger political dialogue. The issue of being Black and more specifically, how each fighter identified himself and how each fighter expressed his "Black" identity, is critical to the relationship that the fighters had with each other and with the American public. These themes intersect with the five bouts that involved the three heavyweights, two involving Patterson losing to Liston, two fights which saw Liston fall to Ali, and lastly, Ali's victory over Patterson.²

Floyd Patterson grew up in a poor family and by all accounts was a sensitive and emotionally troubled youth. He was terribly insecure, a trait that would stay with him through his career. He once commented that he hated laughter “because it seemed no matter what I did everybody always was laughing at me.” He skipped school and got into fights. As a result of his delinquency, Patterson, at age 10, was placed in the Wiltwyck School for Boys in September 1945. Growing up in Brooklyn, Patterson had what he considered “a growing awareness of what a difference in color meant” and his arrival at Wiltwyck symbolized a time for him when he noticed “whites being treated the same as the colored with no preference at all….it seemed color didn’t make an difference.”

Patterson was introduced to boxing at Wiltwyck and started out as a middleweight. Upon his return to Brooklyn, Patterson began training at Gramercy Park with his two older brothers. When asked why he wanted to become a professional boxer, his motivations were mostly financial, replying “It’s the quickest way I know to start earning some money to help out my family.” As an Olympian, Patterson was interested in what the sport could do for him financially. Recalling his earlier motivations, Patterson waxed, “The Olympics didn’t mean a thing to me then. You couldn’t eat medals and you couldn’t pawn them for much to buy food or clothes or a car or have a

---

1 See Ashe, Hard Road to Glory, 90.
3 Ibid., 76-77.
4 Ibid., 77.
little jingling money in your pocket." After his 1952 Olympic victory, he realized that his future was wide open. Two years later, Patterson suffered his first professional defeat in a close bout with Joey Maxim. The loss to Maxim prompted Patterson to set his sights on the heavyweight title. The fight convinced him that he could someday be the champion. The young fighter commented, "Maxim showed me nothing in the ring couldn't learn to handle. And he had been a champion."

By the start of the 1960s, Patterson had established himself as the reigning heavyweight champion of the world. He had won the gold medal at the 1952 Olympics and was considered "a smoldering threat to the big championship from the day he won the 165-pound title" at the Games. At age 21, Patterson became the youngest fighter to win the heavyweight title when he beat Archie Moore in late 1956. Previous to Patterson, Joe Louis had been the youngest to win the title and Floyd's victory brought man comparisons between the new champion and those of the past.

Throughout his early years as a young fighter, Patterson enjoyed a terrific popularity in the press, largely due to his personality and much less to do with his fighting. Writers referred to his compassion and other gentle qualities that had not been normally associated with a heavyweight titleholder. One writer commented, "Patterson is not only a skillful, hard hitting champion, but a mature, compassionate young man."

---

7 Ibid., 81.
8 Floyd Patterson, "How I Lost the Title," *Sports Illustrated*, 4 June 1962, 32; Jackson, *Soul Brother*, 101.
10 Ibid., 33.
Another wrote, "A fine, young, thoughtful champion who has all the moves...Patterson has consummate hand speed....He has splendid stamina, speed afoot and heart....He is devoted to small animals and small children."[12]

Patterson was always trying to prove that he was a great fighter and that he should be included in the discussion of past champion fighters. Criticized for fighting inferior boxers, for not being able to last a full fight, and for being too nice to his opponents, Patterson was maligned by such criticisms throughout his career. He recalled that when he was "on my way up there were those that said Cus D'Amato matched me with setups. I knew different, but the criticism stung." When Patterson beat Archie Moore for the title, "it was belittled as a victory over an old man." The retirement of Rock Marciano had cast a shadow over any titleholder that followed him, including Patterson. Patterson met "what challenges there were, but I came to feel that there was some truth in that the detractors said, that my championship was almost one of default for lack of a challenger of stature. I wanted a clean-cut victory - one there couldn't be any caviling about."[13]

Patterson was convinced that this clear cut victory would be over his next opponent, Ingemar Johansson, from Sweden.

Patterson's championship bout with Johansson resulted in his loss of the title and much of his confidence.[14] It also contributed to the prevailing belief that he was not championship material. Even after he had redeemed himself with two subsequent

---

victories against the Swede, Patterson anguished over his initial loss to Johansson.\textsuperscript{15} His autobiography, written before he fought Sonny Liston and Muhammad Ali, lamented over his defeat and exposed his own neurotic insecurities about how his own identity and self-worth were tied up with his ability to punish others in the ring. Patterson wrote, "You’ve got understand how it is - being the heavyweight champion of the world and then not being the champion. You’ve got to be able to feel what it means to be somebody - to belong - and then suddenly you don’t belong, and you wonder whether you ever were meant to be a human being other people can look up to."\textsuperscript{16} After Patterson’s loss to Johansson, his victorious rematch a year later made boxing history, when he became the first and youngest fighter to ever regain his title at age 25.\textsuperscript{17} The victory over Johansson helped to solidify his shaky position with boxing writers. One commented, "With a fire burning in his head and in his dark, purposeful fists, Patterson knocked out Ingemar Johansson in the fifth round, he became the first man ever to regain the heavyweight championship of the world: in those few minutes he came of age as a man, a fighter and a hero."\textsuperscript{18} In one of his first efforts at fistic prose, a young Cassius Clay offered his version of the second Patterson-Johansson fight.

\textsuperscript{15} Patterson would win back his title from Johansson on June 20, 1960 in the 4\textsuperscript{th} round and successfully defend his title against the Swede on March 13, 1961 in the 6\textsuperscript{th} round.
\textsuperscript{17} Martin Kane, "Ingo Out - And Then...Ee-yah!," Sports Illustrated, 27 June 1960, 17.
\textsuperscript{18} Sports Illustrated, 9 January 1961, 35.
You can talk about Sweden, you can talk about Rome,
But Rockville Centre is Floyd Patterson’s home.
A lot of people said that Floyd couldn’t fight
But they should’ve seen him that comeback night.
Round five. Floyd and Johansson came out fighting pretty fast.
Floyd knocked Johansson dead on the pads.\(^{19}\)

Despite his victory and reclaiming of the heavyweight title, Patterson referred to his second fight with Johansson as the “crisis of my grown-up life. If ever I was in danger of not becoming the mixed-up mind of person again that I used to be as a kid that was the point.”\(^{20}\) The anguish and shame Patterson felt from his first loss to Johansson haunted him, even after winning his next two rematches with Johansson.\(^{21}\) Patterson questioned who he was in the ring. His comments reflect his insecurities and his belief in the fair tale qualities of his rise in boxing and American society.

Is it the man in the ring or the one outside of it? Is it the fighter who will isolate himself from his family for months on end while in training or the one who wants to watch his kids grow up more than he wants anything else? Is it the boy who once thought that if he had $300 in his pocket he’d have anything any man could desire, or the one who has learned the hard way what it costs a champion to live Is it the one who would quit boxing tomorrow if the Catholic Church decreed against it, or the one who knows how much he owes to a sport? Boxing is supposed to be a dirty business, but it has made me clean and enabled me to do some good for others. I know how far I have come from the darkness of the cellars and subways and the fears which used to haunt me and still haunt me now and then.\(^{22}\)

Patterson’s rhetorical questions posit him in an interesting light. He reveals his commitment to the sport by his time away from his family. He credits the sport with turning him into the man he had become, raising him from the “darkness.” Yet, he would

\(^{21}\) Ibid.. 72.
give it all up if his religion told him to do so. His desire to be liked and appreciated by the public was apparent. The tensions and conflicts Patterson experienced were evident by his thoughts. He had given everything he had, essentially his life and identity, to boxing and in return, he was plagued by nagging doubts and insecurities about who he was. In his third and final matchup with Johansson, Patterson emerged as victor once more in an unconvincing win. In three fights with the Swede, Patterson was 2-1 and left looking for another challenger. The next logical challenger for the title was Sonny Liston.

**Sonny Liston**

Sonny Liston’s background was more troubled and more criminal than Patterson’s stay at the Wiltwyck School. It was reported that Liston was one of 25 children and had accumulated over 19 arrests before he met Patterson in the ring. As a teen, Liston was in street fights and gangs. In 1950, he was charged with robbery and sentenced to five years in the Missouri State Penitentiary. Reflecting on his time spent behind bars, Liston was nonapologetic. “I didn’t mind prison. I figure I had to pay for what I did. No use crying. I should have tried that before I did wrong.” Like Patterson, Liston echoed the theme of boxing as a means of redemption for his troubled past.

One reason prison life may have proved to be somewhat beneficial for Liston was his relationship with Father Alois Stevens. Credited with the start of Liston’s boxing career, Father Stevens remembered Liston as “just a big, ignorant, pretty nice kid. He wasn’t smart-alecky, but he got into little scrapes...I ran him two winters in our boxing

---

27 Also see Muhammad Speaks, 18 February 1962, p. 22; Jackson, *Soul Brother*, 107-111.
24 Rogin and Sharnik, “Can’t a Fellow Make a Mistake?” 27.
program, and he wound up being inmate champ.” When Liston was released on parole. Father Stevens called reporter Bob Burnes to aid Liston in his efforts to fight outside of prison. Monroe Harrison, a former sparring partner of Joe Louis, assessed Liston’s talent and gave his opinion about the man. “Sonny’s the type of person that needs understanding...He’s vicious all the way...He needs someone to help control his emotion...I understood Sonny’s language, befriended him. I fathered him around. He needs training. He needs love. The right people have to take an interest in the boy and treat him like a member of the family.” Burnes also supported Sonny, offering a similar view. “He’s still a child, easily misled, easily misguided. I have never known Sonny to go looking for trouble.” However, once out of prison, Liston became connected to the underworld of hoodlums, specifically John Vitale, Frankie Carbo, and Blinky Palermo; Carbo and Palermo were both “facing possible maximum sentences of 85 and 125 years respectively for their illegal activities in boxing.” One policeman who claimed to have made efforts to help Liston stay away from the shady management thought little of Liston, “He’s dumb. He’s got a vicious temper.” One of his managers echoed a similar sentiment saying, “Sonny has the mind of a 12-year-old child.” Still, Father Clark, another priest who took a liking to Liston and saw a hope for redemption, believed he just needed guidance. “He needs someone to show him how to live...He needs somebody he
can turn to. If he’s supervised, he’s all right.” Liston and his alliances with Catholic priests could only help improve his image, but his affiliation with the Catholic religion, like Patterson, should be noted.

As the next legitimate contender to the heavyweight title, Liston drew a great deal of attention, not only for his skills in the ring, but for his scuffles outside it. Even before he was officially listed as the challenger to Patterson’s crown, there was a debate in the ranks of boxing authorities, the press and the sporting public over whether Liston should even be given a shot at the title. His image was tainted not only by his arrest record and time spent in prison, but also by his affiliation with mobsters and fellows that boxing authorities felt were elements not welcome in the sport that was already in ill-repute.

No matter how many new managers Liston hired to prove his dealings with the underground were severed, the sports world was slow to accept his redemption. Despite all the delays, Liston, as a fighter, was undeniably deserving of the chance to meet Patterson. Patterson was anxious to meet Liston for several reasons: mainly to squash talk of his unwillingness to fight top contenders and to finally get the chance to prove his boxing greatness to the sporting world.

Writers from *Sports Illustrated* pressed Patterson to sign a contract with Liston. While they conceded that it was Patterson’s prerogative, as the champion, to fight “occasional bums,” and likened him in that way to Joe Louis, who had fought a bum of the month club, they challenged the legitimacy of the “gold crown given Patterson b

---

D'Amato" if he failed to fight an opponent equal in talent. They felt that Liston was entitled to a shot at the title, though they questioned his affiliations with mobsters. If Liston were controlled by mobsters, as reports suggested, they recommended that Liston break ties and the mobsters be driven out of business. As part of an effort to clean up the image of Sonn Liston and to perhaps present him as an acceptable challenger and heir to the heavyweight throne, Sports Illustrated published a feature article on Liston that detailed his troubled past, but more importantly, focused on his efforts of redemption. The article was published a year and a half prior to his first encounter in the ring with Patterson.

There was little doubt that Liston could handle Patterson physically, but serious concerns as to his ability to handle being the heavyweight champion were the subject of great debate. Pennsylvania Boxing Commissioner Alfred Klein was opposed to Liston fighting for the title. Klein felt that Liston had let boxing down, and that the fighter "continues to fail to show that he has any perception of his position as a potential heavyweight champion." When the boxing commission denied Liston a license to fight Patterson, his failed efforts at redemption were cited. Liston had twice before, in times of trouble, turned to clergymen for supervision and guidance. He failed on both occasions.

In preparation for the fight against Patterson, and to support his claims of seeking another chance and a change from his troubled past, Liston lived for three months in a Denver rectory and worked with Father Edward Murphy, learning to read, write and "become a

26 Ashe, Hard Road to Glory, 94; Cleaver, "Lazarus, Come Forth," 92; Jackson, Soul Brother, 109.
27 "Editorials: Clear up the Liston Case." Sports Illustrated, 29 August 1960, 8.
28 Rogin and Sharnik, "Can't a Fellow Make a Mistake?" Muhammad Speaks, 18 February 1962, 22.
law-abiding citizen." Liston waxed his own philosophy about the commission’s decision. “I still think it’s an injustice, but fretting over it can’t change it. When I started boxing, I never thought things like this could happen. To me, boxing was a sport - like baseball. When a man steps up to the plate, he either hits that ball or he don’t. That’s what he’s judged on, not who he is or where he came from. Seems there’s more politics than sport in boxing now.” Somewhere along the way, Liston had been fed the line about sports being an equal playing field and that meritocracy, or one’s ability in the ring, would determine the person’s outcome, as opposed to having his past held against him.

In a February 1962 issue of *Sports Illustrated*, the sporting weekly asked for the opinions on Liston’s potential shot at the title. The magazine queried, “Sport’s liveliest ‘moral’ controversy rages over Sonny Liston. Is Sonny fit to challenge for - and possibl hold - the championship?” To peak the interest of readers and perhaps to get a variety of viewpoints, *Sports Illustrated* went to several people involved in the sports world for their impressions of Liston and his right to meet Champion Patterson in the ring. The responses varied. Many of the respondents mentioned Liston’s criminal past as an issue that could not be overlooked, while others saw the fight as an opportunity for Liston to redeem himself. Jackie Robinson, always a significant source because of his role in the reintegration of baseball, replied, “Personally, I would like to see Floyd fight Liston, although I think Patterson would demolish the man. To prove himself to the public, think Patterson has to fight him. Floyd has contributed a lot to boxing but still hasn’t

---

29 Rogin and Sharnik. “Can’t a Fellow Make a Mistake?” 49.
31 Jack McKinney. “Can a Man Turn a Whole Town Rotten in One Night?” *Sports Illustrated*, 14 Ma
been completely accepted...I am disappointed that Liston’s record isn’t much better.”

Robinson’s disappointment in Liston’s record is one indication that there was an expectation of Black athletes to behave in a certain manner to be acceptable to the white sporting public and to help the cause of other Black athletes. Branch Rickey, retired baseball executive and equally important in baseball’s efforts to desegregate, felt strongly that Liston was undeserving of a chance at the title and that boxing, itself, was a sport in need of help. “It’s plain greed on the part of somebody that brings a character of that type into public view. I tried to believe I had enough respect for Patterson that he wouldn’t get down to that level. Boxing is sick - a messy business. I don’t think any human being gets beyond the state of redemption. But I don’t think Liston has given any indication he wants to be redeemed.” Fellow black athlete, Bill White, first baseman for the St. Louis Cardinals was in the camp that viewed the bout as a chance for Liston to repair his broken image. He replied, “By what I understand to be the Christian principle, every man should have chance. And I think that if Sonny Liston should become the champion it would help further his rehabilitation - if he hasn’t been rehabilitated already. From a sports standpoint, the man deserves a chance if he is a good boxer.” Congressman and minister, Adam Clayton Powell, agreed with White, responding, “I believe that it is fundamental in our democracy that every man be given a second chance.” Author Harry Golden was most objective, answering from a pure fan perspective, “The heavyweight championship fight is something all by itself. One can sit and watch the participants come down the aisle. The suspense is dreadful and stimulating. The two men sit in their corners, and the

1962. 72.

117
hearts of the spectators pound. Nothing like it. Den Liston, who can use his fists, this chance? Free enterprise is at stake. We need a shock to get us away from our pat attitudes on values. A title fight with Liston and Patterson certainly would be a shock.

Liston’s management was a central issue in the question and the prevailing vision that he was controlled by gangsters and racketeers troubled everyone involved in boxing. To increase his chances at a shot at the title, Liston changed management twice before being granted a shot at Patterson. The delays led to Patterson again feeling insecure, as it was reported in the press that they were actually due to Patterson fearing a match with Liston. To which Patterson responded with, “I’m a man. Any man can say he’ll beat me, but no man can say I’m afraid of him.” Patterson appeared to support the efforts to get a match between the two fighters and seemed unfazed by his possible opponent’s past problems. Patterson felt that Liston, had paid for his shortcomings. “They tell me he carries himself like a tough guy. But maybe that’s because he had no education. He’s had a pretty tough life. I think Liston will realize the responsibility he has to the boys of America if he wins the championship.” If the sport could help Floyd. Floyd is sure that it can help another troubled young man, but what champion would think ahead to a match and envision the responsibility of his opponent to be a good champion. What champion would believe that his opponent had a shot at the title? Perhaps these are small indications of Patterson’s insecurities.

34 Ibid., 8.
Patterson held himself in some respects as a good judge of character, able to predict that Liston could and would prove himself to be an acceptable champion and a good man. Patterson enjoyed his status as champion, the support of the NAACP and his ability to give a criminal a shot at the dream he had enjoyed. He viewed Liston in a much different light than the press, seeing the challenger as merely having a "chip on his shoulder." Initially, Patterson disliked Liston and stated that if he was afraid to fight Liston, he could have easily avoided the fight, in part because that's what was largely expected of him. He noted that there was good reason to have concern about a Liston fight: among them, his background, the refusal of the New York State Athletic Commission to license Liston, and the pressures placed on him not to fight a hardened criminal with ties to mobsters. Patterson mentioned that his fellow members of the NAACP, as well as Ralph Bunche of the United Nations and Jackie Robinson, had let him know that Liston did not deserve a shot at the title because of his criminal record. But Patterson relented, citing the fact that "so many people in the Negro community have not been given the chance to lift themselves above the surroundings into which they had been pushed. How could I refuse this chance to Liston, who paid the price the law demanded? I could have been just like him if I hadn't been given a chance when I was younger." Patterson recalled his own troubled youth, as an "emotional delinquent," and was grateful that his trouble led him to the Wiltwyck School, instead of a trip to prison. Patterson credited Wiltwyck with providing him with "understanding treatment and consideration," and as a result, removing the chip he had on his shoulder. Warned that
Liston as the champion could “bring discredit to the Negroes’ position,” Patterson urged that “a championship brings out the best in a man. It could bring out the best in Liston.”

While Patterson pointed to his own membership in the NAACP, Liston echoed the criticisms concerning Patterson’s past opponents, but also pointed out the color of the opponents facing the champion. “Why shouldn’t I resent him? He runs from Negro opponents. That man’s prejudiced. He hasn’t fought a Negro since Hurricane Jackson. I hate him.” That both Patterson and Liston were African American was important to the fight in that it was harder for the press to dichotomize the fighters into distinguishable categories, two African American fighters, thus Patterson’s clean image was put up against Liston’s criminal record. Liston had his own hopes for the title and what it would mean to him, hoping the title would mean a change in his image. “When I gets to be champion I know I can change a lot of minds about me. I’m gonna be a good champ, a fighting champ and a friendly champ.” Sonny saw boxing as his salvation and attempted to show his willingness to change. “There’s two ways to go in this life - the right way and the wrong way. I took the wrong way first and I paid for my mistake. Now I’m taking the right way and nothing’s gonna change me.” Many would promote the fight as “good nigger” versus “bad nigger.” The race politics of boxing were now black versus black, as there was no white hope in sight.

37 McKinney. “Can a Man.” 73.
38 Ashe. Hard Road to Glory. 91.
Each fighter had different views and philosophies on the civil rights movement surrounding them. Patterson supported integration and had faced several situations as champion that indicated his title was often meaningless when it came to “real life.” In 1959, Patterson was “refused a dish of ice cream in a segregated Indianapolis candy shop” and instead of identifying himself as the heavyweight champion of the world, chose not to speak up. “I won’t always be the champ, but I’ll always be a man....I don’t want to go into a place where other Negroes can’t go.” He recognized the limitations a Black athlete faced in America. When he was hired in Sweden to endorse clothes, he asked, “Where in America would I be asked to model suits?” He referred to himself a Negro, a common term of the 1950s, but it was also reflective of his thinking. “I was a Negro and I wanted to be accepted for what I had always been, not for what I had become. I knew that, champion or no champion. I’d still be called names by the ignorant, still face segregation and discrimination.” Other ways that Patterson indicated his level of race consciousness was his forcing fights to have integrated seating, donating shares of his winnings to the NAACP, and going to Birmingham with Jackie Robinson for civil rights demonstrations. He felt had a duty to the Black community to be involved in issues that faced Black Americans, though he was not considered militant or even mildly outspoken. Patterson was conservative in his approach to change. “I live with myself, look at myself in the mirror each morning. Whatever I can do to relieve my conscience I will do. You have to have respect for yourself. You have to put first things first. I’m not a politician.

41 Patterson, “How I Lost the Title,” Sports Illustrated, 4 June 1962, 32.
and I’m not a leader. I just like to be an active participant, one of the crowd. But I have no respect for the Black Muslims." Those feelings would become more clear before his fight with Muhammad Ali.

While Patterson favored integration and demonstrations, Liston was one step further on the continuum, advocating action, as opposed to patience. When asked his opinion of the civil rights movement, Liston’s reply was “I think those Freedom Riders is stupid. That ain’t no way to do things. You have to fight for what you get....If some sucker comes along and blows up my house, then someone else’s house is going to be blown up. And the next time this sucker ain’t going to be in no hurry to go blow up houses.” His eye for an eye attitude translated into violent punches in the ring. In the aftermath of four Birmingham girls killed in a church bombing, Liston was quoted as saying, “I’m ashamed to say I’m in America.” Liston also refused to permit theaters that had segregated seating to show televised pictures of his fights.

The oddsmakers favored Liston to beat the champion. Patterson knew this and was well aware of his challenger’s great confidence. “The odds have been against me since this fight was signed, and from what I’ve read in the press a lot of the reporters believe Sonny will be too much for me.” Though he was finally meeting the challenge and his critics head on by agreeing to fight Liston in the ring, Patterson was not even full convinced of his abilities to continue his reign. Worried that if he “should happen to be

42 Rogin, “Meeting in Miami.” 18.
43 Gilbert Rogin, “‘I Live With Myself.’” Sports Illustrated, 6 August 1963. 27.
44 Rogin and Sharnik, “Can’t a Fellow Make a Mistake?” 49-50.
45 Ashe, Hard Road to Glory. 94.
successful against Liston," he would still not get the recognition he felt he deserved, and would still not be recognized as "a great champion or even an outstandingly good one."

Patterson revealed his doubts about his upcoming fight, but continued to anguish over past reports of his inabilities. Plagued by what reporters and critics had said in the past, he thought that a victory would result in reporters finding "some reason to diminish the value of the victory." On one hand, Patterson was convinced that he would never be recognized without qualification, and in the next breath contradicted himself claiming, "I'm satisfied with the recognition I have now. I was the youngest ever to win the title and the only man to ever regain it. If I win this time I will prove to myself that I'm a better champion than even I gave myself credit for being." Patterson went so far as to even speculate about the possibilities of Liston winning. "If Liston should beat me, there is a return bout due. If I beat him there are other opponents."

**Patterson vs. Liston - September 25, 1962, Comiskey Park, Chicago.**

Floyd Patterson and Sonny Liston finally met in the ring in September 1962 on the infield of Chicago's Comiskey Park. Originally scheduled for New York, Liston was unable to receive a license because of his past associations with known mobsters and was finally granted a license in Illinois. Liston knocked Patterson out in the first round in two minutes and six seconds and no sooner did he predict "You're next, Loudmouth" to onlooker Cassius Clay. Liston began to speak of the opportunities he would now have as champion- to talk to children, to make a difference, and to change the minds of all those folks who only thought of him as a bad man. He saw his victory as a part of a bigger

---

picture, saying that the win "means more to me than what Martin Luther King - what he's fighting for down there." After winning the title, the race issue and the civil rights movement surfaced in the discussion of the newly crowned Liston. Sonny resented the "fact that many Negroes did not want to see him become champion," and criticized the NAACP for suggesting to Patterson that Liston was not a worthy opponent. Angry because they scrutinized his past, he was even more nerved by their response to his victory. "They wanted to take the sport out of it. When Joe Louis was fightin', the didn’t ask a man’s past. Then after I won they had the nerve to ask for $500." When asked why he didn’t go to Birmingham for civil rights demonstrations, Sonny responded, "They don’t fight fair. They don’t fight my kind of fight. ain’t got a dogproof butt. Some cop puts a hose on me, and I’ll forget where I am." Sonny’s view of passive sit-ins echoed his earlier comments about blowing up houses. "Those people are crazy. The say love when some guy is beatin’ on their head or burnin’ their house. Me, if they burned my house, I’d burn theirs, and if they beat me, I’d beat them.” Patterson’s response to Liston and what he considered Black militant thinking was “Two wrongs don’t make a right.” But Liston’s vision was emerging more reflective and representative of African Americans during this time period and their increasing discontent. Patterson was supportive of a Martin Luther King, Jr. and middle-class NAACP mentality in their fight for integration, while Liston represented the lower-class disenfranchised African Americans who languished in urban centers.

---

For Liston the title represented to him the long awaited opportunity for him to be seen in a more positive light and the chance to impact others.

I want to reach my own people and tell them, ‘You don’t have to worry about me stopping your progress.’ I want to go to colored churches and colored neighborhood groups. I want them to see me and hear what I have to say, what I have to promise. I know it was in some of the papers that the better class of colored people were hoping I’d lose, even praying I’d lose because they was afraid I wouldn’t know how to act. I really don’t believe the was all hoping I’d lose even though it was in some of the colored papers that way.

Liston recognized that there was a large section of African Americans who feared his image becoming representative of their community in America. Just as a Joe Louis victory had been a symbolic victory for all Blacks in the first half of the century, the implications of a Sonny Liston victory were unpredictable and possibly detrimental, especially considering the “progress” that had been made and the direction they were headed. Even Liston recalled listening to the fights of boyhood idol, Louis, and that every announcer said Louis was “A great fighter and a credit to his race.” Such claims about Louis made Liston proud of being Black. Still, his quote reveals three things: his choice of identifiable terms was colored, he read or was read article from African American newspapers, and was concerned about what people in his community thought about him. He intimated that he would use the title as a turning point in his life. He urged sportswriters to make a deal with him. “If I do something bad, I want them to tell the world about it. But if I do something good, I want them to tell the world about that, too. When I said all I wanted was the chance to prove myself, I meant it. I never meant anything more. And if the time comes around and I haven’t been a credit to my race, too.

then I want to give Patterson the title back - just give it back. And he don't even have to fight me for it."^50 A symbolic gesture no doubt, but one that reflects his understanding that he needed to express a sincere desire to change and for acceptance to gain the support and recognition of all factions in the sporting community: white fans, black fans, NAACP fans, lower-class fans.

Patterson continued the dialogue concerning Liston's ability to represent boxing well. "I think he's a great fighter but people won't accept him because he's not a great man. But he can be a good man if he gets the chance to show what's within him. I think it will surprise a lot of people...If they'd only believe Liston was any kind of human being."^51 Liston's triumph did little to alter his press or public image. One writer harshly wrote. "His own social and intellectual inadequacies added to his problem." He perceived him as "remote and uncommunicative." and although not stupid. "his insights are impeded by his neuroses. Emotionally he is a child - stubborn obdurate and completely lacking in flexibility."^52 He was seen as "verging on the indigestible...as an uneducated boor, a semireconstructed no-account subject to instant relapse, a beast in beast's clothing." Another writer put it in different terms. "The tepid publicity campaign to pass off the heavyweight champion as a Good Humor man in disguise has fallen as flat as Floyd Patterson."^53 Writers from the Black press were slightly more willing to give the new champion a chance. Wendell Smith, from the Pittsburgh Courier, thought that Liston's post-fight press conference gave the fighter a chance to finally reveal his true intentions.

---

^51 Ibid., 22-23.
^52 McKinney. "He's Mad." 118.
self, and wrote in his weekly column that he and other reporters "were pleased to learn that he isn't a mean, incorrigible individual." Smith commented that Liston even reminded him of a young Joe Louis, honest and outspoken, "with a twinkle in his eye and a folksy sense of humor." Smith's colleague at the weekly, William C. Nunn was a bit more skeptical, but still open to the possibilities of Liston. Nunn was up front with his hesitations about Liston, and put the new champion in the context he belonged. Nunn stated that Liston "follows in the footsteps of a number of Negro athletes who also have held the fabulous title," and mentioned the legacies of Joe Louis, Ezzard Charles, Jersey Joe Walcott, and Floyd Patterson. Each of these fighters, Nunn wrote, had contributed in their own unique way, but "all of these men were a credit to their profession, their country, their race." They were a symbol of something clean, decent and American.

Nunn felt that America, especially "Negro" America, was willing and ready, although anxious, to give Sonny Liston his chance to continue the legacy of these fighters. Nunn noted America's skepticism, but also the fairness of the nation, that "if you act the part of champion, we believe America will accept you."\(^{54}\) The columns of African American reporters, while conceding that Liston had been in trouble before, were willing to give the fighter a chance, but they also put him into a perspective that relied on the fighter being representative of his race and community to gain the acceptance of Americans, both black and white.


After Liston beat Patterson, the loser withdrew from the boxing scene, and was even rumored to have donned a disguise to escape the public. Many writers reflected on the insecurities and inconsistencies of the former champ. "What a strange champion Patterson was," they wrote. "What a suffering, bewildered and confused man. He fought superbly only twice in recent years: against Archie Moore and against Ingemar Johansson the second time. The rest of his fights ranged from bad to mediocre....He appears to live in continuing dread of critical examination and appraisal when he stands alone. practically naked, before millions. Is it rejection he fears?" To that they quoted Patterson as saying, "Losing is nothing to be ashamed of. It is something to hide from. Because if a person is defeated he feels shame. This is me. I try to change but I can't." He struggled with the expectations that he felt others had put onto him.

Nobody wanted me to make the fight. The NAACP. Senator Kefauver. boxing commissioners, everybody was telling me not to make the fight. I had every out possible...Personally, I believed it was my obligation as a champion to give the No. 1 challenger a chance at the title. Else what right would I have to call myself champion? If Liston was undesirable, why did they allow him to fight his way up to the No. 1 spot?...Letters poured in telling me I got to beat Liston for the good of this or the good of that. It seemed to build up in my mind so that it was no longer a fight but matter of state importance. It became the people's fight, and the people lost.56

2nd Patterson-Liston fight, Las Vegas, Nevada, July 22, 1963

Patterson would get a return match with Liston a year after their first meeting.

The leadup to their second matchup lacked the controversial debate over Liston's right to get into the ring.57 In his first defense of the title, Liston beat Patterson once more, this

57 For articles on the fight preparation, see Pittsburgh Courier. 18 July 1963 and 27 July 1963.
time, needing four more seconds for a total fight time of two minutes and ten seconds.

Liston had outmatched Patterson in two fights and Patterson was out of contention for the heavyweight title. One boxing pundit wrote, “Actually, there was no fight. Liston simply bullied and bashed Patterson into the canvas like a street-corner tough smacking down a dreamy schoolboy. To Liston, Floyd was not an opponent, he was an annoyance - and, with crushing finality, the annoyance was brushed aside. It was done sullenly, without zest or cheer, and consequently it was an apt measure of the man Liston is.” His second victory over Patterson only confirmed his strength and dominance in the ring. His redemption though had still not arrived. *Sports Illustrated* wrote.

It is part of the American dream that a man can rise above his past and be hailed as all the greater for it. In the old days, when Liston was lusting for the title, and the tough guys were obviously around, he was a personable man of rough graces...He knocked around and was knocked around. He did time. All he needed was a chance. He was uneducated, but he was smart, had a good sense of humor and was observant. Full redemption would come with the championship. Then he would show the world the kind of man he really is....Liston has had the championship for almost a year now, and in that time he has become insufferable.58

Still, this was a view from a mainstream, essentially white, sports weekly. African American sports writers viewed Liston’s rehabilitation and reign as champion much differently, with one suggesting that both Liston and boxing be applauded “for the rehabilitation that has changed him into a symbolic and useful citizen,” not to mention “his vicious punching prowess.” Another penned in his weekly column that the saga of Liston typified the “rags-to-riches theme that is so often played in the incredible surroundings of sports.” This reporter wrote that America was a place where men are

“humiliated and stagnant because of the pigment of his skin,” but that athletes, if they possessed the skills, “could even overcome the burden of his heritage.” Liston was such a man in the young reporter’s eyes. In a growing tradition, Cassius Clay, the young fighter and hopeful challenger, penned a poem detailing the matchup between Liston and Patterson.

It was a spectacular fight
at the park that night.
Liston hit Floyd
and knocked him out of sight.
Liston’s dynamite blows
caught Floyd on the side.
Nothing could help the champ.
not even his pride.
Liston was hungry,
rough and tough.
and the champ
soon had enough
As the people left the park.
you could hear them say.
Liston will stay king,
until he meets that Clay.^

Liston’s next challenge appeared to be far off, as there was no one near his ability in the ring. Any fighter who dared to challenge the champ was still years away from being prepared for what Liston had to offer. “Sonn Liston would appear to rank with the better heavyweight champions...Liston is far and away the class now and there appears to be no one around to challenge his supremacy. Young Cassius Clay might give him a fair tussle in a few years, for here is a swift and dazzling boxer and a strong hitter, too....at the

moment, Cassius is far from ready.61 Most agreed, including Wendell Smith, who wrote that Clay could meet Liston in the ring, but that he could not "fight the likes of Sonn Liston and escape disaster." He did concede though that Clay "had added color to what has been a dull heavyweight picture." Moreover, he had been a "delightful relief in these days of uncolored warriors." Smith found Clay's chatter "amusing and intriguing," not only to him, but to millions of people and credited Clay and his rantings with having a "stimulating impact" and arousing the curiosity "of the most blasé individuals." Still, Smith stated very simply that no one should get excited about Clay's chances against Liston, because he didn't have any.62

Cassius Clay/Muhammad Ali

Cassius Clay was introduced to boxing at the age of 12.63 His Aunt recalled that from that age on he just lived at that gym. Another relative believed boxing gave the young man an outlet: "Cassius was looking for a refuge, and he found it in boxing." Ali remembers his introduction to the sport as a means of disciplining himself. "It's all could really do." He saw no future in education and boxing offered him something to do daily, rather than merely hanging out on the streets doing nothing.64 Unlike the Patterson

---

61 Rogin, "The Facts About the Big Fight." Sports Illustrated. 8 October 1962, 22. Also see Pittsburgh Courier. 3 August 1963.
and Liston, Clay avoided trouble, largely as a result of his devotion to boxing and the
time the sport consumed. Clay realized that boxing could provide for him in ways that no
other profession could. His early motivations for fighting were encouraged by the mone
he won in the ring. "I don't really love to fight, you see, but as long as I'm doing it I sure
don't want to do it for free...The fame and pride of doing something real well - like being
the world champion - is a pretty nice thing to think about sometimes, but the money I'm
making is nice to think about all the time. I suppose it's the one thing that keeps me
going." By the time Clay met Liston in the ring as a challenger, he had already earned $1
million with his fists.

Think about that. A southern colored boy has made $1 million just as he turns 22.
I don't think it's bragging to say I'm something a little special...Where do you
think I would be next week if I didn't know how to shout and holler and make the
public sit up and take notice? I would be poor, for one thing, and I would
probably be down in Louisville, Ky., my hometown, washing windows or running
an elevator and saying "yes suh" and "no suh" and knowing my place. Instead of
that, I'm saying I'm one of the highest-paid athletes in the world, which is true,
and that I'm the greatest fighter in the world, which I hope and pray is true.65

Sponsored by the Louisville Group, a collective of white businessmen from Clay's
hometown, the fighter's backers were a breath of fresh air to the dirty world of boxing.

In opposition to the mobsters that surrounded Liston, the issue of Clay's "right" to fight
for the title never came into question. The guidance of the Louisville Group provided the
young fighter with "the benefit of all their experience and business acumen, and the
surround him with a substantial moral and ethical environment, a rare commodity in
professional boxing." One of Clay's backers said, "Our motive is to do something for
boxing at a time the sport needs help...We’ve shown it is not a sport that must be
controlled by the underworld.” Another noted the value of white businessmen owning
apart of a Black commodity. “You know it doesn’t hurt sales in the Negro market if some
of Clay’s sponsors happen to be strongly identified with - shall we say - consumer
products.” Clay’s backers sought to control who represented the heavyweight
championship title, and in Clay, had found a suitable replacement for Liston. Their
involvement in sponsoring Clay was their contribution to the improvement of the image
of boxing as a sport and of the titleholder. “We are behind Cassius Clay to improve the
breed of boxing, to do something nice for a deserving, well-behaved Louisville boy and.
finally, to save him from the jaws of the hoodlum jackals.” These men felt as if their
investment in Clay would improve the fighter and the sport, not to mention their personal
business interests.

Former champ Archie Moore, and a victim of Clay’s fists gave his view of the up
and coming fighter. He said, “He’s like a man that can write beautifully but doesn’t
know how to punctuate... He is certainly coming along at a time when a new face is
needed on the boxing scene.” Clay, while seen as the next heavyweight great, was
predicted to be too inexperienced to face a man of Liston’s size, strength, and experience.
“Cassius Clay...is an authentic heavyweight...Clay has faster hands than anyone his size
and a complete arsenal of punches...He would be the betting favorite tomorrow against
any heavyweight except Sonn Liston.” The fight would come sooner than predicted.

Despite the oddsmakers tagging him as a longshot, Cassius Clay signed a contract to fight Liston. Clay’s lawyer attempted to delay the bout, confident that his client was unprepared for such a challenge. “We argued that he needed more experience, that Liston was too strong right now,” but Clay insisted and his advisors were left to conclude that he “does not try to learn anything from one fight to the next and really doesn’t care about becoming one of the finest heavyweight who ever lived. All he wants is to be the richest.” Ultimately, Clay got his way and the fight was on. Days after the ink was dry on the contract, Clay got a notice from his draft board for a preinduction physical. However, the military could be deferred on account of the scheduled fight. Clay commented, “The government will make a couple million dollars out of a title fight, so they’d be smart to let me go on.” Liston wondered if the military would even want Clay after he was through with him. Still, many viewed the young fighter, with only 19 professional fights under his belt, as the savior of the tainted and corrupt boxing world, though most thought he could not beat the champion. But Clay, who was his own best salesman, essentially made himself the official, though some thought illogical, challenger to Liston. Former champ Rocky Marciano saw the Liston-Clay bout as a “mismatch of the first magnitude.”

Historian Jeffre Sammons detailed the entrance of the fresh face on the boxing scene. Though Clay was clearly the underdog, Sammons claimed that the young, handsome, witty and brash fighter stole the thunder of the champ, who by then had worn out his welcome in the fight world, as he was still unable to shake his bad guy image. During the

---

Liston-Patterson bout, Clay had provided the entertainment when he “threatened to
destroy the big ugly bear.” Sammons saw the fighter’s antics as helpful to boxing,
especially to the gate, and marveled at Clay’s ability to attract both his fans and those who
viewed him with contempt to see him fight.69 Sports reporter Bill Nunn, Jr. referred to
Clay as the “brash and handsome Louisville Lip,” and agreed that most of Clay’s prefight
antics were “designed primarily to lure fans to his fights.”70 While many thought that
banter was prefight publicity, it became a legitimate grudge match when Clay ribbed
Liston about his prison record.71 Unlike the Patterson-Liston fight, which had pitted two
African Americans against each other, with Patterson cast as “good nigger” and Liston
cast as “bad nigger,” the Clay-Liston fight did not pit the two Black boxers in such a
light. Clay was more of an unknown, but his outgoing personality charmed, or at the ver
least fascinated, the public. Liston had moved beyond his criminal record, but had failed
to make an impression on boxing or America, lacking the personality of his challenger.
Even Clay knew that his chatter did not endear him as a fan favorite. “It’s easier to like an
ugly old man than it is to like a loudmouth kid, and everybody wants him to teach me a
lesson.” Clay’s prefight personality had “become like an emery paper: it sparkles a little
and grates a lot.”72

69 Jeffrey T. Sammons, Beyond the Ring: The Role of Boxing in American Society. (Urbana: University of
72 Clay. “‘I’m a Little Special.’” 15.

135
For all the prognosticating about the fight, Liston continued to be the favorite. His size and strength, along with his brutal left jab, made him an overwhelming pick. Clay was not ready to go down quickly. It was believed that his best weapon against Liston might actually be “his very arrogance, his youthful, absurd confidence.” When considering defeat, Clay was sure it would be no easy victory for the champ. He thought that there might be a slim chance that he could lose to Liston, but for the champ to keep his title, Clay predicted that Liston would have to “knock me down and then I’ll get up and he’ll have to knock me down again and I’ll still get up....I’m gonna have to be killed before I lose and I ain’t going to die easy.” He was unsure about his future after the fight. “I have to go into the Army pretty soon, and after that I don’t know.”

Sonny Liston vs. Cassius Clay. Miami Beach. February 25, 1964

When the two fighters finally met in the ring in Miami Beach, Clay beat Liston when the Champ remained in his corner at the start of the seventh round. Sports Illustrated called it “an enormously exciting fight,” matching the “classic contenders for a heavyweight championship of the world - a beautiful, controlled boxer against a man who could hit with deadly power.” Liston, who had once seemed like Superman in the ring had been beaten convincingly and one writer commented that “It seemed wrong, somehow, to feel sorry for Sonn Liston.” The victory appeared to be “the best of all

---

74 Clay. “‘I’m a Little Special.’” 15.
possible solutions to the ills that beset the world of boxing.” Liston had already beaten all the top contenders. Clay, however, had not and it seemed as if he would have several good fights in from of him. First on his agenda was a rematch with Liston.

First on America’s agenda though was Clay’s religious conversion, his membership in the Nation of Islam, and his subsequent name change to Cassius X and then to Muhammad Ali. In the days prior to the fight, he had been seen with Malcolm X. Malcolm X, in his acclaimed autobiography, recounted his first introduction to Ali, when he was called Cassius Clay. Clay, with his brother Rudolph, attended a rally at a Detroit Mosque in 1962. Clay introduced himself to Malcolm X before the rally and in a manner that indicated the militant Muslim should recognize the young fighter. Malcolm X recalled that “Up to that moment, though. I had never even heard of him. Ours were two entirely different worlds. In fact, Elijah Muhammad instructed us Muslims against all forms of sports.”

Malcolm X accompanied Clay to Miami for his challenge of Sonn Liston. At this time, Malcolm X was under suspension in the Nation of Islam for comments he had made regarding the assassination of President Kennedy and his presence at Clay’s training camp further displeased Elijah Muhammad. Recalling the pre-fight chances of a Clay upset, Malcolm X said, “They felt that Cassius hadn’t a prayer of a chance to win. They felt the Nation would be embarrassed through my linking the Muslim image with him.” He noted proof of the Nation of Islam’s feeling that Clay would be defeated b

---

their failure to have a representative from *Muhammad Speaks* at the fight. "Even though Cassius was a Muslim brother, the Muslim newspaper didn't consider his fight worth covering." Malcolm X claimed that despite this lack of faith the Muslims had in Clay, he knew that Clay would emerge victorious. "I flew back to Miami feeling it was Allah's intent for me to help Cassius prove Islam's superiority before the world - through proving that mind can win over brawn." Malcolm X appealed to Clay through religion and his role as a part of the larger struggle between Muslims and Christians. Malcolm X saw the fight as "the truth." He called it a "modern crusade," with the "Cross and the Crescent fighting in the prize ring - for the first time." He asked, "Do you think Allah has brought all this intending for you to leave the ring anything but the champion?"^^

Clay's rumored Nation of Islam Muslim membership was confirmed at a press conference in the days following the fight. In the days prior to the fight, Clay's camp had denied that the young fighter was affiliated with the controversial religious sect.^^ After the fight, the press focused more on the conversion of Ali than his surprise victory over Liston. There was a widespread belief that the Muslim titleholder would ruin boxing. Sammons wrote that even "enemies of organized crime openly stated their preference for mob control of the heavyweight crown rather than have it in Black Muslim hands." and moreover, the title was "too important to relinquish to 'enemies' of American values, and

extreme measures would be employed to recapture it." Such extreme measures would become clearer in the next months of the new champ's reign. The racial rhetoric and the image of Malcolm X as a leading figure of the religion led most Americans, both white and black, to have a fear and misunderstanding of the Nation of Islam and the new champ.

At a press conference in the days following his victory, Ali shared the belief held by Nation of Islam leader, Elijah Muhammad, that Allah had helped lead him to the title, certainly more humble than many victors. In response to the fighter's victory, Elijah Muhammad said, "I'm so glad that Cassius Clay admits he is a Muslim. He was able, by confessing that Allah was the God and by following Muhammad, to whip a much tougher man....Clay had confidence in Allah, and in me as his only Messenger. This assured his victory and left him unscarred." Malcolm X also sang his praises while ridiculing the press for doubting his talents and for not understanding the racial significance of his win. "Clay is the finest Negro athlete I have ever known," Malcolm X said, "the man who will mean more to his people than any athlete before him. He is more than Jackie Robinson was, because Robinson is the white man's hero. But Cassius is the black man's hero. Do

---

80 Sammons. Beyond the Ring. 183.

139
you know why? Because the white press wanted him to lose. They wanted him to lose because he is a Muslim. You notice nobody cares about the religion of other athletes. But their prejudice against Clay blinded them to his ability." But prior to the fight little had been mentioned concerning Clay’s religion, much less pegging him as an underdog for religious reasons. Ali spoke of his beliefs, which bothered many because they did not include a desire for integration and he expressed a pride in his blackness like no other black athlete. Ali said, “I am a black man who has adopted Islam. I want peace, and I do not find peace in an integrated world. I love to be black, and I love to be with my people. I am a very intelligent boxer, you know, and people don’t ask me about my muscles the way they would ask Liston or Patterson. They ask me about Zanzibar and Panama and Cuba, and I tell them what I think.” It was revealed that he had been studying the religion for years and for anyone who doubted his sincerity, he made a strong statement in support of his religion when he said, “If I had to give up my fighting or my religion, I already know what I would do. I would give up boxing and never look back.” Just as Patterson had said he would give up boxing if his Catholic religion required such a decision, Ali proclaimed his own commitment to his faith and it’s priority over boxing. Again, similar to both Patterson and Liston, Ali was intent on being a good champion that could be respected. “I’m going to be a gentleman, be a clean image for children.”

After his victory, Ali began to appear on the pages of the Nation of Islam’s paper, Muhammad Speaks, on a weekly basis, sometimes related to his boxing, but more often as a spokesman for the group. He did this in several ways; traveling internationally as a

representative of the Nation of Islam, entering the ring as its representative, speaking with Black leaders across America and the world, and acting as a disciple of Elijah Muhammad. Literally, in each of the hundreds of articles about his boxing over the course of six years, Ali attributed his success to Elijah Muhammad, his membership in the Nation of Islam and to Allah. Two weeks after Ali had won the title, Elijah Muhammad authored a cover story, "They Hate the Champ," that was the beginning of a campaign to promote Ali as a Muslim and as a Black man who did not need white America for his success, and was in fact, a source of discontent for white America. Sport historian David Wiggins views Ali as "the movement's most important symbol of black masculinity, a man of heroic stature who came to represent the struggle for civil rights." This theme of Ali as a target of discrimination by white America was consistent over the next five years, with much of it serving to fuel the aims of the Nation of Islam. Wiggins credits Elijah Muhammad with recognizing the symbolic importance of Ali as a Muslim heavyweight champion and his subsequent orchestration of "a public relations campaign that transformed Ali into the movement’s leading example of black pride." Moreover, Muhammad "used the controversy surrounding Ali to his own advantage, branding criticism of the heavyweight champion as religious persecution and hatred of Muslims." Wiggins notes that around the time of Ali's entrance into the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X had been suspended and then removed from the organization, making it perfect timing for a young, charismatic leader to continue spreading the

27.
55 Wiggins, "Victory for Allah," 89.
message. Muhammad used Ali as an "example of righteousness for blacks who had been instilled with a false sense of racial inferiority by white Christian Americans."^86 Muhammad's newspaper, *Muhammad Speaks*, was a prominent means of using Ali in such a way. Moreover, Ali's revelation, that he had indeed joined the Muslim faith, gave the group "the shot-in-the-arm the sect has needed for some time."^87

His public image was shaped by the newspaper and was in sharp contrast to the images that white writers presented. *Muhammad Speaks* documented Ali's donations, his work with children, with his community, his black pride, and his politics regarding race and religion. Under a picture of Ali playing outside with children, the caption read, "World's Heavyweight Champion playfully spars with group of children on one of the afternoons which the Champ devoted entirely to the entertainment and inspiration of Negro youths....No boxer in modern times has concerned himself with the plight of Negro youth. Muhammad's appearance evokes an instant identity and response from Negro youth across the nation as the young Muslim champion....sets an example of clean, healthy and purposeful living."^88 He visited public schools at the request of "Negro teachers" who "felt the need to present a real-live black hero to their children to offset the daily "white heroes" they see and hear on television and radio."^89

---

^86 Ibid., 94-95.
^87 "Muslims Told Him to Hate." *Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 March 1964, p. 1.
Simultaneously, white mainstream newspapers referred to him as Cassius Clay, discredited him based on his religion and his call for the separation of the races, as well as his loud mouth.

Most fight fans had a difficult time with Ali’s conversion. One former Clay fan pondered how he, as a white could “look up to or respect a person who represents a group that is out for the purpose of suppressing the white race?” He further agreed with Floyd Patterson’s recent comments and hoped he would be “able to make a quick comeback and wrest the heavyweight title away from Cassius X. Then I, and all true Americans, can look up to the champ with respect, as he would represent the basic ideals for which America stands and form an all-American image for the whole world to see.” Another fight fan took the opposite position stating that religion and race were non-issues in determining the greatness of the new champion. He wrote, “The public should wake up to the fact that it is a prizefighter’s skills in the ring that proves him a hero or bum, not his background or religious convictions.” The issue of religion, specifically the hierarchy of Christianity being above all other religions, was at the crux of most reactions to Ali. Specifically, the Muslim religion, or at least the Nation of Islam sect, was representative of a group that had no need for whites and essentially refuted the power structure and hierarchy of American society, which put whites, Americans, and Christians ahead of all others.
others. A Sports Illustrated reporter was more forthright: “When he came along he was America’s sweetheart, the guy who was going to kick sand back in the bully’s face. He was going to show that crime didn’t pay...They gave Cassius the part of the marshal in High Noon, and he wanted to be the guy in the black hat.”92 Just as Patterson and Liston had enjoyed comparisons to boxing great Joe Louis, one fan suggested Ali take the cue writing, “I suggest the building of an invincible. Joe-Louis type image around Clay.”93 Such an image suggests that Ali conform to how Americans, mostly white, believed he should act, similar to the standards required of Louis in shaking the negative image of his predecessor, Jack Johnson. The displeasure was not reserved solely for Ali. Another fan wrote, “Liston and Clay are both stumblebums, if not as boxers then as people. One an ex-convict and the other a Black Muslim.”94 An illogical comparison, a person’s faith with a crime, except when you recognize that many of the responses to Ali were irrational, but justified as patriotic, Christians expressing their thoughts. The World Boxing Association echoed the fan’s sentiment when it debated taking Ali’s title from him. The WBA stated, “Clay has set a poor example for the youth of the world” and the felt the same about Liston and his trouble with the law.95 Ali’s assessment of the fight scene was this. “We both villains. So naturally, when we get in the ring, the people, the would prefer if it could happen for it to end in a double knockout, because they don’t

want either one of us to win."96 There were rumors that the rematch would not take place because of the two fighters involved - specifically their racial politics. Still, they were unquestionably the two best heavyweights at the time.

2nd Liston-Ali bout, Lewiston, Maine, May 25, 1965

After postponing the fight due to an Ali injury and relocating it from Boston to Maine in part due to the reactions about his religious beliefs, Ali beat the favored Liston with a "phantom" punch in the 1st round. Many cried that the fight was fixed, though there was no proof of such a scandal. Because Ali’s upset of Liston in their first bout was such a surprise, many fight fans predicted that the old Sonny would reappear and reclaim the title that he had seemingly lost in a fluke. For other fans, the fight would confirm Ali’s skills in the ring. It was probably the only fight Liston enjoyed being a sentimental favorite. Ali’s victory left Liston out of contention for the title and brought back a familiar face to the championship bout. Six months after beating Liston, Muhammad Ali was in the ring with former champ Floyd Patterson.

Muhammad Ali vs. Floyd Patterson, Las Vegas, Nevada, November 22, 1965

The Patterson-Ali fight was not borne out of Patterson’s need to get back into the ring, but was rather an attempt on his part for redemption; his own personal redemption and to redeem the sport that had made him into the man he had become. He felt that he could save boxing from Ali and the Black Muslims. He offered to fight for free, donating his share to the NAACP, and would even turn the title over to the next contender, as long as the coveted heavyweight crown was no longer held by Ali. "The heavyweight title is

the most important championship in all sports in every part of the world. It's bigger than the man who holds it. It means more than all the money it represents. There's a tremendous responsibility on the champion that Clay and Liston obviously don't understand - to themselves, to the sport and to the public, especially in these times of such great social changes in our country and in the way the people all over the world look at us. In assessing the cultural and social significance of the fight which pitted two African American boxers, just as the last four title bouts had done, Eldridge Cleaver wrote.

The fight was, ideologically, a pivotal event, reflecting the consolidation of certain psychic gains in the Negro revolution. Both black and white America, looking on, were sucked into the vortex of the event, feeling somehow a profound relationship to what was being enacted in that ring. They knew a triumph and a defeat were taking place with consequences for America, transcending the fortunes of the two men squaring off in the ring to test their strength. The simplistic version of the fight bandied about in the press was that there was a ‘white hope’ and a ‘black hope’ riding on this fight. The white hope for a Patterson victory was, in essence, a counterrevolutionary desire to force the Negro, now in rebellion, and personified in the boxing world by Ali, back into his ‘place.’ The black hope, on the contrary, to see Uncle Tom defeated, to be given symbolic proof of the victory of the autonomous Negro over the subordinate Negro.

Just as Patterson had played the role of the white hope in his fight against the “bad nigger” Sonn Liston, he again positioned himself in the role of sentimental favorite, the American versus the Muslim, the good black versus the new “bad nigger.” Ali. Cleaver put Patterson in the position of Uncle Tom. Cleaver hoped an Ali victory would be

---

97 Floyd Patterson with Milton Gross, “‘I Want To Destroy Clay.’” *Sports Illustrated*, 19 October 1964, 43.
synonymous with the emergence of autonomous Negroes over subordinate Uncle Tom Negroes. The fight represented something much larger than two men with opposing viewpoints.

Patterson believed that if he were to get the opportunity to meet Ali in the ring his triumph would be a victory for Black Americans. It is an interesting thought that Patterson saw his triumph over another Black man as a victory for his people, especially considering fights over twenty years prior that had Joe Louis representing all of America, Black and white, versus German Nazi Max Schmelling. Patterson clarified, “But if I beat Clay, things would be so different. Maybe the Black Muslims would repudiate him. It would be my contribution to civil rights.” To Patterson, fighting Ali was a “moral crusade.” It was his contribution to the fight for civil rights. One could easily wonder how his victory over another Black man would contribute to the civil rights cause. Part of Patterson’s logic was that he was fighting for a civil rights vision that was in stark contrast to the vision held by Ali and the Nation of Islam. One sports fan responded to Patterson’s claim with his own thoughts. “The thing that Patterson should try to realize is that no man’s actions, regardless of who he may be, can disgrace an entire race. Negro or otherwise.” The same reader forecast that “Twenty years from now when future boxing historians assess Cassius Clay and Floyd Patterson, it will be strictly on the basis of each one’s fistic prowess. The fact that the former was a member of the Black Muslims or the latter a member of the Roman Catholic Church will have no bearing.”

---

99 Patterson with Gross. “I Want to Destroy.” 44.
100 Floyd Patterson. “Cassius Clay Must Be Beaten.” Sports Illustrated. 11 October 1965. 98.
Just as *Sports Illustrated* did a feature on Liston to enhance his image, the magazine acted as a forum for Patterson’s ideological differences with Ali before their fight. Patterson sincerely thought that Ali as champion hurt the Black community. “He has a right to believe what he believes, but harm has been done to the Negroes’ cause and the way the rest of the world regards it by the one who calls himself Muhammad Ali....I am a Negro and I’m proud to be one, but I’m also an American. I’m not so stupid that I don’t have all the rights and privileges that all Americans should have. I know that someday we will get them.”

Patterson exudes optimism regarding his visions of race relations in America and affirms his superiority over Ali by making a critical distinction between the two men - Patterson sees himself as an American, Ali is a Black Muslim, thus negating his American status. Patterson expressed the duality that DuBois had written about at the turn of the century, that he was both Black and American, and that he was willing to sacrifice some of his Blackness to be more accepted as an American.

Cleaver noted the irony when he wrote, “It made no difference that, when Patterson announced that he would beat Ali and return the crown to America, Ali protested vigorously, asking, ‘What does he mean? I’m an American too!’ Floyd Patterson was the symbolic spearhead of a counterrevolutionary host, leader of the mythical legions of faithful darkies who inhabit the white imagination, whose assigned task it was to liberate

October 1965. 102. Ironically, Ali is still placed within the context of his affiliation with the Nation of Islam, while Patterson is rarely remembered for his belonging to the Catholic faith. Chalk went on to author two books on the subject of Blacks in sport: *Black College Sport* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1976) and *Pioneers of Black Sport* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1975).

Patterson with Gross. "‘I Want To Destroy.’" 43.
the crown and restore it to its proper "place" in the Free World." 103 Patterson had become the extension of the Black athletes who had initially broken the color barriers in American mainstream sport. Just as Joe Louis and Jesse Owens had molded themselves into images and icons that were acceptable and accommodating to how white American believed Black men should behave. Jackie Robinson had continued this behavior in the late 1940s when he reintegrated major league baseball. Other Black athletes followed, in fact the majority did, because it was the path to limited success and the only access one had into the white sporting world, the Black athlete had to fit into the standards of white America. Floyd Patterson was very adept at such a task, believed that it was what he should do, and was even convinced that it was what he wanted to do. Muhammad Ali did not fit, did not want to fit, and challenged the standards set for Black athletes. Bill Nunn, Jr., writing about the history of Black fighters, thought that they had been stereotyped and expected to be humble, shy, taught to stay away from controversy, and "the dumber he is the better people like him." He compared Ali to Jack Johnson and Sugar Ray Robinson, as fighters who did not compromise and as a result were "condemned and lambasted for being ingrates." 104 Nunn editorialized that Ali represented the "new, young militant Negro." Ironically, though, Nunn still referred to the fighter as Clay throughout his column.

The ideologies and politics of the two fighters continued to butt heads in the weeks prior to the fight. While some thought it was more of Ali's antics to build up the gate, it was Patterson who contributed to the heightened tensions between the two men.

citing the religious choices of Ali as detrimental to boxing. One writer wrote,

"Patterson is perfectly sincere in his resentment; that resentment is directed against the segregationist Black Muslim movement, to which Clay adheres. In so adhering, Patterson feels, Clay is a disgrace to his race, his country and to boxing."105 This said, Patterson denied that he could be the last savior of boxing, though he seemed to revel in his "white" knight role. "From some of the things I’ve read, that I will not only be trying to win the heavyweight title for the third time, but fighting to save boxing as well. You could get the idea that the entire sport depends on me and that if I, as some sort of homemade Sir Galahad, do not defeat the villain, Clay, boxing will most certainly die." Patterson further asserted that boxing did not need him or anyone else to survive, but he did declare that "By calling me a ‘Black White Hope’ and by several other ill-advised and intemperate remarks," Ali had continually damaged the image of American Negroes and the civil rights groups working on their behalf."106 It is ironic that Patterson referred to himself as a "white hope" following his victory over George Chuvalo. "I can’t tell you what that meant to me. Usually in mixed fights the majority of the crowd is for the white boy. But during the fight I became the "White Hope."107 If boxing needs a Patterson victory to survive, how could the great sport be damaged by one Muslim? And if Ali’s religion is part of Patterson’s anger and his feeling is that religion should be left out of the ring, why does Patterson continue to refer to his own Roman Catholic religion? Should America worry that a Catholic holds the title? Ali knew he was not the fan favorite.

106 Floyd Patterson, "Cassius Clay Must Be Beaten," 80.
“Everybody love Patterson because he got this nice, humble manner and he is so loving and everything. They all going to be cheering for him and booing at me, and they all going to come to see the fight to see him whip me. I am the most popular fighter in the world, but right here in the U.S.A. I am not.” Ali’s claim was somewhat accurate. His international acclaim was unrivaled by any other athlete or world leader.

As a Muslim and as the heavyweight champion of the world, Ali had enjoyed several trips abroad as a representative of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. As a representative of Muhammad and the Nation of Islam, Ali was welcomed as a “prodigal son” and even commented that he had not been home in over 400 years. The theme of pan-Africanism and the religious ties between the two continents was clear in the reporting of his trip. Seeing the advancement of the countries, Ali mentioned that he had been exposed to phony allegations by the United States concerning the civilization of African nations. With all his travels and later, his fights in other countries, the proclaimed Ali as the first true world champion, giving the title new meaning. Moreover, they could claim his as the first Muslim world champion. Muhammad Speaks established an international fan club and on occasion would print letters of support for the Champ in

107 Ibid., 83.
their pages, from faraway places such as Pakistan, Ireland, Ghana, and Sweden.109

According to the weekly, and undisputed by any other news source, Ali had the strongest international backing of any previous champion.110

Talk of white hope and black hope fueled the racial differences between the two black fighters. Patterson claimed that “Once the bell rings and all the lights go out, don’t know if my opponent is white or colored.” One might wonder then how he could tell the religion or patriotism of his opponent? Ali’s response was, “In the eyesights of the world, you’re considered a good, clean American boy and I’m a bad Muslim.”111 It was these comments that only urged Ali’s preparation for his destruction of the aging challenger. “I want to punish him. To cause him pain.” Ali said.


You find out what a person don’t like, then you give it to him. He don’t like to be embarrassed, because he has so much pride, so I’m going to make him ashamed...When Floyd talks about me he puts himself on a universal spot. We don’t consider to have the title any more than the Baptists thought they had it when Joe Louis was champ. Does he think I’m going to be ignorant enough to attack his religion? I got so many Catholic friends of all races....He says he’s going to bring the title back to America. I act like I belong to American more than he do....How is he going to buck all this? This little, old, dumb pork chop eater don’t have a chance. From eating pork he’s got trillions of maggots and worms settling in his joints.112

Continuing his great oracle tradition of predicting the outcomes of fights, just as he had for the Patterson-Johansson fight and the Patterson-Liston matchup, Ali offered his prose once more. More than his previous poems, this one embraced his pride in Blackness and chastised Patterson’s integrationist philosophies.

I am going to put Floyd flat on his back  
So that he will start thinking black.  
Because when he was champ he didn’t do as he should;  
He tried to force himself into an all-white neighborhood.  
And when he and his family finally were disgraced,  
He had to find himself another place.  
Now he wants to make Sweden his home: Anything to keep from accepting his own.  
From reading Sports Illustrated you really do not understand.  
You have been talking like an ignorant man.  
You were really deaf, dumb, and blind.  
Wanting my title because I love my own kind.  
Now for all the wrong you have said and done.  
This fight could be all over in Round One.  
And when the fight is over, you will hear the referee shout.  
“That’s all, folks, this rabbit is out!”  
For Patterson it will be an embarrassing fight.  
Then he will have to return to his beard that night.113


In his verbal barrage, Ali went after Patterson's weak spots, just as he would in the ring. He mocked Patterson's decision to integrate his family into a white neighborhood, and he questioned Patterson's blackness, just as Patterson had questioned Ali's Americaness. But to Ali, it was more important that he have pride in his being Black and that you could be both Black and American. Ali predicted that Patterson would not only lose, but would be so humiliated by the punishing blows that he would have to don a disguise to escape the shame, just as he did years earlier in his loss to Sonn Liston.

Patterson had three goals for himself in the fight against Ali. He sought to repay a debt he owed to boxing for all the sport had done for him. He went so far as to wonder who he would have become without the sport. "A laborer? A truck driver? A bum? Surely, I had convict tendencies." Second, he wanted "to achieve a degree of vindication, although when I look at my record, the ridicule I receive is ridiculous." He was still hampered by self-doubt and insecurities. Lastly, Patterson hoped to "win the championship back for America," seeing himself as a representative of the country overtaken by Black Muslims, which was hardly the case at all. Ali had other things in mind for Patterson, a fighter he referred to as Rabbit. "When he's lying there, I'm going to stick a carrot in his mouth, a carrot with some green on it. 'Nibble on it, Rabbit.' I'll tell him. Don't you think that'll make him leave the country? I'm going to hit him so hard it'll jar his kinfolk in Africa. Before he fights me again, he'd rather shave a lion with a dull blade. He will be beat so bad, he will need a shoe horn to put his hat on. How many days did it take God to make the world Six. He had his pleasures and his work for six days. Since Patterson loved boxing so, I'm going to give him pleasure for six
rounds, which symbolizes six days. On the seventh, I’m going to give him his rest.”

The fight actually lasted 12 long rounds for Patterson and many criticized Ali for not putting his challenger out of his misery. It was a mismatch and a letdown to many.

“...They don’t want reality. What the critics want, in essence, is theater, a TV show, a series of events arranged so that they have a dramatic unity and interest - in other words, a fixed fight, but one where everybody had the winner the day before. This fight was the way life is. often intolerable and overwhelming, unsuspected, a letdown.” Perhaps it was a letdown to some because the sentimental favorite lost, but to others it was a great symbolic victory.

Ali talked to Patterson through the fight, bantering at his opponent who finally had to listen to Ali’s antics with little recourse. Ali yelled, “Come on American, come on white American.” The white press was sure that Ali’s in-the-ring antics were “part of his juvenile scheme to embarrass Patterson.” Patterson’s shot at redemption left him embarrassed and ashamed, exactly what Ali had wanted. Patterson’s loss to Ali was a failure to redeem himself, in his mind, with America. Patterson’s loss to Ali meant something more to America. Eldridge Cleaver explains, “Harsh, brutal, and vicious though it may be, no one can deny Muhammad Ali his triumph, and though you comb the ghettos of your desperate cities and beat the bushes of your black belts for another puppet who will succeed where the Rabbit failed, your search will be in vain. Because even as you search you, yourself, are being changed, and you will understand that you must

---

113 Rogin, “Not a Great Fight. But it was a Real One.” 106.
continue to change or die.” Cleaver was not addressing the search for a replacement to Ali as a boxer, but of Ali, the Black man who represented a new consciousness, that did not accommodate white America like his successful predecessors, and who challenged all Americans, black and white, of the boundaries of skin color, nationality, and defining one's own identity. The domination of Ali, as a boxer, as a public figure, and what he represented to a majority of Americans, black and white, was unsettling - change would prove to be a difficult task.

After the fight, Ali faced the press waiting to hear their excuse as to why he was not the best fighter in the ring. He asked the reporters, “O.K. what's the excuse? Just give me the new excuse. Carrying him, nothing. He took my best punches. He surprised me. He's a good fighter, determined. He wouldn't fall. He just wouldn't go down. I have two swollen hands to show for it. I'm mad about only one thing - too many people cheered for me tonight. There weren't enough boos. Who do you want me to fight? The best man? Well, find him.” He was ready for the next fighter - little did he know it would soon be Ali versus the United States government.

---

CHAPTER 5

DRAFT DAY FOR ALI HAS HIM AS TOP PICK

It is unthinkable that American Negroes could go to war on behalf of those who have oppressed us for generations against the Soviet Union, which in one generation has raised our people to full human dignity.¹

It is no accident that the U.S. government is sending all those black troops to Vietnam. Some people think that America’s point in sending 16 per cent black troops to Vietnam is to kill off the cream of the black youth. But it has another important result. By turning her black troops into the butchers of the Vietnamese people, America is spreading hate against the black race throughout Asia. Even black Africans find it hard not to hate black Americans for being so stupid as to allow themselves to be used to slaughter another people who are fighting to be free. Black Americans are considered to be the world’s biggest fools to go to another country to fight for something they don’t have for themselves.²

I ain’t got no quarrel with them Viet Cong. – Muhammad Ali

Muhammad Ali’s membership in the Nation of Islam played a critical role in the young fighter’s decision to refuse induction into military service in the Vietnam War.

Though his tremendous physical skills in the ring won him a championship against Sonn Liston, and he went on to successfully defend his title nine times, his title was finall

---

challenged by an unexpected and his most formidable opponent to date, the United States Government and the Vietnam War. Ali had first registered for the draft as Cassius Clay in 1960 and was classified I-A in 1962. In a 1964 military qualifying exam, Ali scored in the 16th percentile on the mental aptitude portion, well below the required 30th percentile, and was subsequently classified I-Y. Ali was reclassified when the military lowered their qualifying score to 15. Ali's long battle with the draft boards actually began in the weeks preceding his 1964 title fight with Sonny Liston. Since his registration in 1960, Ali had undergone considerable changes. Cassius Clay had become Muhammad Ali, a Baptist had converted to becoming a Muslim, and an Olympic Champion had become the world's heavyweight champion. Ali had become a symbol of a changing society—a society that was undergoing tremendous change and a shift in political consciousness. This chapter explores the intersection of Ali's religious identity with his identity as a Black American. A brief explanation of his draft status and his decision to avoid military service, along with the reactions of the American public, sets the stage for further discussion of the impact the Nation of Islam had on Ali's actions and the impact Ali had on other Black athletes. The shaping of Ali's identity by the white press and by the official paper of the Nation of Islam, Muhammad Speaks, lend insight into the forces that shaped his public image and multiple identities.

127.


4 "Scorecard: Muhammad I-Y." Sports Illustrated, 3 January 1966. 6: "A White Look...at Black Sport: An
In the days following Ali’s upset over Sonn Liston, Cassius Clay announced that he had become a member of the Nation of Islam, a group referred to as the Black Muslims, led by Elijah Muhammad. Ali’s conversion to the Nation of Islam was a surprise, even to his manager, Angelo Dundee. Recalling the pre-fight training, Dundee stated that as far as he knew Clay was not a Black Muslim prior to his fight with Liston. “Of course, I did not ask him any questions about his beliefs. I think a fighter’s religion is his own business...It was a matter that never came up between us.” The public response to Clay’s conversion was unfavorable and his racial rhetoric, combined with his arrogant predictions of his victories, soured the boxing public. Ali’s own reasons and statements concerning his religious conversion and the significance of his new beliefs did little to gain support from boxing fans. Ali explained why he decided to join the Nation of Islam:

I want to be a Muslim because the honorable Elijah Muhammad is the onliest man who has black people sticking together, not begging, not on their hands and knees, forcing themselves on people that don’t want him. Elijah’s the onliest man that have following, teaching the so-called Negroes unity among their own, mainl respect of the back woman, which she has never gotten from 400 years out of black men. He is the onliest man teaching us the knowledge of our history, our culture....He’s the onliest man who is connecting us with all of the people in Africa, Asia, Egypt...Pakistan, who has never recognized American Negroes. And he is the onliest man who have followers that the white Americans really respect. Ali began to speak a rhetoric that refuted the superiority of whiteness in America, combined with his expressions of Black pride and his membership in the Nation of Islam.

alienated him from many white and Black sporting fans. He had always felt he “was meant to do something divine, something that God wanted me to do, a feeling that I’m on some type of little mission, something to do with freedom of the Negro in America.”

Ali’s conversion to the Nation of Islam was another twist and turn in the drama of the world boxing scene. Sports Illustrated’s William Furlong wrote about the changes the sport of boxing had undergone in the years preceding Ali’s victory that made the sport “socially significant.” Furlong cited the start of the trend with the Patterson-Liston fight, which he saw as an “allegory of good vs. evil.” The introduction of Ali, who Furlong referred to as Clay, was “the discovery of a truly unpopular cause,” the Black Muslims. Ali’s cause was “so triumphantly unpopular that in an age sharply aware of racial divisions, most whites and Negroes could unite in loathing it - and in paying to see its proponent - hope!hope!hope! - knocked out.”

Ali’s fiscal impact on the fight scene could not be denied. In 1950, boxing receipts were less than $4 million, with Ali in the ring, the sport’s monetary gain reached $7.8 million in 1963, $18.1 million in 1964, another $8.9 million in 1965.

Ali’s conversion to Islam brought the young fighter more attention in and out of the ring. Though he had just won the heavyweight title days before in an upset, much of the press and public’s response to Ali as a fighter was directly related to his religion.

Though he had been predicting his great feats in the rings for several fights, he also began

---

to view himself in a new light, as a representative of a community. Placing himself in the role of the Great Sacrificer, Ali said, "I'm the first bold Negro in the million-dollar bracket. I sacrifice in order to show other Negroes that they're not free." Ali recognized his position as an athlete in an individual sport, and the ability his status lent him to be an example for other black athletes. In another interview, Ali boldly proclaimed his importance in the sports world, but also as front page material, when he mentioned that he was "in the headlines eight times out of 10 for something other than boxing and always something controversial, exciting and drama."^{10}

After his upset of Sonny Liston, Ali's religion became a hot topic in the press, and his subsequent draft status was amplified by the already excessive news coverage of the fighter. After his Selective Service reclassification to I-A, Ali was asked about the chances of his fighting for his country. His response heard around the world was, "Wh me? I ain't got no quarrel with them Viet Cong."^{11} His off the cuff remark prompted reactions that blasted his lack of patriotism and most often failed to comprehend the message he represented. It also led to his being further ostracized by an American public. However, his objections were not without reason to the young fighter, as he stated, "I am a member of the Muslims, and we don't go to no wars unless they are declared by Allah himself."^{12} Up until his reclassification, Ali had truly believed that he would not be asked to serve in the Army. He had confided to a friend, "They're trying to call me to the

---

^{11} "People." *Sports Illustrated*, 28 February 1966. 49; Tex Maule, "Showdown With a Punching Bag."
Army. Man, they know I ain’t going in no Army! The ain’t gonna bother me! There’s too many people in the world watching me, see, and all of those black people overseas, they’re Muslims, not Christians. And America’s trying to make peace with ‘em." He had apparently believed that his religion and his perceived power of Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam could protect him from military service.

Ali commented further on the actions of the military in their reclassification of his status, saying that it was the government who had first deemed him unsuitable for service in classifying him I-Y, and it was the same government that made the decision to reclassify him I-A without even knowing if he was still unsuitable for service. He felt that the government had selected him based on his status as the heavyweight champion of the world. He pointed out, “There’s just one in my class. You have a lot of men in baseball they could have called. You have a lotta men in football the coulda called that are school age and have taken the test that are 1-A.” Ali felt picked on, asking, “Wh me? A man who pays the salary of at least 50,000 men in Vietnam, a man who the government gets S6 million from a year from two fights, a man who can pay in two fights for three bumma planes.” Clearly, his reclassification had taken Ali by surprise and what he believed to be a conscientious objection based on his religious beliefs, and despite his claims of financial importance, was being misinterpreted as an act of treason.

Sports Illustrated. 28 March 1966. 35.
14 Ibid.. 95: a picture of Arthur Ashe and Muhammad Ali in the March 5. 1966 issue, p. 15. supports the notion of Ali being “picked on.” The caption noted that both Ashe and Ali were “feeling the hot breath of their draft boards…as citizens goad their political representatives to lower the boom on their royal athletic bosoms.” The caption concluded that “the sound and fury, relative to military service, seems to make it personal punishment rather than opportunity to serve one’s country.”
Ali had been scheduled to fight Ernie Terrell in Chicago, but the fight was cancelled after promoters were pressured by the city of Chicago, the Chicago Tribune and a number of politicians. Responding to pressure from veteran’s groups, Ali’s home base of Miami Beach also backed out, along with 170 theaters that had planned to air the fight. What people misinterpreted most was Ali’s comment, “I ain’t got nothing against them Viet Cong” and the statement set off a number of people in the press, in politics, and sport fans. Using some of “the strongest language ever used to describe a sports figure,” various sport scribes referred to Ali as “a self-centered spoiled brat of a child,” “a sad apology for a man,” “the all-time jerk of the boxing world,” “the most disgusting character in memory to appear on the sports scene,” and “Bum of the month. Bum of the year. Bum of all time.” Illinois’ governor found Ali “disgusting,” while the governor of Maine said Ali “should be held in utter contempt by every patriotic American.” One veteran asked his fellow Americans to “join in condemnation of this unpatriotic, loudmouthed, bombastic individual.”

The former American 1960 Olympic champion, who during those Rome games had proclaimed the USA as the best country in the world, was deemed unAmerican for his refusal to represent his country in military service, and for the remarks about the war. Ali’s response to the uproar over his religious convictions were equally as loud. He remained firm in his beliefs and spoke his minds concerning the draft, the United States government, and American society and race relations. The Ali draft saga

17 Ashe. Hard Road to Glory. 96.
continued. At a hearing in Chicago, set up to allow Ali to apologize and ingratiate himself to politicians and the public, Ali made his position clear. Surrounded and supported by a contingent of Black Muslims, Ali said, “I’m not here to make a showdown plea or apologize as the press had projected I will. My apology is only to apologize for what embarrassment and pressures might have been put on you, not me.” When pressed by the commission to make a “more direct apology for his ‘unpatriotic’ statements,” Ali responded with, “I’m not apologizing for nothing like that. I don’t have to. I’m apologizing just for what I said to the press.” Still, despite his remorseful rhetoric, most believe that he half apologized to calm friends that had money invested in the fight business. Ali was a symbol and representative for a larger community that both loved and hated him. Muhammad Speaks did not report the details his legal fight, but did report on a weekly basis the growing number of Ali’s international supporters, as well as domestic leaders of the civil rights movement.

In an attempt to return Ali to the good graces of politicians and boxing aficionados, his lawyer, Edward Jacko, pressed the champion to plead ignorance, specifically that he did not understand the words used by the commission. To a group of reporters Jacko spoke for the champ, “Gentlemen, I’ve just talked to the champ. He wasn’t able to understand the meaning of a lot of the commission’s words. For example,

---

asked the champ if he knew the meaning of the word patriotic, and he told me he had no
idea what they were talking about when the commissioners asked him that. "It was
hardly believable and unlike the champ to play stupid.

The fight with Ernie Terrell was finally relocated to Toronto, outside the
boundaries of the United States, with George Chuvalo replacing Terrell as Ali’s
opponent. Other fights outside of the United States followed. The issue of Ali’s
patriotism continued to be a topic of debate. Appealing his draft reclassification, Ali
claimed to be ministering around the country for the Nation of Islam. Still, his
comment concerning the Viet Cong haunted his efforts to change his draft status. “As
one Louisville draft board official admitted: ‘We wanted to grant his appeal, but after
what he said what could we do?’

After fighting four bouts over five months in three different countries, Ali was
finally able to fight in the United States again and a bout was scheduled against Cleveand
Williams in Houston. Ali said, “No one is happier than I am to be fighting in my own
country. I don’t think the real fans ever wanted me to leave the country. It was just a few
pressure groups who made things tough. I was always acceptable to the masses.” The
fight was the first for Ali without the support of the Louisville Sponsoring Group, a group
Ali referred to as “my 11 white millionaire managers.” Some 40,000 fight fans were
expected at the bout and over 100 cities showed the fight on TV. Ali was bothered b


165
the continued scrutiny surrounding his religion and his draft status. As he trained, he asked one reporter, contradicting his earlier comments on fight fans, "How can I get myself ready? All these people so mad at me. Can't even fight in my own country. People here in Miami Beach, they can't even see the fight. They all hate me." Still, he felt strongly about himself as a representative of his religion and his race. "One thing ain't is a Uncle Tom. I'm a warrior. I'm a warrior on the Battleground of Freedom."25

The largest crowd to ever witness an indoor fight packed the Houston Astrodome to see Ali emerge as the heavyweight champion, confirming his physical skills and dominance in the ring.26

Though he remained the heavyweight champion, boxing authorities plotted the champ's exit from the ring based on his religious and perceived political stance on the Vietnam War. The New York Athletic Commission suspended his boxing license and within minutes of his refusal to be inducted, the Commission stripped him of his title. Even conservative Sports Illustrated expressed disappointment and surprise at the WBA's overtly political moves against the fighter. They believed that the organization had violated the principles of the sport, but more importantly, had violated Ali's due processes of the law.27 Ali's rights as a fighter, and clearly as a United States citizen, were being violated. Punished for his thoughts and ideas, a clear rebuke of his freedom of speech, the most American of ideals, boxing authorities worked to limit his ability to enter the ring and keep his heavyweight title.

Ali returned to the theme of Great Sacrificer, acknowledging the millions of dollars he was sacrificing by being a Muslim, but how he could ultimately do more for his race by standing up for his principles. "All this stuff I turned down and I'll show you where it make me bigger. Look how big I am." Ali was so big, he claimed that he had gotten a call from the Pentagon, who revealed that the attempt to draft Ali was merely a public relations ploy to convince the public that the issue was being pursued. "This is a high office calling!" That's power. They know I'm not going."

He went on about the expectations the government and white America had of him.

The white want me hugging on a white woman, or endorsing some whiskey, or some skin bleach, lightening the skin when I'm promoting black as the best....They want me advertising all this stuff that's make me rich but hurt so many others. Little children can come by and meet the champ. Little kids in the alleys and slums of Florida and New York, they can come and see me where the never could walk up on Patterson and Liston. Can't see them niggers when the come to town! So the white man see the power in this. He see that I'm getting away with the Army backing offa me....They see who's not flying the flag, not going in the Army; we get more respect...."

Ali expressed a pride in being Black, in representing a new image to Black youth that differed from Patterson and Liston. He was accessible to Black America and he was one of them, which was frightening and challenging to the way things had always been with the heavyweight champion titleholders. Ali found a pride and sense of satisfaction that he was aligned with a religion that seemed to elude the law, but also a satisfaction that he was not

---

29 Ibid., 92.
going along with the status quo of how Black athletes were expected to behave. His refusal to accommodate white America with his image, his religion, and his racial politics fueled the debate surrounding his American identity.

Ali had always been very vocal and his monologues concerning the draft, the war, religion, and any topic was perfect press fodder, fueling the dislike people already had for him since his conversion. He did little to win back his popularity with the press, sport fans, and the American public. He was forced to justify his religious beliefs and their position on the war. Because the religion was unfamiliar to most Americans, it was misinterpreted, and misunderstood. Ali pointed out that his religion teaches him that "we don't participate in wars to take the lives of other humans." Ali was pressured to explain and rationalize the Nation of Islam as a legitimate religion and reason for exclusion from military service. On the justification of using his religion as a reason not to fight, Ali responded, that his religion did not bear arms or fight unless the war was declared by Allah himself. Muslims were taught to defend themselves if attacked. He also pointed out that white Americans were also protesting their draft status, and recalled a news clip that showed white men burning their draft cards. 30 Ali wasn't the only one noticing that others evaded service. Wendell Smith wrote that college professors, students, and other citizens were also protesting the country's involvement in Vietnam. He noted that even some representatives in Congress opposed the war, but he pointed out that no else had been ridiculed as Ali had been and that whether one agreed with the fighter's beliefs, he

30 Ibid., 101.
was "within his rights when he takes an arbitrary position on this particular subject." When asked about his comments, after being lambasted in the press for his statements, Ali felt as if reporters had "taken my words as though I'm a politician," and the boxer made insinuations that "he was just a poor little ignorant fighter and he had been tricked and it was unfair to quote him on Vietnam and the draft and such weighty matters."

Ali did little to help his image and his case in his fight with Ernie Terrell at the Houston Astrodome, in February 1967, three months after returning to the U.S. boxing ring. While his victory over Terrell proved without a doubt that Ali was physically superior as the world champion, some said he destroyed Terrell, his manners in the ring were heavily criticized. Famous for his loudmouth, Ali let loose in the ring on Terrell with a verbal and physical barrage. Before the fight, Terrell had referred to Ali as Cassius Clay, refusing to acknowledge his name change. In the eighth round, when he could have just as easily knocked Terrell out for the victory, Ali taunted Terrell, yelling "What's my name? What's my name?" Ali would follow with a flurry of punches to Terrell’s head. At the end of that round, Ali glanced at the clock, looked at his bloody and beaten opponent and yelled "Uncle Tom." Ali "felt Ernie had betrayed the Negro race by calling him Clay." This incident only served to maintain the misunderstanding of Ali and his religion.

---

33 Ibid., 19-21.
Perhaps most revealing are reactions from American sport fans who were forced to comprehend issues beyond 12 rounds of fisticuffs. Frequent letters to the editor of Sports Illustrated reveal a variety of fan reactions to Ali's draft decision. As the largest mainstream sport weekly, the majority of readers were white, but there is no indication, except if the fan chose to do so, of the skin color of the letter's author. While the majority of boxing fans were not supportive of Ali, partially as a result of his religious conversion, but certainly for his refusal to fight in the war, a few were aware of the hypocrisy of the American ideal. One fan wrote that he abhorred Clay's statements made concerning his country, his loyalty and what patriotism means to him as a Muslim, and could "recall other champions who" were as hypocritical. He went on to state that "Cla is not what many would have us believe he is. To begin with, he appears far too naive to reel off those profound statements concerning U.S. policy without considerable offstage coaching...As a white I admit unashamedly that I have been rooting for a white hope to come along and take the championship, but as an American and a lover of sports I take keen exception to the wa Cassius Clay has been handled since he became champion." 34 Another fan wrote, "What has the world got against Cassius Clay? He's a U.S. citizen and should be allowed to speak his mind like anyone else. Surely he wasn't the first person to express a desire to stay at home instead of going off to war. His reasons are his own, and it is his right to stand up for what he believes." 35 Another fan questioned the right of politicians on forcing the boxer to fight outside the country. He wrote, "So Cla

35 Douglas A. Everett, Palmyra, Pa.. "19th Hole: The Readers Take Over." Sports Illustrated. 28 March
isn’t perfect. Does that give every self-proclaimed savior of the world the right to stop all of his fights? Why don’t they pick on somebody else for a while and let Clay fight where he wants like they do most other good fighters? Another fight fan eloquently took the politicians and other proud Americans to task with his comments. He felt that the “conduct of the Illinois politicians involved in this fiasco” could “be most euphemistically described as disgusting.” He chasised those so blinded by their “patriotism” that they lost sight of the main reason for the Vietnam War - to safeguard the right of men to articulate their political and religious convictions without fear of reprisal against their lives, and livelihood. Since Clay’s livelihood “is professional boxing, and therefore the action of the public officials of the State of Illinois in depriving him of the right to earn his livelihood because of his political attitudes, however unpopular they may be, is profoundly un-American.” Another fight observer whether “people got madder than they should have.” He insisted that “Americans have become so guilty about Negroes that they bend over further than they want to in their attitude toward them. Then along comes somebody like Cassius, and they feel free to unload their resentment and pour it on...the people who made the biggest fuss about him are the same ones who blew their tops when he became a Muslim. This made him antiwhite. and it inflamed their own prejudices. So they could scream about him, and what makes it nice is it’s sociall acceptable.” Still, some fans and press members questioned the seeming loss of Ali’s

1966. 82.
rights as an American citizen. A Miami newspaperman wondered, "Every time I begin to think that he really has the makings of a sweet person, he does something outrageous like this...Some of that stuff he’s spouting is almost treason. Can you imagine what’s gonna happen when he goes in the Army with some sergeant from south Georgia who’s had about eight buddies killed in Vietnam?" There was little consensus in the dramatic shift of events. Moreover, a different set of reactions to the change is evident in the pages of Muhammad Speaks.

The uproar about Ali’s draft status and his subsequent comments were a dominant issue in the weekly and articles detailed the support of Black leaders and international figures, including SNCC’s Stokely Carmichael, C.O.R.E.’s Floyd McKissick, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., activist Dick Gregory, A. Philip Randolph of the AFL-CIO, Director of the National Urban League Whitney Young, Congressman Adam Clayton Powell. I.F. Stone wrote, “Cassius Clay’s reaction to becoming eligible for the draft was characteristically candid...We suspect he voiced the sentiment of most Negroes. But boxing groups found the remark ‘unpatriotic’ and ‘disgusting.’” Ali commented frequently on the contradictions of a black American fighting for the freedom of another country when he was not free in his own. He asked “Why should they ask me and other so-called Negroes to put on a uniform and go 10,000 miles from home and drop bombs and bullets in brown people in Viet Nam while so-called Negro people in Louisville are

---

39 Ibid., 90.
40 I.F. Stone’s Weekly quoted in “Famed Publisher Believes Champs View Reflected Opinions of Most Negroes.” Muhammad Speaks. 8 April 1966. 5.
treated like dogs and denied simple human rights." On another occasion, Ali clarified his stance, stating "If I thought my joining the war and possible dying would bring peace, freedom, justice and equality to the 22 million black men in America, they would not have to draft me. I would join!" Letters, articles and editorial cartoons criticized the draft, the war, and the issue of black soldiers dying on the front line. The discrimination Ali faced by the white press and public, as well as from other black Americans, played into the theme of Ali as a Black Muslim victim of white Christian persecution.

Similar to Jackie Robinson and his career with the Brooklyn Dodgers, Ali knew that his story was unique and that his place in American popular culture ran deeper than the sports section. He was well aware of his stature.

I've left the sport pages. I've gone onto the front pages. I want to know what is right. What'll look good in history. I'm being tested by Allah. I'm giving up my title, my wealth, maybe my future. Many great men have been tested for their religious belief. If I pass this test, I'll come out stronger than ever. I've got no jails, no power, no government, but 600 million Muslims are giving me strength. Will they make me the leader of a country? Will they give me gold? Will the Supreme Being knock down the jails with an earthquake, like He could if He want? Am I a fool to give up my wealth and my title and go lay in prison? Am a fool to give up good steaks? Do you think I'm serious? If I am, then why can't I worship as I want to in America? All I want is justice. Will I have to get that from history?"

The champ continued to refuse to enter the draft, despite the negative press reaction and lack of support from the majority of sport fans. He did not waver in his religious beliefs and made a point that he sacrificed money and fame by remaining a Muslim and member

---

of the Nation of Islam. "The people know the only way I can lose my title is in the ring. My title goes where I go. But if they won’t let me fight, it could cost me $10 million in earnings. Does that sound like I’m serious about my religion?"^44

In a move that made a loud statement about Ali and his boxing career as a Muslim, Ali hired Herbert Muhammad, son of Elijah Muhammad, as his manager after the Louisville Group’s contract expired. A move orchestrated by the Nation of Islam, the selection of Herbert Muhammad as Ali’s manager and the creation of Main Bout, Inc., "the first and only Negro-led" boxing promotions company owned and operated Ali and company was significant. The creation of such a company was consistent with the recent events, such as Ali’s draft status, the formation of Jim Brown’s economic union, and the increased awareness of black athletes being exploited by white owners and managers. It also promoted the Nation of Islam’s call for economic self-reliance. One article made it very clear that the Nation of Islam was not affiliated with the promotions company, but that two Muslims, Herbert Muhammad and John Ali, were involved. Former champ Joe Louis said "Muhammad is surrounded by talented and unselfish friends and advisers – and they spare no effort in seeing that he ends up not simply a winner in the ring – but a winner in cash receipts."^45 In fact, his championship bout with Zora Folley cashed in a record gate of $244,471. Herbert Muhammad was Ali’s personal and business

---

^44 Ibid., 20.
manager and the newspaper highlighted the influence the Messenger’s son had on Ali. Herbert Muhammad worked to help in the shaping of Ali’s public image as the Muslim World Heavyweight Champion. He “projected a series of programmatic developments which would not only enhance his ring reputation, but will assure his historic role in domestic and world affairs.” Ali’s service to his community was at the forefront of creating his public persona, including his work as a minister for the Nation of Islam. Muhammad Speaks noted that “every phase of the champion’s activities has touched directly on the welfare of the black community.” The issue of money as the goal of Ali’s fight career was disputed by one prominent black doctor, who said, “Everyone knows that if Muhammad was interested in money he could make millions by simpl bowing to the practices of so many ex-fighters before him.” He mentioned the fighter’s faith in Allah and the example the boxer set. He claimed that money had not changed the fighter, but that “he has maintained principles, has maintained faith in his religion and his teacher and has become a new example to all the peoples of Africa and Asia. This is not the road to making money – it’s the road to history and greatness.” Still, another noted that Ali’s

---

47 “Muhammad’s 5 Title Fights Closes Most Spectacular Year in Ring History.” Muhammad Speaks. 30 December 1966, p. 7. This article is one example of the power Herbert Muhammad was given with Ali’s career, saying that the fighter’s affairs would be “under the scrutiny of Herbert Muhammad.”


49 “Champion and New Manager Take Time Out to Offer Thanks to Worldwide Fans.” 18 November 1966, p. 9. For more on Ali as a minister, see “World Champion Moves Step Closer to Full-Time Task as Muhammad’s Minister.” 3 March 1967, p. 7; “Muhammad-Terrell Fight Set World Record.” 16 December 1966 – “It is the task I am best suited for and it is as a minister that I look forward, in the near future, to assume my duties in comradeship with my brothers and sisters for the remainder of my life.”

joining the Nation of Islam has "surely been the road to the pot of gold at the end of the
rainbow."\textsuperscript{51} Despite the money the champ earned, issue after issue detailed his generous
donations of time, effort, and money for worthy community causes.

Ali did have supporters who were non-Muslim traveling in his entourage.

Bundini Brown, a good friend of Ali’s although they differed in their religious beliefs,
said in support of the fighter.

The champ wants to clean up the black man, to wipe out prostitution and dope
addiction, to give the black man respect. So what difference does it make what
the champ calls himself? If he wants to call himself Two and say he’s a member
of the Boop Boop tribe, that’s his business. America is supposed to mean
freedom, isn’t it? What white people can’t understand is that the hurtingest thing
in the world is to be black and live in the ghetto. If you live in a ghetto, you prove
you’re a man by throwing bricks. If you’re intelligent, they don’t respect you for
it. They think you’re crazy. The champ is trying to teach respect. I’m not a
Muslim, but sometimes I talk like one.\textsuperscript{52}

Another friend, who did not travel with Ali and who remained unnamed in a five-part
series in \textit{Sports Illustrated} that examined Ali’s religion, recognized the sacrifices the
champ made financially, but also pointed out the hypocrisy of the government. "The
government may say his religion is nutty as a fruitcake, but the government can’t say it’s
not his religion." He further noted that "how the hell are you gonna send a kid like that to
fight against people of color, his people? How the hell are you gonna send him into battle
alongside white Americans that he regards as the real enemy?" Finally, he recognized he
financial sacrifice that Ali had made. He stated that the William Morris Agency had
informed Ali that he could make a quarter of a million dollars a year in endorsements and

\textsuperscript{51} Charles P. Howard, Sr., "On Tour With Ali: Egypt Thanks Messenger!," \textit{Muhammad Speaks}, 3 July
1964, p. 4.
advertising, but backed out of the deal after Ali announced that he was a Black Muslim.

"Does that sound like somebody who's faking his religion?" Another Ali friend spoke on the fighter's beliefs. "When he says, 'I don't want to be bombed, I don't want to be lynched or have no dogs chase me' - he's expressing general fright more than a real race attitude. I think he finds it safer to be with Negroes, his own kind....I think if you scratched down deep enough, you'd find that was at the bottom of the whole draft thing....The idea of going into the Army with all those strangers to put himself into that strange environment, with white people at that - man, that really hit him where he lived!" The challenge to Ali's title, as a result of his refusing to be drafted, had moved beyond the personal and into the legal arena.

In order to have his case heard in a legal court, Ali was informed that he must first refuse to step forward during the induction ceremony. Such a refusal would exhaust his administrative remedies and earn him the right to have his case heard at a civil proceeding by a federal judge. Ali's request for a draft exemption on the grounds that he is a Muslim minister had been denied not in court of law, but by the Selective Service Board of Kentucky, the National Selective Service System Director, and by the National Selective Service Appeal Board. Until Ali refused his induction, a federal judge could not consider his case, despite all the appeals, requests, and suits filed by Ali's lawyers in the case.

Hayden Convington and Quinlan Hodges.

In late April 1967, at the Houston Induction Center, Ali refused three times to step forward at the call of his name. Despite warnings that his refusal could result in a felon punishable by five years in prison and a $10,000 fine, Ali refused a fourth and final time. He was asked to write, “I refuse to be inducted into the armed forces of the United States,” sign his name, and his refusal was official. Covington noted that even if the federal judge ruled against Ali, it could be up to two years before the fighter would enter prison, but as he also pointed out, Ali had been prejudged by boxing authorities.

Covington’s partner in Ali’s defense, Hodges, said “Muhammad Ali has not even been charged with a crime yet, and they’re all leaping in to strip him of his title.” In fact, Ali’s fight only a month earlier against Zora Folley would be his last until the next decade. A week later, Ali was indicted by a federal grand jury for failing to submit to the draft.

The champ saw the irony of the violation of his freedom of speech and the freedom of religion. “Blacks and whites are dying in Vietnam so those people over there will have the freedom to worship as they want,” he said. “So how come I can’t do it here?” When asked about serving in the armed forces, Ali replied with another version of the same answer. “It’s against the teachings of the Holy Koran. I’m not trying to dodge the draft. We are not supposed to take part on no wars unless declared by Allah or

---

56 Ibid., 24.
57 Ibid., 24.
58 Ibid., 23.
by the Messenger (Elijah Muhammad). Muhammad was a warrior 1,400 years ago but he was a holy warrior fighting in the name of Allah. We don’t take no part in Christian wars or wars of any unbelievers. We aren’t Christian or Communist.  

More than his previous bouts with the draft, Ali received letters of support and encouragement from sport fans. One Illinois man wrote, “Let the draftees who have no respect for their own freedom step forward for the oath, then march off in meek submission. It’s wild self-delusion to think patriotism is going along with something the only alternative to which is jail. It takes more guts to buck the system than to go along, and Cassius’ behavior indicates why he has been a winner in every challenge he has undertaken.” Another fan wrote in support of Ali asking, how can you call him ‘an apologist for his so-called religion’ when he has said (much as a Quaker or Jehovah’s Witness might say): ‘It is in the light of my consciousness as a Muslim minister and my own personal convictions that I take my stand in rejecting the call to be inducted into the armed services.’ If Ali were a ‘demagogue,’ I daresay he would have more vociferously exhorted others to follow his lead than he has. Finally, his Vietnam views, quite opposite from ‘not deserving rebuttal,’ are creating considerable emotional impact and are widely shared by those who note our economic support of apartheid, manifest destiny in Southeast Asia, etc.”

Still, this letter from another fight fan was representative of the inability of some to see the double standards and hypocrisies of American ideals and citizenship. The fan wrote, “If he doesn’t love America and what it has given him enough to fight for it, why doesn’t the self-styled minister move to a place he would be willing to defend?...He is a disgrace to every Negro serviceman in the armed forces and an insult to every family that has a

59 Ibid., 23.
Negro serviceman buried somewhere in the world. These men gave up what they had, in some cases their lives, so that he could enjoy the opportunity of living in the U.S free to do and say what he pleases.  

After his induction ceremony in Houston, and two weeks prior to his day in court, Ali held a meeting with ten other Black athletes in Cleveland. At the request of Ali's manager, Herbert Muhammad, Jim Brown, professional football player turned businessman and actor, set up a meeting with other prominent Black athletes to help Ali with his decision regarding his upcoming draft induction. The Cleveland meeting was a significant event, as it was an unprecedented gathering of high-profile Black athletes gathering together for a discussion that had political, social, and cultural ramifications. Upon his retirement from professional football, Jim Brown cited one reason for his unexpected exit from the game to his desire to work with his community. He believed that as an athlete he had a means of reaching Blacks not inclined or invited to participate in the political climate of the times. “We want to help the ghetto Negro, and we think maybe we can do it, because as athletes we can reach them. Look, to the Negro in Harlem the Urban League doesn’t mean anything. To the Negro in the ghetto, Whitney Young is a name he hasn’t heard. But he has heard of Bill Russell and Mudcat Grant and

---

Jim Brown, and he feels like he knows us.\textsuperscript{64} Jim Brown was able to recognize his visible position as a professional athlete and the opportunity that visibility gave to him within the Black community and American society.

Brown, a great running back in football, a developing actor, the founder of the Negro Industrial Economic Union, and a partner in Main Bout, Inc., invited the other Black athletes; Bill Russell, basketball player for the Boston Celtics; Lew Alcindor, All-American basketball player from UCLA; Curtis McClinton, fullback for the Kansas City Chiefs; Willie Davis, All-League defensive end, Green Bay Packers; John Wooten, guard, Cleveland Browns; Bobby Mitchell, flanker, Washington Redskins; Jim Shorter, defensive back, Washington Redskins; Walter Beach, defensive back, Cleveland Browns; and Sid Williams, linebacker, Cleveland Browns.\textsuperscript{65} Some of the athletes were invited because of their relationship with Jim Brown, while others represented the tops in their sport, and others had been involved in smaller protest activities within their teams. While none of the invited athletes were members of the Nation of Islam, most were sympathetic to the cause, with several being featured in \textit{Muhammad Speaks}. Brown recalled that Ali

had been offered the opportunity to enter the service, but he would be guaranteed that he
would not see combat. Brown agreed to hold the meeting in part because of the issue at
hand; he felt that Ali needed the support of other Black athletes because "when a man
makes a decision of that magnitude he needs friends to help him sort things out." The
meeting was held in Brown's Cleveland office and the group was mixed in their opinions
of what the boxer should do. Ali was adamant with the group, telling them that he would
not go into the service because it was against his religion.66

Herbert Muhammad's recollections of the draft issue make clear Ali's intent to
not enter the military. "I know my father didn't want Ali to go in the Army. That war
was wrong. But my father wasn't gonna tell Ali what to do. Because you have to realize.
Ali was a young man then, and he might have gotten up and told the media, 'Elijah
Muhammad told me not to go, so I'm not going.' And that was against the law. You
couldn't counsel a young man to refuse the Army."67

Another invited athlete, Lew Alcindor, who only a few years later would convert
to the Islamic religion and change his name to Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, was a basketball
player at UCLA at the time of the meeting. The only college athlete invited to the
gathering, Alcindor recalled "being very flattered and proud to be invited to the meeting,
because these were professional athletes and I was just in college." Stating that he was "a
hundred percent behind Muhammad's protesting what I thought was an unjust war."
Alcindor discussed the details of the meeting. It was set up as an open forum, with Jim
Brown leading the discussion. Brown emphasized to the invited athletes their "stature as

182
heroes in the black community could help us gather support for Ali.” As far as Alcindor was concerned, Ali had the support of the black community. Alcindor credited Ali with giving people the courage to test the system. He recalled his own religious conversion and his decision to not join the Nation of Islam, opting for the Sunni Muslim religion. He mentioned the ideals presented by Malcolm X and credited the killed leader with his own change in philosophy concerning race relations, but also recognized the contributions of Ali in his conversion. “There’s no doubt in my mind that public acceptance of what I did was greater because Muhammad laid the groundwork before me. He was, and is, one of my heroes. To do what he did outside the ring, on top of being a brilliant one-of-a-kind athlete; that’s a very hard hat to wear, and he wore it like he was born with it on.”66 And while he claims his conversion to Islam had no relation to Ali’s conversion, the college ballplayer did participate in a boycott of the 1968 Olympic games the next year and it is probable that Alcindor’s exposure to the courage and determination of Ali through the draft issue could have been a profound statement that Alcindor took to heart the next year.

Another athlete who played a significant role at the meeting and in how the meeting was portrayed was basketball great, Bill Russell. Recalling the meeting, Russell attended not to change Ali’s mind, but to support him in whatever decision he made. He was struck by how confident Ali was and that the fighter was “totally assured he was that what he was doing was right.” Russell was impacted by the meeting. “I saw a man accepting special responsibilities, someone who conducted himself in a way that the

66 Hauser, Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times, 177.
people he came in contact with were better for the experience. Philosophically, Ali was a
free man. Besides being probably the greatest boxer ever, he was free. And he was free
at a time when historically it was very difficult to be free no matter who you were or what
you were. Ali was one of the first truly free people in America.\textsuperscript{69}

In the days following the meeting, Russell recounted the meeting in an article he
wrote for \textit{Sports Illustrated}. Russell saw the meeting as an opportunity for other black
athletes, himself included, to “offer him whatever help we could with his problems.”
Russell wrote, “This was not supposed to be a public meeting. When the news leaked
out, it was reported wrong, too. We never went to Cleveland to try to persuade
Muhammad to join the Army. We went to offer him our help; if he changed his mind and
decided to go in the Army after all, we were ready to say that we had influenced him to do
it and we were ready to accept our share of criticism and insult he would be sure to get
from some of the Negro community.”\textsuperscript{70}

Russell recounted the dialogue he had with Ali about his service in the armed
forces. Ali said to Russell and the group, “I’m doing what I have to do. I appreciate you
fellows wanting to help and your friendship. But I have the best legal minds in the
country working for me, and they have shown me all the options and alternatives I could
use if I wanted to go in. Things like going in to be an ambulance driver, or a chaplain, or
a truck driver. Or joining and saying I would not kill. I could do any of those things, or
can go to jail.” On his faith in his religion, Ali spoke, “My fate is in the hands of Allah.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 178.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 178-179.
and Allah will take care of me. If I walk out of this room and get killed today, it will be Allah’s doing and I will accept it. I’m not worried. In my first teachings I was told we would all be tested by Allah. This may be my test.”^71

Russell’s article lent the boxer a great deal of peer support. The basketball player was not shy about speaking out on Ali’s behalf, while also criticizing the justice system of the country. Russell didn’t think Ali had been treated fairly and that the action taken by the boxing commission was symbolic of the times. “the doctrine of guilt by accusation.” He couldn’t recall there ever being a requirement that the titleholder be a certain religion or have certain viewpoints on war issues. He has not been convicted of anything yet, but he has been deprived of his championship. Russell noted that the Constitution guaranteed Ali’s right to be a Black Muslim. He also believed that the Muslim fighter would not get a fair trial because of his religion and his refusal to compromise his principles. Russell was insightful, noting that the crux of America’s dislike for Ali rested with the boxer’s religion. He posited that if a biography of Ali was written that there would be little to write negatively about the man’s habits; he didn’t drink, smoke, curse, or chase women. He was the best heavyweight boxer of all times. But when the issue of his religion was introduced, problems arose. “Then you would put down that he is a devout Black Muslim, and all at once, from being a hero, he would become a villain. Then go back through the biography and change just two words. Every time you used ‘Black Muslim’ change it to Catholic or Protestant or Baptist, and now he’s a hero again.”^72 Just as Ali had reveled in the role of Great Sacrificer. Russell was able to validate that Ali true was

^71 Ibid., 19.
making a great financial and professional sacrifice by standing firm with his beliefs. He thought that most Americans had a misconception of Ali as being dumb and naïve to the motives of the Nation of Islam. Russell made a very good point, when he asked, "What good will he do to the Muslims in jail? Right now he is the best recruiter they have, and when he goes to jail - if he does - they will lose his services. He can earn a million dollars a year fighting, but he won’t make penny in jail. So it would be to the best interests of the Muslim movement if he went into the Army in noncombatant status." Russell was able to acknowledge that Ali was standing up for principles and that he was making "far greater sacrifices than anyone seems to realize."  

Beyond the responses of his peers, the meeting and subsequent refusal of Ali continued to gain the attention from the press and sports fans. Many fans were still critical of his failure to serve his country. "This man who owes all that he is to the guidance of a group of white men, upon arrival at the peak of his profession, sneeringly turned them aside. The only country in the world in which he, a Negro boy born in poverty, can become a millionaire, we find him unwilling to serve that country." Another fan wrote, "It involves honor to country and belief in the country where one lives. Ali’s theory would appear to be "serve thyself" and Black Muslims, but not m country - not even in nonviolent ways by driving a truck, special services, etc. As a superathlete he could have had a choice of how he wanted to serve - and this is not the

---

"2 Ibid., 20.
3 Ibid., 20.
privilege of most. Another critic responded, "I must protest any individual’s attempt -
regardless of color, creed or athletic accomplishments - to avoid military subterfuge.

Cassius Clay was originally exempted from military service because he failed Arm
intelligence examinations; i.e., he was supposedly mentally substandard. He did not
claim, then, to be a Muslim minister."

Still, for the number of people who questioned his character and patriotism, there
were a number of people who supported the fighter’s principles, regardless if they agreed
with them or not. "The man’s sincerity toward his religious beliefs cannot be denied.
Look at what he’s already given up...I think he’s a fine example of a man standing on his
beliefs when a whole country is against him. He is criticized so much for not defending
his country, a country that gave him so much...it forgot to give him equal rights."

Another fan points out the ironies in the criticisms of Ali’s refusal to fight, "Muhammad
Ali is a sensitive man of high principles; indeed, he has those same traits of purpose,
dignity and conviction so commendable in whites that are intolerable to white America if
possessed by Negroes."

The meeting in Cleveland was not the first of its kind - Black athletes had joined
their minds to discuss and fight for the right to participate in sporting events without
discrimination a number of times before. In one such incident, the 1965 All Star football
game was scheduled to be played in New Orleans, a city still living with Jim Crow laws.

---

77 John L. Brito, Brownsville, Texas. "19th Hole: The Readers Take Over." Sports Illustrated, 3 July 1967,
63.
Black football players were not exempt from the second class citizen treatment - in restaurants, taxis, and hotels. Twenty Black athletes selected to play in the annual game were subjected to racial incidents in the southern city. Several were turned away from a nightclub, some were dropped off a mile away from their hotel, while others were stranded at the airport for over three hours waiting for a cab. The group of athletes “decided as a group that they would not perform in a city where they weren’t accepted as citizens.” One player expressed his feelings that if he didn’t protest, then he would be implying that such treatment was acceptable. Two players credited with bringing the group together were Buffalo Bills teammates, Cookie Gilchrist and Ernie Warlick. One white player, Ron Mix, held a meeting with the Black players to convince them to protest in another way, thinking that their boycott would result in nothing. Mix recognized the need for some action, but felt that their method would not do their cause any good, which was to “rectify all the injustices, to restore dignity to all men.” Initially, Mix could not see that their protest was about the treatment of Black people in America, that discrimination was unacceptable, and that concessions would not be made. Later, Mix wondered if the protest wasn’t about the bigger picture, when he wrote, “I wondered if he and some of the Negroes present were spurred on to this sacrifice because they felt guilty for having escaped the suffering of their southern brother, their ghettoed brother. Now, at last, the

67.
had the opportunity to take a stand, to carry their share of the work. Was this their freedom ride? Their Birmingham jail? As a result of the stand taken by the players, the American Football League relocated the game to Houston.

So, Ali’s meeting was not the first and would certainly not be the last - it was however the first to be held by a man of his magnitude making a decision whose impact would reverberate beyond his own existence. It would serve as an example of what could be accomplished if people who believed in something chose to stand up for that belief, even in the face of challenge, defeat, and sacrifice. The stripping of Ali’s title was a symbolic assassination of a spirited voice who cried for freedom, similar to the assassin’s bullets that had effectively quieted Malcolm and Martin. What silenced Ali were the U.S. government and the Vietnam war, along with a society that could not accept his religious and racial beliefs. Ali was deprived of his right to earn a living, he was ostracized, castigated, and ultimately exiled from boxing for three years. His stand against Vietnam was religious based, but played along racial lines as well. Ali was instrumental in encouraging other Black athletes to take a stand. Ali’s impact on other Black athletes was tremendous and evident by the increased activism of Black intercollegiate athletes in 1968, including the NYAC boycott, and the proposed Olympic boycott. Moreover, there was an increase in the activism of other individual athletes.

81 Ron Mix. “Was This Their Freedom Ride?” Sports Illustrated. 18 January 1965. 24-25.
such as tennis player Arthur Ashe, in the years following Ali’s fight for freedom.\textsuperscript{85}

Reflecting on Ali’s impact on his own consciousness, fellow fighter Jose Torres wrote,

“His conscience was awakened by the Black Muslims and he took active part of the social changes of the country...In a decade that almost crushed all our emotions, Ali made us laugh and made us hate. He put some emotions back in all of us. And that in m judgment, is a contribution...Ali has been traumatized by the “white man” in America and his obsession seems to be, not his boxing career but the freedom of America’s Blacks.”\textsuperscript{86}

One fan was eloquent in his assessment of Ali’s impact on his fellow Americans, both Black and white, and of Ali’s role in the larger struggle for freedom.
Muhammad Ali has been severely criticized for his alleged unpatriotic statements. If more of us, black and white, spoke with equal candor, Ali’s statements would represent an overwhelming majority. It’s just that we believe in “popular,” or “proper” declarations, which parallel Ali’s Cause but fail to effect his Effect...

When any man climbs into a ring and risks getting his brains scrambled - in a day when brains are valued above all else - for our entertainment, we can ill afford to brand or humiliate him. Ali is everybody - unrestrained.\(^7\)

While Muhammad Ali was the first athlete to take such a significant risk, he was also an impetus to the actions of many others. Within months there was a growing movement to have Black athletes boycott the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, a movement that often gave tribute to Muhammad Ali as an inspiration for collective protest.

The roots of the revolt of the black athletes spring from the same seed that produced the sit-ins, the freedom rides, and the rebellions in Watts, Detroit, and Newark. The athletic revolt springs from a disgust and dissatisfaction with the same racist germ that infected the warped minds responsible for the bomb murders of four black girls as they prayed in a Birmingham, Alabama, church and that conceived and carried out the murders of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Medgar Evers, among a multitude of others. The revolt of the black athlete arises also from his new awareness of his responsibilities in an increasingly more desperate, violent, and unstable America. He is for the first time reacting in a human and masculine fashion to the disparities between the heady artificial world of newspaper clippings, photographers, and screaming spectators and the real world of degradation, humiliation, and horror that confronts the overwhelming majority of Afro-Americans.¹

Just as Muhammad Ali had acted in ways that helped shaped a new image of Black athletes, college athletes continued along Ali’s path, a path that revealed their commitment to challenge the inequities that faced them on a daily basis within the sports setting. In the year following Ali’s Cleveland meeting, hundreds of other Black athletes began to realize their potential as activists on college campuses across the country: their potential as activists, but also the position of power and capacity for institutional change

that athletics allowed them. In 1968, there were a reported 37 protests by athletes on
college campuses. Several college and university boycotts and protests were part of a
larger organization, The Olympic Project for Human Rights, an organization created by
Harry Edwards in response to the inequities faced by Black athletes in college and
professional sports. The main focus of the Olympic Project for Human Rights was to
promote a boycott of the Mexico City Olympic Games by America’s Black athletes.
Moreover, boycotting by college athletes of their own collegiate competitions prior to the
October Games was a popular means of protest. This chapter examines the various
protests of Black athletes on a number of predominantly white college campuses.
Beginning with a brief overview of the process of integration in the early years of the
decade, the protests begin in the mid-1960s and use similar tactics as the civil rights
movement, culminating in the second half of the decade when several Black college
athletes actively worked to change the athletic landscape for Black athletes through
protests and boycotts. The behavior of Black athletes and the consequences of their
actions will be detailed. Their self-expressions of race and their impact upon the sporting
scene will be analyzed.

Black athletes during the 1950s had rarely challenged the sports world and its racism, lacking the numbers and support. The “typical” Black athlete had been
stereotyped as “living only for sports, and unquestioning in his obedience of the coaches’
offers.” Compared to a perfect soldier, “he kept his mouth shut and followed orders to
the letter, showing a full-set of thirty-two’s wherever he went.” Essentially, the Black

---

2 David K. Wiggins. ""The Year of Awakening:’ Black Athletes, Racial Unrest and the Civil Rights
athlete was a "good nigger" for the athletic system. Up to that point, there had been no alternative to playing that role. The Black athlete of the 1950s was typically poor and saw sport as an avenue to financial freedom. If sports did not work out, the athlete had nothing. As far as Black athletes expressing their discontent with playing conditions or racial inequities, they were rendered powerless. "Living under the delusion that his success in sports was predicated upon his silence, he blindly followed orders. By following, he was led to believe that he would not only glorify himself on the field of sport, but, more importantly, he would then be a credit to his race." But this was more typical of the Black athlete in professional sports, as most colleges and universities remained segregated. The Black athlete of the 1960s differed from his predecessors in that he understood that his ability to hit a 30-foot jump shot or running one hundred yards in record time did not give him a better chance for equal housing or get him a better job. "He realizes that while he may be a hero with a uniform on, after the game, he is just another Black face in the crowd." These differences became very evident in the number of Black athletes participating in protests, which used sports as the arena for change. Jack Scott explained why the sports and American establishment did not anticipate the change in the behavior of Black athletes. Scott declared that American sport was "caught off guard." in large part because it "mistakenly assumed that the docility and acquiescence common in Negro athletes of the past was an inherent quality rather than a posture

1 Ibid., 188-189; Edwards, Revolt, 88.
3 Ibid., 63-66.
Negroes had adopted as the only way to survive in a racist sports world." As colleges and universities began to desegregate in the early 1960s, more Black athletes attended predominantly white colleges. The integration of college campuses and their athletic departments was the impetus for the dissent that would eventually result in a number of protests by Black athletes.

Black Sports highlighted the changing role of the Black college athlete in an editorial. "We can cheer them on to victory in their events and we should cheer them on to victory in their attempts to help us realize that the inequalities that exist within our athletic system are merely products of the contaminating ills of society in general." With the integration of college campuses and college athletics, Black college athletes emerged as central figures in increasing campus activism. College sport became a viable platform for Black college athletes to express their discontent at their treatment as Black Americans and Black athletes. Black college athletes employed similar tactics used in other protest activities of the civil rights movement, which eventually culminated in various boycott movements. The first half of decade was the actual integration of athletic teams, while the second half of the decade as dealing with the impact and effects of the integration efforts.

Black college athletes were becoming more aware of their position in their respective Black communities, as well as their importance to the white athletic world, and initiated their involvement as "a dominant and motivating force in struggle for Black equality." Recognizing the position of their power as talented performers in the sporting

---

6 Ibid., 63-66.
7 "Publisher’s Statement," Black Sports, October 1971, 5.
arena, Black athletes were "able to use that influence to affect needed changes." Black athletes realized that athletics were "nothing more than an extension of the American establishment, began to involve himself as a man, and not just an athletic animal." As pieces of valuable property "owned and controlled" by respective universities, college athletes began to understand the value of boycotting and the effects their refusal to participate could have on athletics, as well as the political, cultural, and social struggle. Circumstances and situations challenged their morals and beliefs and resulted in their decision to use their athletic abilities as a commodity, similar to the way they were viewed by coaches, athletic directors, and sport fans.

It is important and significant that during the first half of the 1960s, many predominantly white schools, including Southern colleges and universities, struggled with the integration of their classrooms. On the athletic fields, most teams were feeling the impact of the increasing number of Black athletes on predominantly white college campuses. Success in the win column for teams that were already integrated encouraged other schools to follow in the pursuit of recruiting Black athletes for intercollegiate teams. In 1963, after Mississippi State reluctantly admitted their first African American student, James Meredith, it was believed that Ole Miss would be invited to finally play in the NCAA Basketball Tournament based on the change of the state's integration policy.

---

Still, even after contending for the Southeastern Conference title, which would have given them an automatic berth in the tournament, Mississippi State’s Athletic Director Wade Walker said, “There is an unwritten law here that the state universities can’t compete against athletic teams that include Negroes. We will continue to abide by that law.” The opportunity to compete in the tournament that ultimately decided the national championship was not important enough to the school if it meant possibly competing against an integrated opponent. Later that year in college football, Sugar Bowl officials offered the University of Pittsburgh a bid to compete in the New Orleans bowl game. The Sugar Bowl had “no policy against Negroes appearing in the game and its seating policy is now one of integration.” Still, bowl officials could not guarantee desegregation outside the stadium, in places such as theaters, restaurants, and social functions. Pitt, with an integrated squad, turned down the offer and Sugar Bowl officials then matched the University of Mississippi against Alabama. That same season, Baylor University opened its athletic rosters to Black athletes, following the lead of the University of Texas and Southern Methodist University. Despite the opportunity teams received to play in prestigious games, some refused the invitation to avoid playing an integrated opponent.

Two years later, in 1965, the lily-white Southeastern Conference finally began to recruit Black athletes. Ending a decade long gentlemen’s agreement to not recruit Black athletes, the SEC teams succumbed to the integration of their team rosters. Citing “the pressure on those that are holding out for sporting segregation is likely to become

---

irresistible as soon as they are regularly whupped by their integrated neighbors.”

Notably, only a year later in the 1966 NCAA Tournament, the University of Texas – El Paso started five Black players against an all-white SEC Kentucky squad. An increase in the successes of Black athletes in high school competitions brought great attention from Southern colleges that wanted to be competitive with their opponents who were recruiting Black high school athletes and enticing them with athletic scholarships. In 1967, three southern high schools, Beach and Carver in Georgia and Gibbs in Florida won their respective state’s high school basketball tournaments. The victories were significant in part because the three schools were “all-Negro schools” and the first in the Deep South to play in white tournaments. Prior to the championships, tradition held that each state held two state championships for their two, one Black and one white, high school associations. “The most immediate benefit is that more colleges in the South are offering grants-in-aid to Negroes.”

The impact upon college sport was noticeable and affected the recruiting of every major competitive university. The growth and continued success of integrated teams encouraged segregated white teams to recruit black athletic talent. Other leagues and Southern schools continued their pursuit of new talent. “The whole SWC has given up the ghost of segregation,” with TCU signing the conference’s first Negro basketball player, James Cash, while Southern Methodist signed the Southwest’s first Negro football player, Jerry Levias. TCU and Southern Methodist did have an opponent that refused to integrate. “Texas A&M policy remains quite firmly opposed to the integrated

---

team. "I've got nothing against the Negro athlete," explained Gene Stallings, new Aggie football coach, with the customary preface, "but I don't believe he fits into our plans right now. What we need is a team that will work and pull and fight together and really get a feeling of oneness. We need to be a complete unit. I don't believe we could accomplish this with a Negro on the squad."\(^{16}\)

Moreover, the integrated squads represented much more to Americans and people around the world. While public transportation and schools were still slow to accommodate all Americans, the sports field appeared to be accessible to everyone, based on talent rather than skin color. The United States government realized the message they could send with the increased success of American Black athletes. Harry Edwards asserted that the U.S. State Department annually sent "teams of athletes all over the world to conduct clinics and to compete against native teams." Edwards reasoned that the tours were actually promotional efforts by the government to educate the rest of the world about United States race relations, stating that "the government knows full well that a person in another part of the world who may not understand how a Negro may sit on the U.S. Supreme Court while the majority of black people suffer unspeakable indignities may quite easily become convinced that such contradictions in American life are meaningless when an "integrated" team sets up a basketball clinic in his country."\(^{17}\)

Harry Edwards was a driving force in the protests of Black intercollegiate athletes in 1967 and 1968. Edwards, in his words and actions, sought to utilize "the endemic political, social and economic aspects of sports for the greater and more profound


purposes of freedom, justice and equality for oppressed humanity.”

Edwards had grown disillusioned with the prevailing American myth that exempted sport from
criticism because it was viewed as an equal playing field. Edwards had been raised on
the myth of meritocracy, that if you were the best, you would be rewarded for your effort,
no matter your skin color. “It was something that was drilled into me for as long as
could remember. The basic idea was, ‘Hey, Jesse Owens, Joe Louis, and Jackie
Robinson – they’re making endorsements. They got it made.’ They’ve all proved that
that if you can make it in athletics, you can make it in American society.”

Edwards was determined to break the cycle of destructive thinking. Through sport, Edwards worked to
change American society and race relations. However, Edwards did not originally
conceive the plan to boycott the 1968 Olympic Games, nor was he the first to think that
sport could be used as an effective bargaining tool in the larger civil rights movement. A
month after Muhammad Ali’s Cleveland meeting, the First National Black Power
Conference was held in July 1967 in Newark, New Jersey. The conference was designed
to discuss civil rights issues and increase communication between black activists. The
agenda called for a discussion of methods of gaining economic and political power for
Blacks in America. Noted leaders attended, including Jesse Jackson of the Southern
Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), H. Rap Brown of the Student Nonviolent
Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and James Farmer, the former head of the Congress of
Racial Equality (CORE). More than 900 American delegates attended the three-day

---

conference. Days before the conference, Newark erupted in rioting, killing 26 and injuring over 1000. The violence gave the conference and the agenda an added urgency for greater action.²⁰

Dick Gregory, Black activist and comedian, introduced three proposals related to sport at the Black Power Conference. He proposed that Black Americans boycott sponsors of boxing events held in the United States and urged that all Black American participate in the economic boycott. He moved that Black boxers boycott commercialized boxing competition. His first two proposals were in direct response to the treatment of former heavyweight titleholder, Muhammad Ali, who was stripped of his title as a result of his refusal to submit to the military draft. Gregory's third and final proposal called for Black American athletes to boycott the 1968 Olympic Games.²¹

The proposal to boycott the 1968 Olympics, a movement later adopted and fueled by the actions of the Olympic Project for Human Rights was not the first time the threat of a boycott was presented as an option to athletic participation. In 1960, it was suggested to Rafer Johnson that he boycott the Olympic games to protest the treatment of black people in the South/civil rights movement by police. Johnson “laughed the whole notion off and walked away.” The press heard about the suggestion and “was, from that day on, irrevocably planted in the minds of black people as perhaps yet another tool to use in the dramatizing the gravity of the plight of Afro-Americans in racist white

２⁰ A number of articles appeared in the 21-24 July 1967 issues of New York Times, which addressed a variety of aspects of the conference, including resolutions passed, criticism of Adam Clayton Powell’s absence, attendance, sessions, and a proposed boycott of Black American athletes of the 1968 Olympic Games.

Three years later, Gregory tried to organize a boycott of the Russian-American track meet. The boycott failed, "but the brief movement gave impetus to the whole idea of utilizing amateur athletics as a means of dramatizing racial injustice." In 1964, Gregory tried to organize a boycott of the Tokyo Olympic Games, but again failed. He was able to get people to protest and picket at the trials. Mal Whitfield, once a great track and field performer, also advocated a boycott by American Black athletes of the Tokyo Olympics. Whitfield felt that a boycott would act "as a form of protest against racial bigotry in the United States." and that "Negro athletes," needed to become more active in the Civil Rights movement. Whitfield declared that "Negro athletes have been too smug and complacent during the Civil Rights conflagration." Incidents at the Tokyo Games included unequal treatment of American Black Olympians, including social activities, housing accommodations and athletic assignments.

In September 1967, while competing as an athlete in Tokyo for the World University Games, sprinter Tommie Smith was asked by a Japanese reporter about the likelihood of a boycott by Black American athletes of the Olympic Games in Mexico City. Smith responded that indeed a boycott had been briefly discussed and that such a boycott would be to "protest racial injustice in America." He hinted that perhaps some black athletes would boycott the 1968 games. U.S. newspapers interpreted Smith's statement as evidence of "considerable sentiment" among black athletes for a boycott. When asked about United States race relations, Smith answered "lousy" and continued to say, "Depending upon the situation, you cannot rule out the possibility that we Negro

---

22 Edwards, Revolt of the Black Athlete, 40-41.
athletes might boycott the games in Mexico,” and he revealed that he had spoken with other Black athletes about the topic.”25 Though Smith later denied that he supported such a boycott, the reality of one occurring seemed reasonable according to Jim Fowdler. “the white leader of the U.S. delegation to the University Games.” Fowdler stated that, “some of the Negro leaders may be thinking along these lines. Another difficult hot summer and more problems in some of the big cities and they might see an Olympic boycott as a strong piece of propaganda.”26 Fowdler made the connection between the discontent of Black Americans and the use of an athletic boycott to bring attention to the racial injustices. Hate mail followed Smith after his comments at the University Games. Smith made an appointment with Harry Edwards to discuss the matter. Smith was enrolled in Edwards’ race relations course at San Jose State University. They decided to check in with other world-class black athletes about the problems facing black athletes and the black community. They contacted John Carlos, Lee Evans, Lew Alcindor, Otis Burrell, Mike Warren, Lucius Allen, and others. Many African-American athletes, in all sports, had given thought to a boycott.

At San Jose State, there was a revolt of black athletes and students. The problems at this institution included complaints of racism in the fraternities and sororities, racism in housing, minority recruitment, and a general lack of understanding of the problems of Afro-Americans by the college administration. They also took issue with the treatment of Black athletes at the school. The school newspaper reported the discontent. “They segregated the athletes as soon as social activities are involved. It’s totally different from

24 Edwards, Revolt of the Black Athlete, 42.
out there on the playing field or floor."\textsuperscript{27} At San Jose State, 80 students out of the 23,000 enrollment were Black. 59 Black students banded together to form the United Black Students for Action.\textsuperscript{28} Edwards and the United Black Students for Action "utilized collegiate athletics as a lever to bring about social, academic, and political changes at an educational institution." Edwards outlined the steps taken at San Jose State. After approaching the administration, The Dean of Students, Stanle Benz, deemed the interest and desires of the majority whites as more important than the necessities of the black students. Seeing no alternative, Edwards and his group decided to move into the public arena. On the opening day of classes in fall 1967, a noon rally was held. At first, only 35 blacks and 100 whites showed up for the rally. Then the crowd grew with over 700 in attendance, including President Robert Clark and representatives from black community organizations.\textsuperscript{29}

The rally was successful in generating attention and as a result, the United Black Students for Action's list of nine demands ranging from housing, racist practices on campus, increased number of minority students, tutorial programs, student government representing true student population, and athletics were taken seriously by the administration. The specific demands directed at athletics were that the department of athletics immediately organize and put into operation "an effective program that provides the same treatment and handling for all athletics including visiting prospective athletes," and that the department issue a public statement "denouncing the racist principles upon

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{27} San Jose State College Spartan Daily. 18 September 1967.
\textsuperscript{28} Harry Edwards. The Struggle That Must Be (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 159-164. In Edwards' Revolt of the Black Athlete, he uses different figures, stating that 60 of the 72 blacks on campus were
which the present fraternity system functions and secondly, that they publicly
disassociate themselves and their department from this system. 30 Edwards stated
publicly the group's strategy should their demands not be met. He declared that they
would prevent the opening football game of the season, versus the University of Texas at
El Paso, from being played by any means necessary. 31 Many did not see the connection
between the demands and stopping the football game asking, "Why attack the only area
that had granted black people full equality." 32 But the student group recognized that
sport was as racist as any other areas in the college life. They also felt they had to utilize
a power lever that was central to the community - athletics. "What activity is of more
relevance to a student body than the first football game of the season? What activity is of
more relevance to a college town after a long and economically drought-stricken summer
than the first big game? And what is of more immediate importance to a college
administration than the threat of stopping a game that had been contracted for under a
$12,000 breach of contract clause and the cancellation of all future competition
commitments if the game were not played?" 33

Four days later, on September 21, President Robert Clark announced steps that
would lessen racial tensions, with the most significant step taken being the appointment
of a campus ombudsman that would "conduct a continuous and aggressive campaign
against racial discrimination." 34 The tension on campus was so great that President Clark

29 Edwards, Revolt of the Black Athlete, 42.
30 Ibid., 45-46.
32 Edwards, Revolt of the Black Athlete, 44.
33 Ibid., 44.
34 San Jose State Spartan Daily, 21 September 1967.

205
canceled the football game, afraid of the potential security risks. He issued a statement that read, "We regret this disappointment to the community and to our students, but we do not have the right to take chances with people's lives." There was talk of moving the game to UTEP, but rumor had it that the San Jose Stadium would burn down if the decision to not play was changed. The cost of the cancellation of the game to the school and the community was $100,000 in direct game receipts and anticipated business income. "What is a canceled game relative to acquiring the basic human rights due any citizen of this country and the regaining of one's black dignity?" Edwards recognized the social and economic importance of sports in America, saying that "If there is a religion in this country, it is athletics. On Saturdays from 1 to 6 you know where you can find a substantial portion of the country: in the stadium or in front of the television set." Using sport was sure to attract public attention of public, and in fact, the cancellation of the game received national attention. Max Rafferty, California Superintendent of Public Instruction, stated his displeasure at the decision to cancel the game, saying, "If I had to call in the U.S. Marine Corps, that game would have been played." Echoing Rafferty's sentiments, California Governor Ronald Reagan felt the cancellation was an appeasement to the militant group and declared that he would have also called out the "necessary force law enforcement." Both felt that sport was no place for protest of any kind and both were willing to protect the sanctity of sport at any costs.

35 Edwards, Revolt of the Black Athlete, 47
Edwards recognized that the support of the community was critical to the success of the protest and praised all involved. He softened his previously threatening rhetoric, and conceded that "Fifty-nine people could not have done this without the support of the students and the community. I think the administration, city government and student body are to be commended in an extremely explosive situation. If it can be done at SJS, cannot see why it cannot be done in Detroit, New York, and Newark." Edwards did not see the San Jose as the last word. Moreover, he saw the successful efforts as a starting point for increased activism at schools across the country.

Following the protest at San Jose State and seeing the need for some sort of organizing structure and an effective strategy, Edwards held a meeting at his home in October 1967. Those in attendance included George Washington Ware, a field worker for the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee; Tommie Smith, holder of eleven world records; Ken Noel, co-planner of the opening day rally/revolt; Jimmy Garrett, chairman of the Black Student Union at San Francisco State University; and Bob Hoover, black political activist/counselor at San Mateo Junior College. It was at this meeting that the Olympic Committee for Human Rights was officially formed. The creation of the new civil rights organization drew critical attention to his cause and marked the emergence of organized black activism in American sport. The group held the "belief that the role of blacks in American sports was intimately interdependent with our overall struggle for human rights in American Society." The group planned and organized a

---

37 Edwards, Struggle, 174-180. Edwards lists two dates that the meeting was held: in his autobiography, the date is cited as October 27 and in Revolt, he lists the date as October 7.
38 Edwards, Struggle, 175.
workshop for Black athletes to attend and learn about the new committee as a session of the Los Angeles Black Youth Conference, to be held November 22-23, 1967. The workshop would spell out the direction of the boycott as part of the revolt. The proposal to have Black athletes boycott the 1968 Mexico City Olympics was reintroduced at the conference.\textsuperscript{42}

The Black Youth Conference and the "Blacks in American Sports" workshop attracted world-class athletes, such as Tommie Smith, Otis Burrell, Lew Alcindor, Lee Evans. These four athletes revealed their support of the boycott. Alcindor stated his beliefs concerning the treatment of Black Americans.

> Everybody knows me. I'm the big basketball star, the weekend hero, everybody's All-American. Well, last summer I was almost killed by a racist cop shooting at a black cat in Harlem. He was shooting on the street - where masses of black people were standing around or just taking a walk. But he didn't care. After all we were just niggers. I found out last summer that we don't catch hell because we aren't basketball stars or because we don't have money. We catch hell because we are black. Somewhere each of us has got to make a stand against this kind of thing. This is how I take my stand - using what I have. And I take my stand here.\textsuperscript{43}

Some athletes did not like the idea of a boycott. "Deacon" Dan Towler, former player for the Los Angeles Rams, pointed out how much sport had done for Negroes and how great a privilege it was for a Negro to compete for America. He criticized other athletes as unintelligent and gullible. Still, there were over 200 people in attendance at the workshop. The workshop had given the Olympic Committee for Human Rights their endorsement in support of the Black athletes.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 175.
\textsuperscript{43} Edwards, \textit{Revolt of the Black Athlete}, 53.
A resolution was drafted at the Black Youth Conference, L.A., November 23, 1967. The athletes in attendance voted unanimously to fully endorse and boycott the upcoming 1968 Mexico City Olympic Games. The athletes also agreed to boycott a track meet held annually by the New York Athletic Club, which had exclusive white Christian members, yet used black athletes in track meet for the financial gain of their organization. Lastly, the athletes agreed to boycott any meet that allowed participants from South Africa or Southern Rhodesia. The workshop made the headlines of the Los Angeles Herald Tribune, New York Daily News, and Los Angeles Times, though the announcement that athletes planned to take actions with a boycott was not taken very seriously.44

Former Olympic decathlete Rafer Johnson tried to stop the movement with a group called "Committee for the Perpetuation of Friendship Through Sport." Johnson believed that winning a place on the team was an individual choice and was won on merit. Furthermore, he did not believe that a boycott would do anything to improve housing for blacks. He supported the common assumption that sport acted as a great equalizer. Edwards' response to Johnson's failure to support the boycott was critical and he pointed out that "neither a Nobel Prize nor an Olympics medal elevates a black person to human status...The only reason why Rafer Johnson has not been attacked is that he has taken no stand in support of liberation for black people."45 Johnson fit neatly into the Black athlete of the 1950s and accommodated the white sport structure.

---

44 Ibid., 55-56.
45 Ibid., 63
The Project, headed by Edwards, created a list of six demands in November 1967, which paralleled the civil rights movement. These demands would be the focus until the following October 1968 and the Mexico City Olympics Games. Edwards and Dr. Louis E. Lomax also brought in several leaders to "strengthen the forces behind the Olympic Project for Human Rights." The leaders who attended the meeting included Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., President of Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Floyd McKissick, Director of the Congress of Racial Equality. A meeting was held in New York City on December 15, 1967 at New York's Americana Hotel, at which time six demands were presented. The first demand was the restoration of Muhammad Ali's title and Ali's right to box in the United States. The second demand was the removal of Avery Brundage as Chairman of the International Olympic Committee as Brundage was viewed as both anti-Semitic, anti-black, and a supporter of South Africa. The group's third demand was the curtailment of participation of all-white and individuals from the Union of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia in all United States and Olympic Athletic events. The group demanded that there be the "addition of at least two black coaches to the men's track and field coaching staff appointed to coach the 1968 United States Olympic team: though Stan Wright was a Black coach, he was not considered acceptable because of his political leanings as a "devout Negro." The group's fifth demand was for the "appointment of at least two black people to policy making positions on the United States Olympic Committee. Their final demand was the "complete desegregation of the bigot dominated and racist New York Athletic Club." Martin Luther King, Jr.,

46 Ibid., 58.
47 Ibid., 58-59. The demands were also printed in New York Times. 15 December 1967.
"commended" the Black athletes in their joining the "struggle against racism and injustice." Floyd McKissick noted that "an athlete is only on the field two or three hours," before returning to his second-class citizenship for the rest of the day. The goals of the proposed boycott were outlined and discussed in a document created by Edwards, Lomax, King, McKissick, and Kenneth Noel. This document was created following the December meeting and was designed to inform potential boycott participants of the aims of the boycott, the reasons behind some of their demands, who was involved in the proposed boycott, and to clear up some of the misinformation spread by the media. The demands revealed Pan-African sentiment and the connection of the plight of all Blacks, not just American athletes.

The group's final demand concerning the desegregation of the New York Athletic Club was the impetus behind the proposed boycott of the 100th annual track and field meet hosted by the NYAC. NYAC was very influential in the legislative process of amateur athletics, but had discriminatory practices, allowing no Blacks and only a few Jewish members into the club. The meet was scheduled at Madison Square Garden for the first time in meet history. Moreover, the NYAC meet was one of more prestigious track meets in country. The central aim of the NYAC boycott was not to integrate the facility, but to "regain some dignity that black athletes had compromised over several decades by participating for a club that would not even allow a black person to shower in its facilities." Not that other clubs did not also have discriminatory practices, but NYAC

---

50 Edwards, Revolt of the Black Athlete, 65.
presented the group with the opportunity to bring attention to their cause, as well as challenge a club that had profited from the talent of black athletes. The track meet was a visible and vulnerable target for protest. "We’re not singling the NYAC out. But theirs (sic) is the most blatant because they’ve had so much success using black athletes in their meet."

Omar Ahmad, co-chairman of 1966 Black Power Conference, H. Rap Brown, chairman of SNCC, and Jay Cooper, chairman of the Columbia University Black American Law Students Association were contacted to mobilize black people to demonstrate and picket. Marshall Brown, AAU official, contacted East Coast athletes. Tommie Smith and Lee Evans were the first athletes to announce their boycott. There were mass withdrawals by teams and individual athletes, cancellation of the high school competition, and only nine black athletes registered for competition. Villanova’s team withdrew as a result of a team vote. Black team members discussed boycotting the NYAC meet, and Coach Jumbo Elliot decided to let the team members choose their course of action. The team voted unanimously to not go to the meet. “I know because counted the votes.” Team captain Dave Patrick recalled. “There were two reasons. We thought the New York AC was doing itself an injustice by not letting Negroes in the organization. We also thought that we have such a great team feeling that we didn’t want to take a chance and try to split any views. We function as a team, and we should go or not go as a team. We decided not to go.”

Other predominantly white universities decided to boycott, including St. Johns, Georgetown, and New York University. The

---

Urban League, SNCC, CORE, and delegates from the Black Power Conference supported the boycott. Recognizing that many schools were not attending, meet organizers recruited foreign athletes to compete, but even the Soviet National team skipped the meet.

The boycott of NYAC meet was successful; attendance dropped fifty percent and race times were mediocre. The NYAC meet seemed a more viable target than the Olympics and as a result, over 100 Black athletes boycotted. In the end, only nine black athletes participated in the Feb. 16 meet. One of the nine Black athletes that competed, USC sprinter Lenox Miller, didn’t believe that his attendance had “damaged the Negro cause. It’s been misrepresented. I don’t like the idea of being told not to compete by somebody who doesn’t know what track is all about or what athletics is about.”

Popular sports writer African American A.S. “Doc” Young supported his performance. Doc Young thought that sport was one avenue where blacks had been given opportunity blacks to participate and excel in white America. He saw Black athletes as having a positive impact on all Black Americans. Young was adamant in his dislike of “the Mafia-type tactics being used by the proponents of the boycott to whip Negro athletes into line.” Moreover, Young did not “believe the absence of Negro athletes from the Olympic Games will improve conditions in America one iota – and meanwhile, Negro

57 A.S. “Doc” Young. Chicago Defender. 6 March 1968.
athletes will have missed an opportunity to continue the positive march of sports. On the same day of the track meet, the International Olympic Committee announced that South Africa had been reinstated into the 1968 Olympic Games. The tremendous success of the NYAC boycott was a civil rights victory and helped the prospects of an Olympic boycott seem possible. It also strengthen the importance of Harry Edwards' in the growing discussion of the proposed Olympic boycott.

After the success of the NYAC boycott, college campuses across the nation were the sites of protest by Black athletes. "It is a mess that extends from Niagara to the University of California, from Michigan State to the University of Texas at El Paso. Universities across the country saw black students protest and demonstrate at predominantly white universities, including Cornell, San Francisco State, and Columbia. There were also Black student protests at historically Black colleges. Howard and Tuskegee. Black athletes protested at University of Oklahoma, University of Kansas, Iowa State University, Princeton University, Marquette University, Michigan State University. The Black athletes were protesting the systematic racial discrimination that occurred on predominantly white campuses. Black students, non-athletes and athletes wanted more Black professors and Black Studies curriculum programs. Black athletes wanted black assistant coaches, trainers, and black cheerleaders. They wanted employment opportunities for their spouses, viable social outlets, and a change in the inequities in treatment. They complained about the inordinate amount of time spent on

---

58 Chicago Defender. 22 September 1968.
59 The decision to reinstate South Africa was rescinded on April 28, 1968, after 40 countries threatened to boycott the Games. See William Furlong, "A Bad Week for Mr. B." Sports Illustrated, 11 March 1968. 18-21; Tex Maule, "Switcheroo from Yes to Nyet." Sports Illustrated, 29 April 1968. 28-29.
practice, travel and competition, that Black athletes were recruited blacks primarily for their athletic skills, with little attention or concern for their academic success, and the social isolation experienced too frequently by Black athletes. The Black athletes most potent bargaining tool was the threat of their non-participation in athletic events.

The Olympic Committee for Human Rights “white-listed” three universities: University of California - Berkeley, University of Texas – El Paso, and University of Washington. The white-list was comprised of predominantly white universities where Black athletes had expressed and voiced their concerns regarding racial inequities. At Berkeley, Pete Newell, the Athletic Director had sent an all-white mile relay to the NYAC meet. On February 18, 1968, a press conference was held to demand the resignation of Newell and Rene Herrerias, the basketball coach, two men Edwards deemed as “insensitive and unconcerned about needs and problems of campus athletes.” Other demands presented that day called for better treatment of campus black students, the inclusion of courses relevant to black people, and recruitment of more black students. Athletes and students, including support from the Black Student Union, threatened to picket and disrupt all UC athletic events, athletes had threatened to boycott competition until men resigned, and that no prospective black athlete would enroll at UCB until demands were met. “It took a walkout by the black squad members the week before the annual spring intersquad scrimmage to bring the problems into the open. Black protests against lack of communication and understanding and the stacking of blacks against each

---

80 “The Angry Black Athlete” Newsweek, July 15, 1968, 57D.
81 Edwards, Revolt of the Black Athlete, 80.
other at certain positions were among the grievances."^62 What resulted from the protest efforts was the creation of several Black Studies courses, the hiring of two black coaches, and the resignation of both Newell and Herrerias.

At the University of Washington, students invited Edwards to come to their campus to help organize a movement that would end discrimination on campus and they wanted to use athletics as the lever. Black athletes threatened to boycott athletic competitions and like Berkeley had the support of the Black Student Union. One issue raised was the dating habits of Owens' Black players, such as Junior Coffey, who despite his talent ended up sitting the bench because he was suspected of dating a white girl. Football coach Jim Owens denied that he or the school was racist. The belief that ability was not the sole criterion for staying off the bench was raised as a concern. As a result of the pressure put on the school administration and the threats of boycotts and further protests. Black coaches were hired, black studies were instituted as part of curriculum, and steps were taken to end discrimination in housing and employment. Coach Owens suffered no consequences.

Perhaps the school that was hit hardest by the NYAC boycott and the white-list was the University of Texas at El Paso. UTEP had been the first university in Texas to recruit a black athlete, Charlie Brown. The school had used Black athletes to earn an athletic reputation nationwide and 1966 won the NCAA basketball title with five Black starters. El Paso was two percent Black and the campus had only 250 in their student

body of almost 10,000. Black athletes were concerned about housing, social isolation, interracial dating, unemployment, and the racial prejudices of coaches and staff. UTEP Black track athletes had been forced to compete at the NYAC meet and were threatened with the loss of their scholarships. Many of them went simply to get a free trip home to New York City. The athletes received threatening phone calls, and Edwards announced that once the athletes saw the picket line, they would quit. He said he could not be held responsible for anything that might happen to the participating athletes. Coach Vandenburg recalled that his “boys were scared to death,” and that he informed each one that they did not have to compete. 

Sports Illustrated reported that the Black athletes who had “crossed the Madison Square Garden picket line and performed under intense pressure from Negro militants,” were welcomed home as heroes who had “stood up to the militants.” Morgan recalled that the athletes were congratulated for participating, despite subpar performances. Morgan remembered being told by the athletic administration that by performing they had “really stood up for our rights.” But the New York trip started the Negroes thinking and they began to consider some type of protest at UTEP. I disturbed the Black athletes that whites in El Paso considered them heroes because the had crossed the picket line. Among the tracksters that had competed in New York, there was a growing feeling that the inequities that existed for them at UTEP could no longer be tolerated.

---

66 Ibid., 41.
67 Ibid., 41.
After the NYAC meet, Harry Edwards was contacted by black athletes at UTEP. Only four days after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., Edwards arrived on campus to discuss the options Black athletes had to improve their situation. Football coaches planned a practice so the players could not meet with Edwards, but he held a second meeting. The administration was furious and believed that the record showed its support of Black athletes – or as they referred to them – colored athletes. “This was the first institution in Texas - right here! - that had a colored athlete, and George McCarty, our athletic director, was the coach who recruited him.” Assistant Athletic Director Jim Bowden bragged. “George McCarty’s done more for ‘em than this damn guy Harry Edwards that’s coming in here to speak. George McCarty’s done more for the nigger race than Harry Edwards’ll do if he lives to be 100.”"^8

The assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., “ended the vacillation and brooding and brought the Negro trackmen into a cohesive unit.” The next weekend, the track athletes competed at the Texas Relays, and held a secret meeting upon to campus. The next meet was a track meet hosted Brigham Young University, a Mormon school, in Provo, Utah. The Mormon religious doctrine concerning Black people distressed the Black athletes and they discussed not competing at the Easter weekend meet. The Mormon religious doctrine depicted blacks as descendents of the devil and the Book of Mormon placed Black people in an inferior role. Athlete Dave Morgan thought there were several good reasons that the Black athletes should not compete. Morgan was particularly bothered by the Mormon depiction of Blacks, and also mentioned the timing of the track meet.

^8 Ibid., 30.
The Mormons teach that Negroes are descended from the devil. As a reason for a track team's boycott it may sound like a small thing to a white person, but who the hell wants to go up there and run your tail off in front of a bunch of spectators who think you've got horns. And it was Easter week, and it seemed to us that there was an obvious connection between the martyrdom of Jesus and the martyrdom of Dr. King. To a white it might be nothing; to us it had great significance. And on top of all that, there was the general fact that the Negro is treated like something out of the jungle here, and we wanted to express ourselves about that.69

It was decided that the track men would boycott BYU as "both a gesture of reverence to the slain Dr. King; a protest against Mormon ideology, that every black person is morally, intellectually and physically inferior; and retribution for the lack of concern displayed by the UTEP athletic department toward Afro-American athletes, toward the murder of Dr. King, and for its position in the NYAC issue."70 The school administration and coaching staff failed to understand the relationship between the King's assassination and the Mormon-sponsored BYU track meet. The athletes were again threatened with the loss of their scholarships, but still decided to boycott.

During the week prior to the meet, the Black athletes attended practice, giving Coach Vandenburg the hope that perhaps they would not boycott the weekend meet. "When he heard informally that the athletes were going to refuse to head for Utah he prepared a statement saying that they were, in effect quitting the team."71 The night before the team was to leave for Utah, Assistant Athletic Director Jim Bowden talked to the boycotting athletes. According to School President Joseph Ray, Bowden discussed the ramifications of their plans to boycott the meet. Bowden "told them that he didn’t necessarily disagree with them on principle, but he said they were paying too big a price

69 Ibid., 41-42.
70 Edwards, Revolt of the Black Athlete, 85.
to make their point. But according to the athletes, Bowden told the athletes that the
would be "off the track squad and lose their scholarships if they refused to go to Provo."
The next morning the track team left, leaving eight of its Black athletes behind. All black
track athletes were removed from the team and when the school attempted to host a meet
without them, Afro-American women invaded the track and sat down, refusing to move.
Police had to be called to remove the women.

The reaction from the school president and Coach Vandenburg are very revealing.
President Ray said, "A whole lot of pushing has been done by Negroes, and that pushing
is going to hasten the day when your Negro comes close to equality. But I think in this
case they paid a hell of a price to win their point...This is a price that no college athletes
in this country have ever yet paid for a point on this issue. They were laying down their
collegiate athletic lives, and they surely knew it." If others could see the cost and the
sacrifice such actions resulted in, surely the participating athletes recognized the
statement they were making. Coach Vandenburg was a bit more concerned with the
resulting performance and successes of his track team.

\footnote{Olsen, "In An Alien World." 42.}
\footnote{Ibid., 42.}
\footnote{The eight Black athletes did lose their track scholarships. See Scorecard. \textit{Sports Illustrated}, 21 October 1968, 9: Eight of the 11 black trackmen who lost their scholarships at the University of Texas at El Paso last spring after refusing to compete against Brigham Young are back at UTEP this fall, on different scholarships...The athletes...have been aided by the efforts of the Disassociated Students Fund Coordinating Committee in El Paso.}
\footnote{Olsen, "In An Alien World." 42.}
Look what happened. Look what this thing did to the track team. We lost the world indoor record holder in the long jump, the school record holder in the hurdle, the school record holder in the quarter mile, the freshman hurdle champion, a couple of outstanding intermediate runners, a fine long-jump and triple-jump man - and not one of them seniors. We had aspirations of winning the NCAA championship this year. At least we'd have been second or third. Track and Field News picked us third, three points behind second place. Now we're not gonna win anything except a few dual meets. It kills us!\textsuperscript{75}

His point made concerning the success of his team was reflective of the value placed on Black athletes as commodities and for their talent, with little regard for them as students, individuals, citizens and men. The coaching staff failed to see the connections between the behavior of Black athletes and the civil rights movement, instead crying about what it did to their team and the impact of losing a sporting event.

Discontent for Black athletes at predominantly white colleges and universities was spreading across the country and their reasons echoed from school to school. "The newly militant attitude of Negro college athletes, which led to a change of basketball coaches at California, the boycotting of a track meet at the University of Texas at El Paso and an uproar at the University of Washington, has spread to the sport where it could hit colleges the hardest - and in the pocketbook. The sport is football, and the new militancy has evidenced itself at Michigan State, a most unlikely place."\textsuperscript{76} Michigan State had the reputation of being a university that was proud of all its athletes, black and white, and had remained free of racial disharmony in athletics. Despite this, a group of 15 to 20 Black football players left the practice field to speak with the Athletic Director, Biggie Munn. Many of the players charges were valid. They recounted that they were "being

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 43.
\textsuperscript{76} "Scorecard," Sports Illustrated, 6 May 1968, 8.
pressed to take nonacademic snap courses to stay eligible,” and it was pointed out that the school offers a degree in mobile-home building. They felt that the school was “not hiring enough Negro coaches.” and charged that “the athletic counselor should have a black assistant; that the school does not have a black trainer or doctor for black athletes.” They claimed that they were discouraged from playing baseball and that the school has “never had a black cheerleader.” The athletes threatened to boycott all Spartan athletics until a meeting with the university president, John Hannah, was scheduled. Michigan State’s football team was not the only gridiron squad to deal with protest from Black players on the team.

The next season, the University of Washington, already troubled by racial divisions in athletics, faced similar problems with its football team. “On Thursday afternoon Owens had lined up his 80 players and interviewed them, one by one, on the matter of team loyalty.” After the interviews, Owens ordered an assistant coach, Carter Gayton, a black, “to drop four blacks from the squad because ‘they could not give me assurance they were prepared to give total commitment to the ball club and the Washington football program.” When the team left for its game at UCLA the next morning, their bus was met by over 200 protesters. The remaining Black football players and Coach Gayton decided to not travel with the team to UCLA and were assured by Athletic Director Joe Kearney that they would “incur no official reprimand or recrimination,” because, according to Kearney, “they indicated they were under considerable pressure not to board the bus - even to the extent of threat of physical

77 Ibid., 8.
78 “Football’s Week.” Sports Illustrated, 10 November 1969, 60.
violence to themselves and their families. The Huskies problems did not end there. While Black athletes called for the resignation of Coach Owens, he relented and began to negotiate with the suspended players. Those meetings ended when the players walked out because Owens would not allow the players to have their attorney present. As soon as this was resolved, the players balked again when Owens refused to allow a black assistant coach, Carter Gayton, to be present. Finally, the coach and players met...with the announcement coming late Saturday that all the blacks except Halfback Harvey Blanks would be taken back. That same week, other teams in college football faced similar protests.

Just as Owens had kicked off four Black football players, Wyoming’s Coach Lloyd Eaton dismissed 14 Black players from his squad as a response to their protests regarding the racial policies of the Mormon BYU. The only demonstration against Eaton was the wearing of black armbands with ‘14’ on them, worn by a handful of fans. BYU, the target of UTEP’s boycott in track the year prior, continued to stand by their racist beliefs and were met by a San Jose State football team wearing black armbands. Even Spartan Coach Joe McMullen wore an armband in “protest of the alleged racist policies of the Mormon Church, the issue that touched off the trouble at Wyoming.” In the Midwest, Indiana University’s football squad was in turmoil. Coach John Pont dismissed 10 blacks, including three defensive starters, for skipping practice two straight days, an offense that called for automatic dismissal. Days later, the dismissed players released a

---

79 Ibid., 60.
81 Ibid., 80.
82 Ibid., 80.
list of eight grievances, including charges of inadequate medical treatment and the existence of an atmosphere that is "mentally depressing and normally discouraging for blacks." No charges were made against Coach Pont. The following week, four of the Black players had returned to practice. During the next home game, the players "received a loud pregame ovation from the Indiana fans, many of whom had changed their 'Go Big Red' buttons to 'Go Big White.' a not-so-subtle response to the dismissed blacks, who met in the school's Union Building during the game. To discourage any disturbance in front of a regional TV audience, 84 uniformed policemen ringed the field and a state police helicopter hovered overhead."

In a speech in 1969 to the California State Conference of Athletic Directors, Max Rafferty, the California State Superintendent of Public Instruction, addressed the rising number of protests by Black athletes.

My purpose in bringing these incidents before you tonight it simply to remind you of their increasing frequency. At San Jose (State College), Wyoming, Washington, and a dozen other distracted colleges, players have challenged their coaches, walked out on their own teams, and boycotted their own schools, all in the name of some social, economic or political grievance which the sport in questions had never had anything to do with and with which it was never set up to cope.

His simple reminder reiterated the prevailing belief that sport was ill-prepared to serve as a political forum for grievances. Despite this belief, the protests were receiving attention simply because they were played out in this unfamiliar territory.

---

83 Ibid., 80.
84 Ibid., 82.
As more and more Black athletes, many on college campuses, became aware of their ability to affect change, the momentum of the proposed Olympic boycott continued. Harry Edwards relied more and more on Black nationalism in persuading Black athletes to join the Olympic boycott. Coupled with the IOC’s readmission of South Africa, an increased number of protests on campuses, and the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., the Olympic boycott was a viable means of contributing to larger civil rights movement. Many wondered how an Olympic boycott could improve race relations. Edwards placed the boycott into the larger picture, saying, “We’re not just talking about the 1968 Olympic Games; we’re talking about the survival of society.”

The trials for the Olympic basketball team were held in the spring 1968. “The intrusive priorities of school work, pro contracts, tired bones and a threatened boycott having taken their toll, the U.S. Olympic basketball trials finally reached the showdown stage last week with barely enough candidates for a fast break in a broom closet.” Elvin Hayes had signed with professional team, rendering him no longer an amateur. UCLA standout Lew Alcindor took a stand as a no show, supporting the boycott, saying, “Knowing I live in a racist country, I must react in some way - and this boycott is my way, my obligation to all Afro-Americans.” Many people saw the young basketball player as unpatriotic and ungrateful for not seizing the chance to represent his country in the Olympics. Mike Warren and Lucius Allen, Alcindor’s UCLA teammates, also skipped the Olympic trials leading Olympic Coach Henry Iba to call the dropouts “bad

---

citizens." Many Olympic officials dismissed the absent players, "as just another flimsy excuse for those players who didn’t want to come," but reminder of Harry Edwards and his boycott efforts "continued to hang heavy over the proceedings." Edwards, who had announced he would "talk to these black brothers and try to make them see the light," did pop in and out of Albuquerque a couple of times during the weekend to change planes and between speaking engagements in El Paso and Santa Fe. But if he made any contact with the 44 Negroes at the trials, or if Martin Luther King’s assassination and the attendant riots caused them any concern, no one was talking about it. Jo Jo White and Charlie Scott, two Black athletes tried out and made the Olympic cut. Scott said about the boycott, "As far as I'm concerned, there is no boycott yet. I don’t believe this is the proper means of protest, and I want to play. If the boycott does come about and it’s total, well, I’m not going to be the only Negro out there. I’ll go along with them. But if it’s scattered, my choice is to play." White voiced his opinion about his desire to play, saying, "I make up my own mind, and I’ve decided to play. I don’t care if I’m the only one. They can go ahead and boycott: I’m playing." The team eventually was comprised of five Black athletes on the 12-man squad. Besides the bold stance taken by Alcindor, support of the boycott was scarce among team sports.

The Olympic trials for track and field were held during the summer of 1968. Using the trials to promote the boycott, protesters held signs, one reading "WHY RUN IN MEXICO AND CRAWL AT HOME." Talk of the boycott was mixed, with rumors

---

90 Edwards, Revolt, 72.
91 Kirkpatrick, "The Team," 91.
92 Ibid., 91.

226
spreading about threats on Black athletes lives if they did or did not boycott. There were rumors of “black lives being threatened by black hands.” and Coach Stan Wright, a non-supporter of the boycott and the team’s only Black coach, had two bodyguards during the trials. Wright’s life had been threatened in several letters.93

For some of the athletes, the proposed boycott had been a theme that resonated throughout the year, even if they were not planning on actually boycotting the Olympics. No Black athlete escaped the association with the planned boycott. Ralph Boston, the 1964 Olympic gold medallist long jumper, planned on repeating his gold medal performance in Mexico City. While he was not an advocate of the boycott, he supported the right of other Black athletes to participate. In the days following the assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Boston reassessed his boycott position. “For the first time since the talks about the boycott began, I feel that I really have a valid reason to boycott. I sat and though about it, and I see that if I go to Mexico City and represent the United States I would be representing people like the one who killed Dr. King. And there are more people like that going around. I feel that I shouldn’t represent people like that. On the other hand I feel if I don’t go and someone else wins the medal and it goes to another country I haven’t accomplished anything either.”94 However, a week later, Boston stated that he was “speaking in anger. I was not myself.”95 At the trials. Boston remained committed to representing the United States and even hoped to be selected as the flag bearer for the United States. Echoing a philosophy similar to basketball player Charlie Scott, Boston stated that he would participate in a boycott if “a majority of

93 Ibid.,13.
principals so decided,” but that he resented “being threatened or coerced into a point of view.” Boston asked. “This is supposed to be a matter of human rights, isn’t it? And as a human, I should have the right to do what I want and say what I think is right for me.

That’s what it’s all about. Respect for a man and what he believes in whether he agrees with you or not.” In a letter written by Olympic high jumper Gene Johnson, the political realities faced by Black athletes were made very clear.

There is a tremendous credibility gap between the treatment accorded our Negro “stars” and the black masses in general. The United States exalts its Olympic star athletes as representatives of a democratic and free society, when millions of Negro and other minority citizens are excluded from decent housing and meaningful employment. This is where the credibility factor enters. I would like to pose this as a question. What would be the fate of a Ralph Boston, if he was not a 27 foot broad jumper, or a Charlie Greene, if he was not a 9.2 sprinter? They would be “faceless” black men caught in the same system of racial discrimination as many other black citizens. The Civil Rights movement or struggle requires the aid and contributions of all black men regardless of their “station in life.” Negro athletes should not be exempt from nor should they divorce themselves from this struggle. The mere fact that a great sacrifice, such as forgoing a opportunity to participate in the Olympics, is involved points to the urgency surrounding the issue.

Harry Edwards recalled asking sprinter Tommie Smith, “How can you strain and sweat for the ideological merchandisers who promote the Olympic Games?” Edwards told Smith that “They tell the world that the Games are free of discrimination, a wonderful example of fair play to everyone. And they use big, box-office performers like you to make the US a big part of that scene. Meanwhile, neglect kills off your people faster than you can sprint. Mothers, dads, brothers, relatives of the same black guys who compete in the Olympics get no anthem or medals - they’re where they started, at the bottom.

---

hopeless, with a gun or club waiting when they object."^{98} Smith stated that the goals of a boycott "would not just be to improve conditions for ourselves and teammates, but to improve things for the entire colored community."^{99} Smith’s San Jose State teammate Lee Evans said that "the Olympics are something that I have dreamed of participating in ever since I first learned to run. This does not, however, mean participation at any price."^{100} Black athletes were certainly not unified in their commitment to the Olympic boycott.

A meeting was held at the trials and of the Black athletes who attended there was an even split about participating in the Olympics. Many of the athletes had felt their hard work and talent would go to waste if they were not able to compete at the Olympic Games. Still, others believed that their boycott would not send the desired message to the American people. It was decided that all the athletes would be released from their commitment to boycott the games. The reasoning behind the compromise lay in the fact that the boycotting Black athletes could have been replaced by other Black athletes who did not stand for the principles of the boycott. It was also believed that sending some Black athletes, while others boycotted, might send the wrong message to the public and that it would cause dissent among the Black athletes. While the boycott was off, a new plan was devised which called for every Black athlete who qualified to compete at the Olympics in Mexico City to not celebrate any victory celebrations. "The talk that came out of these meetings, however, was not so much that they would boycott but what they would do after they got to Mexico City - like sitting down during the national anthem.

---
^{98} Ibid., 71.
and sewing their own emblems of team uniforms and generally raising hell to "embarrass The Man."

The athletes left the trials prepared to compete at the Olympics but to make their displeasure with American race practices known. The boycott was officially over.

The Black intercollegiate athlete in many ways changed the image of the American Black athlete. Though the Black intercollegiate athlete certainly had more to risk than the Black professional athlete, college athletes were in the forefront of the protests that plagued athletic departments on college campuses across the country. Harry Edwards expressed the changing role of the college Black athlete, writing, "Top black athletes of the country are mobilizing,... risking their scholarships, school eligibility, and families' welfare,...to express what they should have stood for years ago: you cannot, and maintain a claim to manhood, run, hurdle, jump, throw punches, lift weights, or stuff balls into baskets in the name of the American nation when your people are headed for perdition."102 Risking their potential for professional success, Black intercollegiate athletes lost their roster positions, their starting positions, and often their reputations in exchange for their participation in athletic boycotts and protests. In exchange, a new generation of Black athletes across the country enrolled on campuses that were much different than at the start of the decade and even from the integrated locker rooms at the middle of the 1960s. Coaching staffs were much more likely to have an assistant coach who was Black. More schools were offering programs in Black Studies and hired more Black professors. Racial inequities for Black athletes remained entrenched in the

---

100 Ibid.
structure of sport, but progress had been made as a result of the protests and efforts of brave and courageous Black athletes. Perhaps the greatest change was the raised consciousness of Black athletes and all Americans, both Black and white.

Edwards dedicated his energies to enact change for Black athletes and Black America. Edwards had been a driving force behind the boycott. The young professor organized, supported, and fostered sense of collective consciousness among black athletes.

There are some who may feel that the goals sought by the present generation of black athletes are far too insignificant and petty and the prices paid by so many athletes are far too harsh to justify some of the tactics used. But one should never underestimate the awesome motivating factors inherent in any man’s desires for human dignity and freedom. For those involved, the costs are never too high and the rewards are never too petty. This is a new generation of black athletes. Their sacrifices in their own behalf and in behalf of their people and the gains already made are noble and grand indeed when contrasted with the shuffling, accommodating past generations of Negro athletes.¹⁰³

Though the proposed Olympic boycott failed in its original conception, meaning that Black athletes did participate and represent the United States in Olympic competition.

Edwards and the efforts of Black athletes did create a change in the landscape of sports and civil rights. Sportswriter Red Smith recognized that although Edwards was not successful in generating a boycott of the Olympic games, the activist accomplished something significant. He wrote,

The fact that athletes of his race wouldn’t buy his proposal does not mean nothing that Edwards has accomplished nothing. By talking up the boycott idea, creating headlines and stirring debate, he helped call attention to the inequities black people still suffer. That is all an actual boycott could have achieved. It’s all Edwards could have thought it would achieve.”

¹⁰² Edwards, Revolt of the Black Athlete, 71.
¹⁰³ Ibid., 126-127.
Moreover, incidents and protests involving American Black athletes did occur in Mexico
City at the Olympic Games. Track and field athletes who had been instrumental in some
of the college protests in 1967 and 1968 would participate in these actions, with the
victory stand protest of Tommie Smith and John Carlos being the most notable and
publicized incident.
CHAPTER 7

TOMMIE SMITH AND JOHN CARLOS
SALUTE BLACK AMERICA AT THE 1968 MEXICO CITY OLYMPICS

If all our past heroes of the Games, their medals jangling, paraded into Washington, Detroit, or Cleveland, and confronted riot squads, all their speed wouldn't enable them to outrun bayonets and bullets. The sole factor separating a Tommie Smith, Ralph Boston, or John Carlos from becoming an ambushed Rev. Reeb or Medgar Evers is that they've been on no firing lines. Beyond the win-or-lose motivation there exists another intimate - and overlooked - concern of our membership.¹

Harry Edwards and the Olympic Project for Human Rights, an organization that joined Black athletes in their attempts to end racist practices in sport were monumental in the developments at the 1968 Olympics. Sprinter Lee Evans recalled a letter sent to all Olympic athletes before the Games from the United States Olympic Committee (USOC). The letter threatened to send home any athlete who did not "perform in honor of the U.S." Brundage goaded the Black athletes. "He said we were lucky to be allowed on the team.

If he hadn’t come out like that, I don’t think anything would have happened.” One such protest that occurred at the Games was the victory stand protest of Tommie Smith and John Carlos, an action that created uproar.²

In a protest that gained worldwide attention, Tommie Smith and John Carlos brought attention to the racism and inequalities of American life with their Black Power salute at the 1968 Olympics. On Wednesday, 16 October 1968, Tommie Smith won the 200-meter race in a world record time and his teammate John Carlos finished third. At the awards ceremony Smith wore a black glove on his right hand, a black scarf around his neck, and stood in black socks. Carlos wore the black glove on his left hand, beads around his neck, and stood in his black socks. When the national anthem began, the two athletes bowed their heads and put their gloved fists into the air. Smith and Carlos both felt that their actions were for the good of their race, that they represented Black Americans, and like Ali and unlike too many others before, they were willing to express their Black pride. After the ceremony, the two men held a press conference. Smith stated his pride clearly. “I represented black America and I am very proud to be a black man and to have a gold medal. I thought in this way I could represent my people by letting them know I am proud to be a black man.”³ He went on to state his preference for how he would like to be identified. “We are black.” Smith said, “and we’re proud to be black. White America will only give us credit for an Olympic victory. They’ll say I’m an

American, but if I did something bad, they'd say a Negro." Smith objected to references to Negro athletes by the media and said, "I prefer to be called black....If I do something bad, they won't say American, they say Negro." His actions were measured not as an expression of himself, but as against the system that had "made him" what he was - successful and able to participate as an American in the Olympic Games. The press, and most Americans, were uninterested in recognizing or legitimizing Smith's identity. The concept that he could not be both Black and American and that the expression or claim that one excludes the other is a clear example of the duality in sport for African Americans. Smith recognized that in the view of white America, Negro does not equate with American, and that unAmerican behavior can be cause to be referred to as a Negro, even if he is a representative of the American Olympic team. Thus, Smith chooses to be called Black. Even Smith's wife expressed the dichotomy of being Black and American. Following a grievance filed at the Olympic trials she told Coach Wright, the "Black" Olympic assistant coach that "he should start being a black man first and an American second."

His teammate, and bronze medalist in the event, John Carlos, also had his views of how white America perceived Black athletes. "If you think we're bad," said Carlos. "The '72 Olympic games are really going to be bad. The black people who say they are

---

going to boycott the Games are the ones who are winning the medals. Remember this.”

Carlos believed that white Americans viewed Black athletes as animals used to perform for white audiences, and cited such reasons as support for his victory stand actions. The runner said, “We want to make it clear that white people seem to think black people are animals doing a job. We want people to understand that we are not animals or rats. We want to tell Americans and all the world that if they do not care what black people do, they should not go to see black people perform.” Carlos went on to express his thoughts on the exploitation of Black athletes, thoughts that were becoming a familiar sentiment among Black athletes. “After the job is done, we are not supposed to think. We wanted to do something to signify black. We want people to know that we are not animals, not lower animals, not rats and roaches.” He further told newsmen that he wished those American black athletes who remained at the Olympic Games “14 years of bad leg troubles.” “I’m not concerned about the National Anthem.” Carlos said when asked if he would stand up when it was played. “It was written for white people.” To Carlos, Americans meant white people, a group that enjoyed the rights and privileges exclusive to Americans and thus, to him and the Black Americans he represented on the victory stand. The next day the USOC, under pressure from the IOC and Brundage, apologized for the actions of Smith and Carlos and suspended the two athletes from the Olympic Games. Despite their removal from the American team, the United States did

---

10 Chicago Defender, 26 October - 1 November 1968, p. 16.
not take the protesters medals from the total U.S. victory totals. In response, Smith made it clear that his actions were not a singular representation, but his seizing of an opportunity to represent his community. "When I won that gold medal it's not just mine, the medal is for all black America." The USOC threatened to expel any other Black athlete who dared protest. Still, small acts occurred, though none resulted in punishment. The 4x400 relay wore black berets and raised their fists, yet stood at attention during the national anthem. Others, such as Bob Beamon, wore black socks on the victory stand.

The 1968 Olympic protest of Tommie Smith and John Carlos was not the first protest by Black athletes of the decade, but was clearly one of the more visible and climactic expressions of the movement. This chapter examines the actions of Smith and Carlos at the Mexico City Olympics. Additionally, it analyzes the coverage Black and White newspapers provided of the Smith-Carlos victory stand gesture. It shows that there were similarities and differences between Black and white reporters and amongst them as several themes emerge in their treatment of the gesture and its meaning. It examines the general differences between how they covered the event; further investigates whether and how Black writers supported the efforts of Smith and Carlos in a bond of racial solidarity and conversely did White reporters condemn the actions of the two athletes.

Several themes merge in the writings. The issue of the Olympics as

---

12 "Carlos, Smith Feel Beautiful." Chicago Defender, 24 October 1968, p. 38.
14 From five cities, a mainstream, meaning white, and an African-American newspaper were selected. The newspapers examined were: Chicago Tribune, Chicago Defender, Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Sentinel, New York Times, Amsterdam News, San Francisco Chronicle, Oakland Post, Washington Post, and Washington Afro-American.
apolitical was addressed by both Black and White writers. Terminology used by White writers in covering the incident, the reaction of Black writers to the White coverage, as well as the usage of the phrase “Hitler-salute” in both presses emerges as another theme. The notion that Blacks did not gain from the gesture is a theme dealt with more in the Black press. Finally, within the framework defined by the writings of W.E.B. DuBois and Carmichael and Hamilton, the definitions double-consciousness and Black Power are used as meanings in the analysis of the writer’s, both Black and white, attempts to understand the meaning of the incident. In several of the articles, many of the themes interface and are addressed simultaneously.¹⁵

When examining the reports of the protest, many of the stories carried in all ten papers were the same, largely due to their dependency on wire services. The most interesting insights into what people thought can be found in columns, editorials, and letters to the editor. For the most part, the coverage of the white press was more ‘factual’ (i.e., they used more AP wires, less their own writings in some articles) in reporting the events, and less involving. Even white liberals used language, even if they understood the terms, that was provocative. Many articles within the white press were veiled with some subtle racism as reporters used such words as Panther salute, variations of phrases using Black Power, defiant, martyrs. Negro militants, two most bristling American black

athletes, ultrabelligerent, and divisive to describe the events and the athletes. White papers from New York, Chicago, and Washington all used the word Negro in a headline covering the event. While the Tribune was a conservative paper, the Times and Post were considered liberal. It seemed out of place for the two papers to use Negro at a time when the transition from Negro to Black was very charged. Beyond their word selection, their deliberate omission or printing of irrelevant items aided in the analysis. Art Rosenbaum, of the San Francisco Chronicle, who in most his articles seemed a middle of the roader and attempted to remain neutral in his reporting of the details of the events, chose in one report to include some quotes he had overheard spectators make. "...The way Smith and Carlos put on their act, they looked like end men in a minstrel show.'...Alcindor is jealous that he didn't come to the Olympics, he could have held his hand higher.'...Each gu wore a single black glove because they couldn't afford two pairs." 17 Rosenbaum seemingly heard no supportive comments, nor did he reflect on the makeup of the audience that day or their comments. He pretended to be neutral by merely reporting the events and by remaining silent concerning the racist statements overheard.

Many of the reactions objected to the protest of Smith and Carlos, insisting that the Olympics was no place for demonstration, that it is apolitical, and that the Black athletes had no reason to protest. Brad Pye, a Los Angeles Sentinel journalist, wrote that the "celebrated black glove, black sox, black scarf and black power gestures" by Smith

---

and Carlos "were not only out of place on the victory stand," but that "their display was discourteous and out of place here in Mexico City, period." Pye reprimanded the athletes for their behavior, asking his readers, "Wasn't it disrespectful for Smith and Carlos to give a Hitler-type salute and look down at the ground when they were being saluted for their superior athletic accomplishments as the band played the Star Spangled banner?"

Yet, in his conclusion, Pye was able to admit that perhaps the athletes had a reason to protest, but they had chosen the wrong forum. "The problems Smith, Carlos and other black people have should be aired, but not on the Olympic Games victory platform."  

Pye, an African-American, emerged as one writer who consistently badgered the protest and the athletes. In an article that appeared the day after the demonstration, Pye made no mention of the protest, despite his own attendance. Instead, he focused on the American flag waving of George Foreman after he won the gold medal in boxing and he presented this behavior in sharp contrast to the actions of Smith and Carlos. Pye further emphasized the gains Foreman had made for Black people. He reported that a "John H. Ferring, a plant owner in Missouri." said that after Foreman's victory he started thinking about "how I could do more" to increase racial understanding. Ferring and his employees discussed the integration of his plant and decided to hire more blacks. Pye finished his statement again supporting the right of Smith and Carlos to protest, but he envisioned it as a futile effort that helped no one. "Comment: Tommie Smith and John Carlos did their thing on the victory stand in Mexico City, and is still being discussed around the world, but how many jobs did Tommie Smith and John Carlos gain for black people

---

How much goodwill did Tommie Smith and John Carlos gain for the black man?" Pye failed to acknowledge the act as an expression of Black Power and dismissed the gesture in part because of its lack of goodwill for the larger Black community.

One of Pye's co-workers at the Los Angeles Sentinel took a directly opposite view. In two consecutive columns Clint Wilson Jr. blasted John Hall, a writer for the Los Angeles Times, for his commentary on Smith and Carlos. Hall had spent a considerable amount of space counting the number of Black athletes and entertainers he had admired, and attempted to whitewash the racial issue. "Vince Lombardi would call it love - white, black, red, green or purple. I thought of Nat Cole and Lena Horne and Louis Armstrong, whom I've loved all my life." Hall concluded with a comment that overlooked the race issue and placed himself in a classic white liberal position. He stated that Smith and Carlos did "a disservice to their race - the human race." Yet, Wilson's criticism of his Times counterpart focused specifically on the Nazi salute, but it could have been equally applied to Pye. The day Wilson condemned the Times for its rhetoric, Pye had applied exactly the same image and words. This is one of the few instances where there were visible tensions and disagreements between writers from different papers and between an individual Black writer and a white writer.

Clint Wilson was one media member who supported the protesters. He understands that the actions of the two Olympian were far more symbolic of pride in Black America, than most who deemed their protest as truly unAmerican. He also

---

20 John Hall, "It Takes All Kinds," Los Angeles Times, 18 October 1968, sec. 3, p. 3.
recognized that Smith and Carlos were worthy of praise because they took an action for their community and used their position in the sporting arena to help further the cause of Blacks in American society. Wilson was critical of the white press and their coverage of the event. "In addition to the over-reaction of U.S. Olympic officials, we were quite distressed over the reaction of some of our local White Press." Sarcastically he noted that they had provided their "usual 'objective'" report of the incident and he then addressed the terminology the Times used. Wilson stated that in the story credited to the Associated Press wire, Smith and Carlos' actions were described as a "Nazi-like" salute, "a phrase that wasn't taken kindly in our Black community." Wilson fingered Hall as one white writer who was unable and unwilling to recognize the symbolic nature of Smith and Carlos' action. "Our attention is turned specifically to Times sports columnist John Hall. With all the usual aplomb of a white person who can neither comprehend nor empathize with a sincere black gesture." Wilson still made no mention of Pye's similar statement, instead he illustrated Hall's guilty white liberal tendencies to overlook the issue of race and his feelings that he could not be racist because he had many black friends. Hall "took off into a pathetic and irrelevant sob story of how he loves and appreciates so many wonderful Negro athletes," but, it's too bad that he "didn't get the message Smith and Carlos had for him the other day." Wilson then presented the central significance and meaning of the protest: a comprehension of the event that no white writer understood or even identified with. "You see, it's the people like Hall who have a 'shallow view of the world;' who won't face up to reality: who can't bring themselves to believe that black men have the dignity to show the world that they possess more than world-class abilit
but also a love for their people that transcends politics and fear for their future careers in a
white-dominated society." Wilson aims at Hall's liberalism to reveal that it blinded him from seeing the reality of the situation.

A week later, Wilson took another smack at white liberalism and addressed the place of protest and the issue of pride. "We know that many feel the Olympics was not the 'place' for demonstrations. But, where is the 'place'? Smith and Carlos chose to demonstrate their beliefs on the victory stand. What better place can one demonstrate the pride and equality of black people?...a riot? a firebombing?" He recalled the riots that had occurred only months earlier, the non-violent protest of the athletes was placed in perspective, while still admiring and validating its profound impact on Black Americans. "That brings us to the main point of last week's column: Smith and Carlos' actions were for YOU; they placed their futures and reputations in jeopardy for YOU. the humble Negro clerks, custodians, gardeners, laborers and unemployed who are 'trying to make it' because YOU can't run 200 meters in 19.8 or dunk a basketball or hit 40 homers a year." Wilson articulated a true understanding of the intentions and significance of the athletes' action, and was able to recognize that the gesture was an expression of redefinition and liberation for the two athletes. Even before Carmichael's book appeared in the popular press, his rhetoric and ideas were being communicated by other Black writers.

Another difference that emerged in coverage was that the Black press looked at the impact of the protest on the Black community, something the white press chose to overlook or were perhaps unable to comprehend. Many Black reporters looked at the meaning and attempted to understand it, while the white press appeared more concerned with the poor mix of politics and sport. John Helem, a bowling columnist for the Chicago Defender, addressed the Blacks who were critical of Smith and Carlos. "We sit around and listen to these Negroes criticize every effort of black Americans to carve out an identity of their own...The cries of these Negroes have rung out loud and long, this past week against the action taken by Olympic champions Tommie Smith and John Carlos."

Helem recognizes the position of Black athletes in the community. "Can't they realize that only our champions, no matter what their field of endeavor, are our most effective spokesmen?" He articulated that "Their courageous action said to the world, 'Even though we can win international championships and prove to be the best in the world, at home we are not accepted on an equal basis, or judged strictly on how well we perform as human beings!'" Helem appealed to the passivity which he felt paralyzed older Blacks from seeing the good come from the activism of the two athletes which was shared by many involved in grassroots organizations. "What they did took more courage than all the do-nothing critical Negroes will do toward the salvation of the black man the rest of their lives. May God give us more Tommie Smiths and John Carloses...Amen."

---

Helem recognized the benefits that had emerged from the efforts of Black militants and action-oriented Blacks, as well as writing in a language that expressed Black Power sentiment.

The editor of Helem's Chicago Defender, was not in agreement. More in the mold of Pye, John Sengstacke's criticism was about the place of protest. He saw no "rationale (sic) basis beyond an infantile resolve" for the action, and saw the protest as "inappropriate and pervasive a gesture as if two black baseball players were to perform such a ritual at a World Series Game. The Olympic games are sacrosanct... certainly this is no hippodrome for circus stunts or childish exhibitionism." The editor examined the treatment of Black athletes and he subscribed to the mythology of sport as an equal playing field, therefore discounting any reason for protest. "Negro athletes at the Olympics are treated with equality and courtesy. What, then, was to be gained by the demonstration of black power? Precisely, what does black power mean at an international Olympiad?" 

Even if most Black writers disagreed with the protest or where it took place, they agreed that the punishment of the athletes exceeded the crime. Sengstacke admonished the USOC for its overreaction. "There is no doubt that the two Negro sprinters in question violated basic standards of sportsmanship and good manners. However, their banishment from the Olympic Village and subsequent expulsion from Mexico exceeded the nature and extent of the violation." From the Amsterdam News, also emerged the proclamation that the punishment was excessive; the reporter also questioned the
overreaction of the sports world, and pointed out the double standards that exists for white athletes. “We fail to see why the IOC, USOC and the rest of the sports world flipped their wigs because two Afro-American athletes bowed their heads after receiving their medals and while the Star Spangled Banner was being played in Mexico City. Today’s white college rebels don’t even stand up for the playing of the National Anthem. But nothing is said?” The writer mocked the expectations whites had of Black people and used it to justify the protest. “And what’s wrong with black men bowing their heads isn’t that what the ‘boy’ is supposed to do?” The author pointed out more contradictions about the statement issued by the USOC exonerating the two athletes. “And all this flap about ‘immature behavior,’ ‘untypical exhibitionism,’ and ‘discourtesy.’ Is calling a 29-year-old man ‘boy,’ simply because he’s black, courteous? And the cry about injecting politics in the Olympic games is just so much more flap....”26

Booker Griffin, another Pye co-worker at the Los Angeles Sentinel highlighted the white media portrayal of the incident. He warned his readers, “We are receiving shallow and slanted news in all media in regards to the XIX Olympics in Mexico City, the mass communications media of America are remiss in their civic responsibility by virtue of their shallow and subjective approach to informing and entertaining the people of this country.” While Griffin mainly targeted the white media, he recognized that segments of the Black press were similarly guilty and that not all Black reporters expressed monolithic support of the athletes. Griffin clearly sided with Smith and Carlos and their efforts to

25 Ibid., 13.
call attention to the conditions of Blacks in the country. In a message full of pride and admiration for the two men, he articulated his feeling that “the incident will probably go down in history as the most profound single act of this Olympics and well it should.” Griffin insisted that the “gesture on the part of these noble black men is to me one of the greatest moments for the Afro-American in the 400 years of his colonialization in this country,” and he totally agreed “with what they did and admire them for their guts and heart-felt belief in the fight for freedom, justice and equality.” Griffin’s affirmed the athletes’ role in the larger Black struggle for equality and presented the matter and the trackmen with dignity. Similar emotions were expressed in an editorial printed in Griffin’s Sentinel. The author felt no law existed against “doing your thing.” He felt how dare officials ask the 4x400 gold medalists “why they wore their tams.” when Russian athletes are not asked why they click their heels or wear monocles. They think that is cute.” In reference to the gesture of Smith and Carlos, the author addressed their expression of Black consciousness. “The boys were BLACK and it took POWER to win so that’s BLACK POWER...What difference does it make? We have lived under WHITE POWER all our lives and we don’t hate white people.”

While the Black press generally did not find it necessary to uncover white supporters of the athletes in their reports, the Los Angeles Sentinel provided an account of white Los Angeles radio announcer’s. Allin Slate, view of the situation. “If you saw the sports page of the Times this morning, Tommie Smith and John Carlos on the victor

26 Amsterdam News. 26 October 1968, p. 18. The article does not make clear who was called boy or b whom, but insinuates that Smith and Carlos were the targets of the term.
stand...black gloved hands raised...and described as..."In Racial Protest"...and described elsewhere in the paper as, "Defiance"...The word to describe these men...is not. "defiance,'...the word is, "pride"...and of the two words...Black man"...the emphasis should be on..."man!" While Slate's comments fall into the classic white liberal category, his words challenged the white listener to think beyond their white frame of reference. "I would think that we would be PROUD that these two great champions showed their people (that's all of us in the U.S.)...and the world, that a protest can be quiet and dignified!" When he asked, "Would it have been better to have them come home and throw a Molotov cocktail...or riot in the streets?" and then calls white Americans hypocrites, he contextualized the event in the turbulence of a year that saw riots after the assassination of Martin Luther King. "We don't want violence...which is about the only thing a small man can do for attention. Now, we tell a champion...who has great value as a leader, that he cannot protest wrong doings and display pride in a quiet, peaceful, and dignified manner!"[29]

If the emotions were mixed among Black writers, they were just as varied among their white counterparts. Some criticized Smith and Carlos for similar reasons as the Black reporters, who believed that the Olympics were not meant to be a political forum. Others attempted to defend the actions the IOC took against the athletes, but an equal number of white writers supported Smith and Carlos, often for the reason that the Olympics is the most visible platform available to the Black athlete. In a classic example

of a conservative right-wing view. A Chicago Tribune editorial labeled Smith and Carlos as "renegades" and "extremists" and compares their "behavior" to the "grubby demands" of the politics of the English Labor Party. Also coming from a conservative viewpoint, though from a different angle was New York Times columnist Arthur Daley. He criticized Smith and Carlos for bringing "their other world smack into the Olympic Games, where it did not belong, and created a shattering situation that shook this international sports carnival to its very core." He saw it as a "very divisive" act.30

Shirley Povich, of the Washington Post, represented a centrist view among white writers; implying that while he may understand the meaning of the action, he did not approve of it. He recognized that the Olympic platform provided Smith and Carlos the opportunity "to tell the world of their militancy and protests with an impact never before offered a Negro, athlete or otherwise" and he conceded that he, too, felt the punishment exceeded the crime. "It was not nice that they did not give their full attention to the American flag but their sin otherwise was less than horrible."31 Calling the gesture "unpatriotic and a violation of the Olympic ideal," Povich pointed out that the uproar was not so much their attire or actions on the victory stand, but "sullen refusal to respect the American flag." At the same time he chastised the two athletes' patriotism, he found it relevant to note that without Black athletes on several Olympic teams, especially boxing and basketball, "there would be no hope. They dominate these teams even more than they do track and field." He insisted that a large difference existed among the athletes,

pointing out without explanation, that “America’s boxing-basketball Negroes appear a
different breed than the raging militants on the track team.” Even when he is seemingly
supportive, Povich used phrases and terms that are degrading, and sometimes sarcastic.

Jim Murray of the Los Angeles Times is similar to Povich in his supportive, yet
sarcastic twist on the action. “I don’t care much for the Star Spangled Banner, either.
But I keep my shoes on. Well, now the word is out: we got race problems in our country.
This will come as a great astonishment to the reading public of the world, I am sure.”
Not only did he mock the “race problem” in the United States, he attempted to make
linkages with other racial incidents of the decade when he wrote, “American blacks here
have mistaken the International Olympic movement for the hierarchy of the state of
Mississippi.” Apparently, Murray’s attempt at humor failed once again, when he wrote.
“If you’ve got something to get off your chest, start practicing the 200. We may get our
next Hitler out of Lane 4.” Just as his paper had used Nazi-like salute, Murra
compared the protest of Smith and Carlos to Hitler, himself; yet, in jest, suggesting that
perhaps the Olympic platform did reach many people. Murray’s style was to make light
of the situation, which was offensive in itself.

explanation for the differences in racial militancy between Black boxers and basketball players and their
track and field counterparts, one explanation could be that boxing and basketball offered professional
careers and protests could jeopardize those professional opportunities. Track and field offered little
opportunity for professional careers or money making opportunities.

250
Two of the more liberal white writers were from the San Francisco Chronicle. Ron Fimrite conceded that politics and the Olympics were irrevocably joined by the very nature of the ceremonies and the Games. He wondered if politics was to be excluded from the Olympics, why then are national anthems played. He further proclaimed surprise over all the fuss over sprinters Smith and Carlos, since it had long been acknowledged that they were black activists who were sincere in their beliefs. "In a sense, they sold out to flag and country by even competing in the Games as representatives of what they persistently refer to as "racist America." How then to demonstrate their displeasure with their country? The Olympics quite naturally, provided them with a stage - that nationalistic victory ceremony. So as the anthem played and the flag was raised, so did they raise their black-gloved hands in protest. Political, yes, but no more political than the ceremony itself."\(^{35}\)

Fimrite's co-worker, Art Rosenbaum, also wrote articles in which he appeared to support the athletes, and he was not surprised by their action. "After a year of reporting about the threatened black boycott and its innuendoes, of dining with Harry Edwards and hearing about his arsenal, of reading about Huey Newton and Eldridge Cleaver and the whole 'burn, baby burn' philosophy, I saw little additional significance of the display. It was non-violent and less active than anticipated."\(^{36}\) Despite his apparent understanding of what occurred, he restored the image of the white coach when he recounted the post-victory interview of Smith. When Smith was asked which coach helped him most in achieving the victory, he was unable to answer. Rosenbaum recalled that Smith's "San


\(^{36}\) ibid.
Jose black militant friends" had been telling Smith that his coach Bud Winter was a racist. Yet Rosenbaum knew that Winter is the one to be credited with helping Smith quicken his start and believed Smith does not want to give the white Winter any credit. By linking Smith with Black militants, he implied that Smith was a manipulated young athlete incapable of distinguishing acts of racism on his own.

Beyond reporters and spectators at the Games having varied responses, the press looked to other athletes, past and present, to voice their reaction. One person, both the press and the USOC looked to for advice was Jesse Owens. The quintessential integrationist, Owens appeared to many whites as the moderator between the athletes and the officials, in part because he had been a tremendous Black athlete who believed that the white sports world had helped him succeed in life. Many of the younger Black athletes saw him as an Uncle Tom type character. He endorsed the Olympic ideals and credits it with bringing "about tremendous understanding and cooperation in racial matters" and for this reasons did not "think the pride which our black athletes have in themselves and their country will allow them to do anything to embarrass the United States in so conspicuous a world arena." Before the event he spoke against the idea of a protest, and appealed to the American in each athlete, expressing the belief "that the would not only be hurting themselves, but they might in the end aid our strongest competition, the Russians."  

---

Other athletes responded to the protest. Jackie Robinson said of the two runners that he "admired the pride in their blackness." Olympic boxing champion Ron Harris believed they "had good reasons for their black power salute," Decathlete Tom Waddell saw the event as somewhat of an equalizer. "I think they have been discredited more often than they have discredited it. Our image is so bad it can't get any worse. Maybe this will help." British trackster John Wetton spoke in favor of the protest. "We all thought it was a bloody good show. It's bully that these blokes had nerve enough to express their feelings." Crewman Jacques Fiechter of Harvard was another athlete who agreed with Smith and Carlos. "By winning their competition, they won the right to do anything the felt proper. It seems to be, in sponsoring an athlete, you don't only sponsor his performance, you sponsor the whole person, the whole consciousness of the athlete."

Another rower, Tom McKibbon from San Diego, echoed his sentiment. "It was a strong action to take, throwing them off the team. But they had a strong reason to protest, and this is the right place for it. No nation is free of race problems." The responses were not limited to male athletes. Despite their noticeable exclusion from protest plans.

---


Wyomia Tyus and the women’s 400-meter relay dedicated their victories to Smith and Carlos. Even their action was deemed as an incident of “Black Power” emerging among women athletes.

Still, several of the responses of fellow athletes were negative and expressed the belief that the protest was an anti-American sentiment. “It was kind of cheap of them,” said pole vaulter, Bob Seagren. “If it wasn’t for the United States they wouldn’t have been there. I don’t think it was very proper. If they don’t like the U.S., they can always leave.” Former Olympic champion Bob Richards felt that the protesting athletes had done a “disservice to black people and to their country.” The flag-waving George Foreman responded, “That’s for college kids. They live in another world.”" Barr Weisenberg of the U.S. water polo team had an unfavorable response. “I do not think it was so tragic. think it was a disgrace. In my opinion, an act like that in the medal ceremony defiles the American flag.”^41


254
Just as athletes had a response, politicians and leaders had their opinions. The reactions of support of various leaders and scholars in the Black community highlighted the pride and courage of Smith and Carlos, who they considered to be heroes to the Black community. H. Rap Brown, at a Howard University rally welcoming John Carlos said, "To be black and proud is not an answer in itself...The man will kill you if you're black and proud or black and ashamed. You must begin to move into a phase of action." At the same rally, Stokely Carmichael echoes Brown's support of the two trackmen. "We are letting white America and everybody else know we will pick our own heroes. Our heroes are not those who will bow down to white America, but those who will stand up for our people." Both Brown and Carmichael emphasized the need for awareness, but more importantly, action. Harry Edwards, the leader of the failed Olympic boycott movement, predicted a 1972 Olympic boycott by Black athletes and believes that the actions of Smith and Carlos would help increase the support for such a boycott. "You won't see niggers stepping on each other and fighting to get in line to be used as political propaganda for America's capitalist, racist, imperialist regime anymore." Edwards felt that black athletes were being used as "20th century gladiators for the white man" and that the domination of Black athletes at the 1968 Olympics "have brought the man to realize he will have to give black people something more than gold medals." Los Angeles City Councilman Bill

---

43 Ibid., 31.
44 Ibid., 31.

255
Mills stated he was "proud of them for the restraint they exercised, and their personal contributions to preventing the games from exploding into the most revealing socio-political upheaval in the history of modern man."^45

More revealing are letters to the editors of a couple of newspapers. One Vietnam veteran stated that he was "ashamed of the conduct of the athletes," and that they did not represent him. He went on to declare that "the poison" of Eldridge Cleaver, Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown and others are "revolting," but unfortunately "Negro society condones that sort of thing. And Negro society will not make gains until it shakes off these shackles."^46 Another letter echoed the veteran's displeasure and criticism of the athletes' un-Americaness. "I feel that any person who cannot be proud of his flag and country should not be allowed to represent it. If it were not for the fact that they had the opportunity of being an American they might very well not be at the Olympics to win the medals."^47

Still, more letters were printed in support of the protest, many making references to other racial incidents, other Black activists, and proud of their expression of Black pride. One expressed the opinion that "As long as racism persists in America, we will need the Stokely Carmichaels and the Rap Browns; the Malcolm X's and the LeRoi Joneses; the John Carlloses and the Tommie Smiths, men who are loyal to the democratic principles of their country and to their people, and who are willing to be unpopular on our

behalf. Several letters clearly approved of the protest, saw reasons why the gesture needed to be made, and commented that the actions were patriotic. "The arrogant attitude of the USOC in evicting the two black athletes from the Olympic Games in Mexico City for their gesture of black unity during an awards ceremony in which they had won medals is unforgivable...I heard one of these athletes affirm that he was a black American. He was not disavowing the USA." Another wrote: "The poignant demonstration by the black Olympic stars Tommie Smith and John Carlos should have been welcomed with applause and understanding by all Americans." And still another poignantly pointed out that a victorious Black Olympian "knows that it is probably the only occasion on which he will ever have the attention of his nation and the world." Tommie Smith used his moment of personal glory "to symbolize black pride." He pointed out that unlike recent events, Smith "did not curse or scream hatred against anyone. He did not loot, riot or burn...His gesture was restrained, even dignified. What more can America conceivably ask from people who have been second-class citizens for so long?" Another reader echoed a similar sentiment expressed earlier by Fimrite, when she highlighted the contradictions of Olympics and politics. "All have used the nonpolitical Olympic games for baser reasons than that of black pride, one for pure profit, the other to promote a factional, political cause by spreading their political philosophy. Surely both motives are deadly sins if the purely strained Olympiad is to remain free of any political taint." In most instances the letters to the editor were more insightful than the thoughts and commentaries of man

---


257
white columnists. White columnists seemed to be far removed from the emotions of the actions, perhaps in their attempts to be objective. Letters to the editors expressed a comprehension of the personal and emotional aspects of the gesture within the context of the civil rights movement and events of the decade.

Some twenty years later Sports Illustrated’s Kenny Moore wrote an article that looked back at the incident. Moore stated that the actions of Smith and Carlos, criticized in 1968, could now be appreciated for the sacrifices they had made. Moreover, he insinuated that the country was now at the point where such treatment by whites would not be tolerated in “a society of equals.” Yet, Moore enjoyed a distance from the event that was not shared by journalists covering the event: a distance that allows us to look at the event within the contemporary contexts of racism, self-identity, and the Olympics.

The press, in large part, helped shape the meanings of the event after the gesture. The media in 1968 did little to explain the significance behind the actions of John Carlos and Tommie Smith. Smith and Carlos were re-defining themselves in their own image of what they desired, not what the white society dictated. The two athletes were breaking from their double-consciousness, protesting the definition white society placed on them. Their action allowed them to be both Black and American, and not have the two be conflicting terms of within their identity. In some cases, the press misrepresented their intentions and in others dismissed the objectives of the incident solely because the occurred in a setting many deemed inappropriate. This was more true for white writers than their Black counterparts. Few white liberals understood the meaning or the new
consciousness that was emerging in the late 1960s, but those in the Black press could look beyond the setting of the protest to the deeper meanings. Several Black writers were able to express an understanding of this new consciousness in their coverage, while some struggled with their own identity. Those that had problems with the athletes' use of the Olympic platform for protest and were critical of actions deemed un-American, could attribute it to their own struggles within double-consciousness, not yet ready to redefine themselves.


259
CHAPTER 8

INVISIBLE WOMAN – BLACK FEMALE ATHLETES AND THE 1960s

To be a woman in such an age carries with it a privilege and an opportunity never implied before. But to be a woman of the Negro race in America, and to be able to grasp the deep significance of the possibilities of the crisis, is to have a heritage, it seems to me, unique in the ages. In the first place, the race is young and full of the elasticity and hopefulness of youth. All its achievements are before it.... Everything to this race is new and strange and inspiring. There is a quickening of its pulses and a glowing of its self-consciousness. Aha, I can rival that! I can aspire to that! I can honor my name and vindicate my race! Something like this, it strikes me, is the enthusiasm which stirs the genius of young Africa in America; and the memory of the past oppression and the fact of present attempted repression only serve to gather momentum for its irrepressible powers.¹

In the years following the end of slavery in the United States, Anna Julia Cooper addressed the role of women in the achievement of national identity and American citizenship for Africans in America. Cooper was a leading advocate of women’s rights and her writings on gaining American citizenship were based upon the premise that only when Black women enjoyed the same rights as American citizens could any other American, Black or white, enjoy the same freedoms. Cooper wrote, “Only the Black Woman can say when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of m

womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me." Bringing the issue of gender to the forefront. Cooper clearly recognized the need to gain full citizenship rights as Americans, and foresaw this happening only when Black women were included and that only when Black women were afforded this full participation would the whole nation, Black and white, male and female, enjoy such freedoms.1

If Black male athletes in the 1960s struggled on a daily basis for equality in the sporting world, their female counterparts were in a starting position far behind. While Harry Edwards' Olympic boycott movement had solicited top Black male athletes, Black

---

1 Ibid., 31.
female athletes were not considered important representatives in the cause. While boycotts and other events occurred on college campuses across the nation. Black women - or any female athletes for that matter - were not key figures in these efforts towards change. Yevonne Smith, in assessing the relations between Black men and women, identified sexism within the civil rights movements as one means of diminishing the power of women. The efforts and contributions of African American women in the civil rights movement was “often appropriated by Black males without acknowledgment or recognition.” Moreover, the movement “reflected male patriarchal values,” and as such helped Black men gain access to male privilege that allowed them to assert power over Black women. Scholar bell hooks “emphasized how sexism perpetually undermined the struggle for liberation. The force of sexism within the society and within the race effectively oppressed and informed the social status of African American women.”

Despite their being overlooked by the media, by Black male athletes, and by the sporting public, both black and white - Black female athletes were largely responsible for the increasing improvement in status, ability, and power of the American track and field Olympic teams of the 1960s. Black men dominated a majority of professional sports - baseball, football, basketball, boxing, and track - while Black females had yet to expand their talents that far reaching - with track and field being the main recipient of the great talent these women had to offer. At the start of the new decade, integrated athletics were still primarily the pursuit of men and Caucasian women. The 1960 Rome Olympic

---


Games was a major event that highlighted the athletic achievements of African American females and initiated the increasing, though still scarcely existent, press coverage of Black women in sport.

The history of African American women's participation in sport has been mostly one that documents names, numbers, and events. Little analysis of their patterns of participation and the significance of their sporting activities has been completed. It has been noted that "with the possible exception of Wilma Rudolph and Althea Gibson, the great and near-great black female athletes have been fleetingly, if ever, in the consciousness of the sporting public. Nobody knows her: not publicists, nor researchers, nor entrepreneurs, nor published historians." Contemporary scholars view this lack of attention on the accomplishments of Black female athletes as "a tragic loss for the American community, black and white, male and female." citing "the fact that the black American sportswoman has performed a prodigious psychological achievement...To become a fine athlete she had to develop an assessment of herself in the face of a society which devalued her, as both a female and a black."

This chapter analyzes the athletic experiences of Black female athletes. It will review the analysis of Black women's sport participation by sport historians. In examining the sporting past of Black female athletes, specific attention will be given to Black female athletes and Olympic Track and Field in the 1960s. To avoid repeating a pattern of simple reporting of times, distances and athlete's names, a framework that

---


7 Ibid., 1.
considers the role of Black women in American society during this time period will be established. In examining the sporting accomplishments and participation of Black female women, it is important and not the least bit ironic that these women, with all their talent, strength, and success as American athletes, became just that - American athletes. While their Black male counterparts emerged during this decade with a race consciousness exhibited by a number of boycott movements and other protests. Black female athletes were virtually deracinated by the sporting press and public battling both race and gender stereotypes. It is the gender stereotypes that are most apparent in the press coverage and discussion of the achievements of the Black female athletes, with few references being made to the skin color of the female athlete, with the coverage of Wilma Rudolph being an exception. The racial identity of Black female athletes was often overlooked, not necessarily by themselves, but by the public and press. They were viewed first as women and then their race became a distinguishing feature. While many Black male athletes struggled with the dualistic tensions of becoming American while still maintaining their Black identity. Black female athletes faced a different reality. Because the realm of sports was predominantly male, these women were first viewed through their gender. The double-consciousness may have been a triple-consciousness - instead of being torn by Blackness and becoming American, these women had three factors to contend with: racial identity, American identity and gender. Socioeconomic status was an additional factor that played a significant role in the creation of their sport identity. Unlike their male counterparts, their participation was enmeshed in politics to a much greater extent, and in some ways aided in their quest for acceptance into American
society. It was the talents of Black female athletes that vaulted America past their Soviet competition in the sports world. These American women were hailed first as American heroes in their race against communist politics, with their gender playing a significant role and then their skin color. To expect Black female athletes to express a racial identit or consciousness like some of their male counterparts would be an unfair comparison. B their very participation, these women were expressing a consciousness, one that was more rooted in their gender than their race. This does not suggest that these women did not encounter racism because they did. But because Black female athletes faced sexism from within both the Black and American community, gender added to the already existing racism they faced. Because of their success in sport, these Black female athletes altered the typical depiction of Black women in the 1960s.

Carole Oglesby cites the “socio-economic and psychological milieu of the United States” as not being “conducive to the development of the black sportswoman.” Oglesby sees the success of Black female athletes as indicative of their strength and perseverance. Oglesby found the successes of Black female athletes remarkable and gave tribute to the spirit and talent of the Black female athletes that had succeeded despite the man “barriers in society to the development of the black sportswoman.” The Moynihan Report, written in the 1960s and based partially on Franklin Frazier’s writing on the disorganization of the black family, linked the “data on marital dissolution, illegitimac rates, female-headed families and welfare dependency” to the breakdown of black families and wrote that “black women became scapegoats, responsible for the

---

psychological emasculation of black men and the failure of the black community to gain
parity with the white community." The strength of Black women struggling to keep their
families together, instead of being praised, was viewed as a disruptive strength. The
strength of Black women was overlooked and disrespected in society and in sport.
Moreover, as a group, African American women are "among the lowest paid, the most
undereducated, and most likely to receive public assistance, although proportionate
more have always worked outside the home and been forced to develop mental and
physical strength to resist daily dehumanization." Yevonne Smith writes that "despite
their personal strength and integrity, women of color have historically been oppressed and
omitted from the mainstream of society, sport, and scholarship." 

Scholars, including Susan Cahn, Gwendolyn Captain, Yevonne Smith, and
Patricia Vertinsky consider the labor history of African American women, as slaves,
tenant farmers, domestics, and wageworkers and explain that such factors have
"disqualified them from standards of femininity defined around the frail or inactive
female body." Because Black females were part of the labor force, their employment
exempted these working women "from ideals of womanhood" that were predicated "on
the presumed refinement and femininity" associated with the "domestic arena." As a
result, they were "often represented in the dominant culture as masculine females lacking

"Ibid., 8. Oglesby cites The Moynihan Report, a public policy commission formed after the urban riots of
the 1960s. The report was published in 1965. See Daniel Patrick Moynihan, The Negro Family: The Case
1965). Also see E. Franklin Frazier, The Negro in the United States (New York: Macmillan, 1949) and
originally published in 1948.
11 Ibid., 231.
in feminine grace, delicacy, and refinement." bell hooks chronicles the continued silence of Black women and the discriminations they have faced over the last two centuries; denied the right to vote, "raped by white and black men," receiving inadequate wages, and exploitation in "their service and domestic work." Moreover, Black females have "limited access to quality education, well-paying jobs, and legal protection." Thus, their contributions to society have been diminished, as has their sport participation.

Susan Cahn's work, *Coming on Strong*, has been the most analytical attempt at understanding the sport participation of African American female athletes during the twentieth century. Moreover, she is one of only a handful of scholars who investigate the multiple identities of Black female athletes in twentieth-century American sport. Her chapter, "Cinderellas of Sport," focuses entirely on Black female athletes and has been of

---


14 There is a rich history of African American women participating in sport. We are charged with moving beyond knowing who ran faster, who jumped farther, and who threw farther. Beyond an understanding of the gender barriers African American women faced in their sport participation, greater attention needs to be given to the racial barriers they faced in sport. Because the documentation of their participation is scarce in the mainstream media and little mention is made in reference to their cultural background, we must rely on the participants and oral history of their experiences. Other works on Black female athletes, including a book on African American women in track and field and Arthur Ashe’s *Hard Road to Glory* series, fail to move beyond exploring who did what, when, and how well. See Michael B. Davis, *Black American Women in Olympic Track and Field* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1992) and Arthur Ashe, *Hard Road to Glory* series for examples of books that document women’s participation in sport, but fail to analyze the meanings behind their sport participation. Both serve as excellent resources for names, dates, and accomplishments. Additionally, the Black Women in Sport Foundation produced a video, "Amazing Grace: Black Women in Sport," chronicling the athletic achievements in a variety of sports. The video follows a similar descriptive format used by Ashe and others to detail the successes of Black female in athletics. There has been an increase in the number of scholarly investigations into the sporting experiences of African American women, including the work by Vertinsky and Captain. Two others worthy of mention are Ph.D. dissertations: see Rita Liberti, “We Were Ladies, We Just Played Like Boys”; A Study of Women’s Basketball at Historically Black Colleges and Universities in North Carolina. 1925-1945.” (Ph.D. diss., The University of Iowa, 1998); Linda D. Williams, “An Analysis of American Sportswomen in two Negro
tremendous importance in the study of Black women’s history of sport. Cahn identifies the cultural significance and implications of sport participation of Black females during this time period. Cahn notes that Black females, because of their employment, were “denied access to full-time homemaking and sexual protection,” causing these women and the Black community to “not tie femininity to a specific, limited set of activities defined as separate and opposite from masculinity.” Instead, as an alternative, Black female athletes “created an ideal of womanhood rooted in the positive qualities the cultivated under adverse conditions: struggle, strength, family commitment, communal involvement, and moral integrity.”

Cindy Gissendanner writes, “working-class and rural African-American women enthusiastically embraced the possibilities for racial uplift and individual advancement in highly visible, competitive, and commercialized sports.”

Gissendanner cites racial segregation, low-class socioeconomic class status, and the African American community’s ideal of a more active femininity as factors that contributed to Black women being predisposed to reject the athletic model promoted by white female physical educators. Beauty and athleticism were not mutually exclusive in the Black community. In response to their rejection of the white women’s model of athletics, and in direct response to the racism of white women and sexism of Black men, Black females created their own autonomous athletic organizations. Black women
created similar organizations in society, as well, with the national Association of Colored Women and the National Council of Negro Women being two examples of such organizations. Despite such separations between the genders, the success of the two were inextricably linked. Gissendanner made the connection, stating that the “Racially-segregated, male-dominated nature of athletics and the institutions that governed them tied the fate of black female athletes tightly to the progress of black male athletes.”

In the Black community, “women’s sport had clearly played second fiddle to men’s,” but a “significant sector of the population demonstrated interest in women’s athletics,” as fans, recreation leaders, or athletic sponsors. Additional encouragement came from African American educators and journalists, and in 1939 prominent black physical educator E.B. Henderson made a statement which stated that “the first priority of girls athletics should be health, not competition.” Henderson went on to criticize “the narrowed limits prescribed for girls and women,” and argued that girls should “displa their skill and national characteristic sport to a wider extent. These national exponents of women’s sport are therefore to be commended for the prominence they have attained…The race of man needs the inspiration of strong virile womanhood.” He recognized the symbolic importance of Black women succeeding in sport and commended their accomplishments as worthy of praise and emulation from their communities and the country. Henderson’s feelings about female athletes had not
changed a decade later, when he “took pains to establish the femininity of black competitors,” and asserted that “colored girl athletes are as a rule, effeminate. They are normal girls.” In examining the competition between Black and white female tracksters, Henderson did not see it as an issue of femininity, but one of talent, and he attributed the presence of only two white women, out of a team of eleven, on the 1948 U.S. national track team, to “American (white) women” being “so thoroughly licked over so many years by the Booker T. Washington Girls that they have almost given up track and field competition.” Cahn asserted that the sporting achievements of African American women in track and field “served as a broader symbol of pride and achievement for black communities.” At the same time the Black community could recognize these sporting achievements as “measures of black cultural achievement.” the athletes were virtually ignored by the white media and athletic establishment.

Althea Gibson was one of the first African American female athletes to become a recognized figure by the white sporting public, though she was certainly not the first African American woman to excel in sport. Gibson, a tennis player, was the first to excel in a sport considered “white” and within a sporting organization that was organized and operated by white management. Tennis was compatible with Black middle-class femininity, but was a sport that most African Americans did not compete in because of the costs involved, and it was a sport in white America steeped and rooted in upper class

---

1 White America (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press. 1997), 221-240.
21 Ibid., 133.
22 Ibid., 120.
23 Ibid., 125.
24 Ibid., 125-126.

270
American Tennis Association was the Black equivalent of the United States Lawn Tennis Association, and had 134 local clubs in 15 regions. The ATA made agreements with the USLTA to let Gibson into sponsored events. Gibson was sponsored by two Florida doctors, hardly the background of past tennis champions. Gibson emerged on the scene in 1950, but made her presence known in tennis and the international sport scene when she became the first African American, male or female, to win the Wimbledon championship title when she beat Darlene Hard in 1957. During the championship match, one writer reported that Gibson “suffered from center-court nerves and the self-imposed responsibility of representing the whole Negro population of the United States of America.” The same writer, in acclaiming Gibson as the “first representative of the Negro race ever to win a Wimbledon title.” believed the crowd to be oblivious to the social significance of Gibson’s victory, when she reported that “the center court raised only an apathetic cheer” as Gibson was presented the trophy by the Queen and embraced by her competitor. The press saw Gibson’s victory as “making some kind of sociological sporting history.” This last comment is probably one of the more insightful lines written in mainstream sports journalism as far as even acknowledging the importance of race in sport, but stopped short of exploring why her victory was significant. The Black press had noticed years prior the racial significance of Gibson’s entrance onto segregated courts. The Chicago Defender compared the tennis player

---

25 African American females did compete in tennis; but because of segregation they were not included in white tennis matches and were forced to create their own organization, the Black Tennis Association. See Gissendanner, “African-American Women.” 88; Angela Lumpkin, Women’s Tennis: A Historical Documentary of the Players and Their Game (Troy, NY: Whitson Publishing, 1981).

Gibson to Jackie Robinson, who had broke the color barrier in baseball. Gibson commented, “Obviously they all felt what I had done was important not just to me but to all Negroes.” But the Black press also attacked Gibson when she refused to grant interviews and was somewhat sulky and difficult to deal with. Historian Mary Jo Festle reveals the struggle Gibson encountered as a race representative. She highlights a quote from Gibson’s autobiography that illustrated her difficulties in representing Black America. Gibson said, “It was a strain always trying to say and do the right thing, so that I wouldn’t give people the wrong idea of what Negroes are like.” She noticed that the prefix Negro was used in front her name in daily reports, but her opponents were never identified as white. She thought her race was obvious to the observer. She went even further, echoing Booker T. Washington sentiments, saying, “I don’t consciously beat the drums for any special cause, not even the cause of the Negro in the United States, because I feel that our best chance to advance is to prove ourselves as individuals.” Gibson also struggled with the constraints of womanhood and appropriate femininity and she discussed the pain of having other girls think she acted like a man. Both race and gender impacted the identity of Gibson and she struggled with both aspects. After Althea Gibson’s retirement from professional tennis, the visibility of African American women in “American” sport diminished significantly.

Track and field, beginning in the late 1930s and continuing over the next thirty years, was one sport that allowed African American females an opportunity to compete successfully at the highest level and gain national recognition. Black women dominated track and field beginning in the late 1930s. Track and field offered a stage for African American women to excel and enjoy recognition for their talents. The "permissive attitudes towards women's athletics" in the Black community, coupled with their interest in the popular sport, "set the stage for the emergence of black women's track at the precise moment when the majority of white women and the white public rejected the sport as undignified for women." Smith states that "despite obvious sexism in ethnic minority communities during and after the civil rights movement, the African American community has been traditionally more equalitarian than the dominant culture, particularly concerning athletics for women." Track and field was "an arena largely abandoned by middle-class white women," and Black female athletes found tremendous success both nationally and internationally. Cahn explains that their "preeminent position" in sport was a double-edged sword. On one hand, the Olympic victories of Alice Coachman, Mae Faggs, and Wilma Rudolph "demonstrated to the public that African American women could excel in a nontraditional yet valued arena of American culture." It also meant the opportunity for travel, education, upward mobility in a rigid socioeconomic class structure, and public recognition. On the other hand, Cahn points out that these successes in a "mannish"

30 Cahn, Coming on Strong, 118. Also see Williams, "An Analysis of American Sportswomen."
sport, when "viewed through the lens of commonplace racial prejudices," served to reinforce "disparaging stereotypes of black women as less womanly or feminine than white woman."\(^{32}\)

The discussion of womanhood was a theme that resonated throughout the coverage of African American women in sport. In an article that detailed the dominance of Black women in track and field and the talent of Black female athletes on the 1948 Olympic track and field team, the subtitle of the article read, "Negro Womanhood on Parade." Cahn interprets such a comment as "suggesting that the black public viewed athletics as a terrain of achievement with import beyond the immediate athletic realm."\(^{33}\) The dialogue concerning the femininity of Black female tracksters was of major importance because of their prominence on the team and their dominance of competition. In the 1950s, African American women made up more than two-thirds of the American track and field team at international track meets, including the Pan American Games and the Olympic Games. Their success was applauded and at the same time acted to reinforce the masculine image much of America had of Black women and female track athletes. While their athletic successes affirmed "the dignity and capabilities of African American womanhood," it also confirmed "derogatory images of both black and athletic women."\(^{34}\) Track and field officials struggled with how to improve the image of American women track and field athletes. Promoters did this by fitting "black track women into approved concepts of athletic womanhood." and by minimizing "the

\(^{32}\) Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 111-112.
\(^{33}\) Ibid., 120.
\(^{34}\) Ibid., 120.
presence and contributions of black women in order to create a more respectable image of the sport.\textsuperscript{35} The dialogue continued and efforts from within the Black community worked to cultivate a feminine image of African American female track athletes.

The Soviet Union dominated women's track and field during the 1950s, with the American women beginning to challenge. Cahn presents the most complex and meaningful analysis of Black women's sport participation, recognizing the impact of both the gender and race in the context of their sport experiences, but also the role of U.S. politics.

American track women suddenly found themselves under the international glare of Cold War athletic rivalries, a complicated matrix of racial and gender issues came to a head. A reservoir of racist beliefs about black women as deficient in femininity buttressed the masculine connotation of track and field. Throughout the Cold War era, the sport was dominated by African American and Soviet women. Thus two symbols of mannishness - black women and Russian "amazons" - stood in the foreground, impeding efforts to overhaul the sport's reputation.\textsuperscript{36}

The International Olympic Committee had set up minimum standards for women's track and field events, though no such standards existed for men. In the nine Olympic track and field events for women, only ten women could be allowed onto the team, prompting one writer to ask, "How capable of slowing down the Russian steam roller are the rest of the women of the world?"\textsuperscript{37} Many supporters of American women's track and field were upset about the inequities that existed between the genders and believed it "smacks of the Russian attitude of 'Don't compete unless you can win.'"\textsuperscript{38} American women that were

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 133.
\textsuperscript{36} Cahn. Coming on Strong. 138.
\textsuperscript{37} Mary Snow. "Can the Soviet Girls Be Stopped?" Sports Illustrated. 27 August 1956. 10.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 10.
capable of competing against and even beating the Russians included many African American females, such as Barbara Jones, a sprinter from Chicago, and Mae Faggs and Isabel Daniels from Tennessee State University in Nashville. Also from Tennessee State were Margaret Mathews and Willie White, described by the press as "two very class broad jumpers." Earlene Brown, from Los Angeles, was America's top shot putter, and from Tuskegee Institute came high jumper, Mildred McDaniel. Mary Snow, of Sports Illustrated, noted that if "given one-tenth the support the Russians give their women and still adhering to the American way, our girls could match the Russians next time." American women were not expected to dominate track and field like their male counterparts, but were steadily improving and showing signs of potential and promise. The belief was that "We will, of course, win the men's competition. We won't be disgraced in the women's." Low expectations and the tremendous talent of Black women in track and field combined to improve the showing of American women in track and field, both on and off the track.

The success of African American women in track and field competitions was critical to the success of the United States in international competitions. The past inability of American women to fare well in international competition had been of little concern to American sport officials, but, as Cahn notes, "with the Soviet Union's first Olympic appearance in 1952, these failings posed an acute problem for U.S. politicians, sports leaders, and a patriotic public." In sport competition, the U.S. men's team was

39 Ibid., 9.
40 Ibid., 10-11.

276
generally well matched with their Soviet male competitors. However, Soviet women athletes “so overpowered their American counterparts that the United States was in danger of losing the unofficial highly publicized competition for Olympic gold.”2 In assessing the rivalry between the United States and Soviet Union, sport served as a highl
contested arena where both countries used athletic laurel to demonstrate superiority of capitalism or communism, with the results that the “pressure to triumph over Soviet ‘slave athletics.’” led national sports establishment to give unprecedented attention to black and female athletes. U.S. sport officials conceded that had it not been “for the sensational performances of the great Negro athletes we wouldn’t even be in a secondary position in world athletics today.” Cahn asserted that American officials relied on talented Black athletes to “disprove Soviet charges of pervasive racial discrimination in U.S. society,” and the prominence of Black athletes in America actually “refuted Communist ideas about the status of our colored citizens.”3 Clearly, for reasons having more to do with winning and international prominence and little to do with racial or gender equality, African Americans stepped into an importance role in American athletics.

Seventeen American women were named to the 1956 Olympic Track and Field team, with nine African Americans. Sports Illustrated had a two-page layout of headshots of the women’s team, a rare opportunity for sport fans to not only read about women, but to actually see their photographs. The pictures included in the magazine were the only reference to the skin color of the runners. In the sprints, Mae Faggs, Isabel Daniels, of

42 Cahn, Coming on Strong, 131. Also see Festle, Playing Nice, 86.
Georgia, Meredith Ellis of New York City, Lucinda Williams of Georgia, and Wilma 
Rudolph of Tennessee would represent the United States. Earlene Brown qualified in the 
throwing events, with Mildred McDaniel and Willie White represented in the broad jump 
finals.\(^4\) At the time of the Olympic trials, Tennessee State had eight women on track and 
field scholarships and were considered to be the "Notre Dame of women's track and 
field."\(^5\) Coached by Ed Temple, Tennessee State's women were well represented on the 
Olympic team, with the majority of the nine African American women coming from the 
Tennessee State track team. Tennessee State, a historically Black college, along with 
Tuskegee, presented Black women an opportunity to receive an education and participate 
in sport. These historically Black colleges were "pioneers in competitive sport 
opportunities for women long before the women's movement."\(^6\) When Coach Temple 
was asked about the problems of fielding a good women's team, he answered with, "We 
have to take an American girl with her powder and lipstick and develop her into a 
competitor. She has to be feminine and talented. This combination is hard to find."\(^7\) 
Despite the rising success of American women in track and field, the sport was still 
considered masculine and was marginalized in the sporting press, save for every four 
years with the Olympic Games bringing interest and attention to the sport. Temple, as 

\(^4\) Cahn. *Coming on Strong*. 130.  
\(^8\) Events and Discoveries. *Sports Illustrated*. 15 September 1958.
part of his coaching responsibilities, felt he had the task of insuring that his women would not do anything to perpetuate the negative stereotypes about track and field and the masculinity of the participating women.

The leading performer at the 1960 Rome Olympics was one of Coach Temple’s star, slender 5 feet 11 inches, Wilma Rudolph. Described by the press as a “café au lait runner,” referring to the shade of her brown skin, Rudolph won three gold medals at the 1960 Olympic Games, the first American female to accomplish such a feat. Rudolph, unlike her African American teammates who were rarely even mentioned, was described by her skin color. Of Rudolph, Coach Temple said, “She’s done more for her country than what the United States could pay her for.” In fact, Rudolph’s own hometown paper, the Clarksville Leaf-Chronicle ran an editorial that called the sprinter “an inspiration to the world in general.” Her home state of Tennessee’s governor, Buford Ellington headed up plans for a welcome home party for the victorious Olympian. Ellington had won office running as an “old-fashioned segregationist.” Following the Olympics, at the Los Angeles Invitational, Rudolph continued to dominate the track circuit.

---

She made herself gracefully available for interviews, and Los Angeles welcomed her from city council to movie set. Los Angeles fans stormed the sports arena in such numbers that a sellout was posted one hour before opening ceremonies, and the shutouts were offering $6 for $2 seats, with no takers. For the 13,622 who got inside, the show was well worth it. Wilma, who appeared to be having the time of her young life, showed up poised, friendly, innocently flirtatious and nine pounds heavier than she had been at Rome.50

Track and field fans loved Wilma’s speed and grace. One reporter noticed that for one race, Rudolph did not even remove her wristwatch. Her victory was so convincing that the same reporter thought that she could have even carried her purse in the race. He noted that with the exception of the “girls” she defeated. “Everyone in the massive sports arena... was quite in love with Wilma Rudolph.”51 Another reporter thought the sprinter to be in a class of her own, writing, “in action or repose, red or red-white-and-blue, black or white, male or female, no one in Palo Alto could match the incomparable Wilma Rudolph Ward for effortless grace and poise.”52 While the press reported her victories, they also emphasized the femininity of the Olympian.

In one article, Rudolph was described as “attractive,” “queen of the spiked-shoe set,” and “definitely not a tomboy.” Her primary interests listed were “her studies in elementary education, stylish frocks, dancing” and what Rudolph described as “just plain female gossip.” The article detailed the number of letters she had received since her Olympic victories, as well as the marriage proposals that poured in daily. She noticed

51 Ibid., 48–49.
that people seemed to treat her differently and expressed her desire to be liked for herself, not because she is fast. To dispel any misconceptions about her being a tomboy, Rudolph pointed out her bright plain skirt and the delicate gold buttons on her bodice. The article concluded that Rudolph looked more like a homecoming queen than a female athlete and then answered what they saw as the inevitable question, “Can Rudolph cook?” Rudolph replied, To tell the truth, no. But I am learning.\(^{53}\) Her coach supported her claims to womanhood, and was quoted saying, “Skeeter never makes the common mistake of trying to prove she’s as good as man. She’s a woman.” In fact, after crossing the finish line at the Millrose games, Rudolph was overheard asking for a comb and mirror.\(^{54}\) Her femininity was a fascination of reporters and they wrote that the sprinter was the most popular female athlete since Babe Didrikson. Such an honor was quite an accomplishment for a Black female, but it was noted that her appeal was twofold. Simpl out. “Unlike most American female sprinters, she wins; and, unlike many American female athletes, she looks feminine.”\(^{55}\)

In the years following the Rome Olympics, American women continued to make their presence known at international competitions. In a 1962 U.S.-U.S.S.R. meet in Palo Alto, reporters claimed that the event was “not only was the best track meet of the year. it also was the prettiest.” Feminine appearance was still important. The commented, “Soviet women athletes have always seemed more attractive than Soviet women clerks or housewives, and now the Americans are catching up in this new respect

\(^{54}\) “Storming the Citadel.” Time. 10 February 1961, 57.
\(^{55}\) “Girl on the Run.” Newsweek. 6 February 1961, 54.
as well as in the events on the field. But it is difficult to be beautiful under the strain of competition." Sport competition did begin to alter the images prescribed for American women and one reporter conceded that "in deference to our own women we have quit calling the Russians ‘muscle molls.’” While he viewed losing to Russia as still acceptable and no disaster, he also recognized the signs of progress in women’s track and field, including an “expanding awareness of what women’s track is all about,” the President’s national fitness program being offered to girls for the first time, and Tennessee State offering scholarships for women athletes. Still, a greater amount of focus and attention on their feminine attributes than their athletic achievements and abilities remained the norm in the press. Cahn contended that the prominence of black women in track and field combined with “the impact of the civil rights movement” to create changes in the ways the media reported on women in sport. Changes include more photographs of African American female athletes and more feature articles on the women, though the number was still relatively low. African American women were more often featured and photographed. Still, there were a few athletes who became visible in the press, but were treated as exceptional cases. One example of an athlete treated as an exception was still Wilma Rudolph, who was in a sport where her competitors and teammates were “characterized by overdeveloped muscles and underdeveloped glands.” and viewed as “masculine freaks of nature.” Still, there was a danger to being an exception in that despite the increased attention from the media, the stories were written to support prevailing racial and gender myths. Cahn, in assessing the media treatment of

---

Rudolph wrote, "Even as they applauded her charm and speed, the press resorted to stereotypical images of jungle animals. They nicknamed Rudolph the 'black gazelle.' Like other black athletes, she was represented as a wild beast, albeit a gentle, attractive creature who could be adopted as a pet of the American public."\(^{58}\) Rudolph’s Tennessee State coach, Ed Temple, made statements to help increase the amount of respect paid to African American female track competitors. As the United States women rose to the top of international track and field, the women received more attention, but also were given a slight more respect for their perceived contributions to American success. \(\textit{Sports Illustrated}\) indicated their amazement in the changing attitudes of female track and field athletes. The weekly reported, "The word was 'our,' and it meant that girls in shorts and spikes were no longer a subject to be avoided in gracious conversation." Coach Temple remarked that in the past he had heard the media refer to his team members as "the girls," but noticed that when the Americans starting beating their Soviet opponents, the announcer called them "our girls." To Temple, this was an important reference to an increasing sense of claiming the women, or "girls," as America's own.\(^{59}\)

Though Black females had great success at the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games, coverage was minimal and despite her speed and victories, Wyomia Tyus did not capture the public's attention and affection like Wilma Rudolph had four years prior, despite her impressive victory in the 100-meter dash and a silver medal in the 400-meter relay. Sprinter Edith McGuire won three medals at the Games and was left off the front page.

\(^{57}\) John Underwood. "This is the Way the Girls Go." \textit{Sports Illustrated}. 10 May 1965. 45.
\(^{58}\) Cahn. \textit{Coming on Strong}. 137. Also see "The Fastest Female." \textit{Time}. 19 September 1960. 74.
Leading up to the 1968 Mexico City Olympic Games, the issue of femininity was still in the forefront of promoters, coaches, and athletes' minds. At the trials for the 1968 Olympic Games, the talent of female athletes was more promising than ever and the past Olympic problems of perpetually losing to the Russians seemed as good as solved. The results of the trials created a team that was "more mobile, stronger, deeper and faster." than any Olympic team before. The real accomplishment, however, was that this more mobile, stronger, deeper, faster team had a "youthful touch of femininity in the air." even "perhaps a faint breath of hairspray, a mysterious new something nobody could quite define." One coach called the team members "a great influx of pretty young things coming into the sport." 60 Coach Ed Temple focused on the athletic talent of the team and stated his support of his athletes, saying "I think that we will make a tremendous showing. People are going to find out - they already are finding out - that we can hold our own with anybody." 61 Calvin L. Brown, track aficionado and announcer chimed in, attributing the success of the women to a youth program finally paying off. Brown noted that most of the athletes were still in their teens and likened the trend of track athletes becoming younger to swimmers who dominate their sport at earlier ages. Brown went on further comparing the two sports and their athletes. "The girls are finding out that there can be a certain air of glamour in all this. For one thing, running does great things for the legs. It makes them shapelier." 62 Temple, perhaps taking offense to shapely legs, responded to Brown that he didn't think "track girls go through as much muscular activit

---

61 Ibid., 17.
as swimmers. Look at the swimmers. Shoot, some of them look like weight lifters. Our girls are definitely more feminine.” Team member and hurdler Mamie Rollins, dressed in hip-hugging gold corduroy bell bottom pants, added her thoughts, saying that “Being a girl and an athlete goes hand in hand.” It was settled – by coaches, fans, the press, and even the athletes. Track can be beautiful.\textsuperscript{63}

At the Mexico City Olympic Games, Black female athletes did their thing, with notable Olympic and world record performances in the 100-meter dash by Tyus, the 400-meter relay, and Madeline Manning in the 800-meter run. On the political landscape, considering the victory stand protest of male team members Tommie Smith and John Carlos and the proposed boycott leading up to the Olympics, Black female track athletes were relatively quiet in their protests. Excluded from the discussions of the proposed boycott, Black female athletes were not expected to speak out at the game by their male teammates. Their voices were not viewed as worthy of inclusion. The press rarely sought out black women, nor did boycott organizer Harry Edwards. Moreover, regardless of skin color, women’s sports received less attention than men’s sports. Team member Willye White was aware of the slights and said, “The men track athletes are a group within themselves. You know they never consulted us on this black boycott issue.”\textsuperscript{64} Gissendanner states that Black female athletes were more dependent on their Black male counterparts, who recognized that success in integrated sports was an effective way of

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 19.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 19.
\textsuperscript{64} Chicago Daily News. 15 October 1968.
creating visibility and support for a civil rights agenda. The success of boycott lay with the male athletes, not the women. Similar to lack of women’s voice in civil rights and American society, Black female athletes were relegated to a secondary position and excluded from the decision-making processes. Their participation was defined by their male counterparts, who paid more attention to racial discrimination, while overlooking and even perpetuating gender discrimination. In a gesture the New York Times referred to as “Black Power,” the American women’s 400-meter relay team, made up of four Black athletes, dedicated their gold medal to the suspended Smith and Carlos. Wyomia Tyus, a member of the relay and the gold medalist in the 100-meter dash, spoke at a news conference following the relay. She stated, “I would like to say that we dedicate our relay win to John Carlos and Tommie Smith.” Less than a year later, Wilma Rudolph was in the news again for reportedly selling her 1960 Olympic gold medals for cash. For the first time though, Rudolph’s skin color was the subject of the article. It had been reported that the jobless Rudolph was denied employment because she was a “Negro.” Rudolph claimed she was jobless because she would not work for less than what she is worth and that her unemployment was temporary. Asked about the mistreatment of her as an African American, Rudolph replied, “I can’t think of one Negro who hasn’t had trouble because of skin color.” She expressed her support of fellow Olympians Tommie Smith and John Carlos, suspended from the Games for their controversial protest. In what the newspaper considered, “outspoken views,” Rudolph declared herself as nonviolent, but

65 Gissendanner, “African-American Women.” 83; Ashe. Hard Road to Glory, volume 2, 6; Giddings. When and Where, 349.
explained that her position "doesn't mean I'd go out and burn down 40 stores, but if somebody hit me, I certainly wouldn't turn the other cheek." Rudolph had rarely spoken out on issues of racism or sexism, though she was always quick to emphasize her femininity. Nine years after her three gold medals, and out of the public spotlight and track and field, Wilma Rudolph expressed her own thoughts on such issues. Again, such articles and reports were exceptions and buried in the back pages of newspapers.

By the end of the decade, Black women in track and field had made their mark in terms of athletics style and feminine style.

Like a cloud of newly emerged butterflies, they appeared out of nowhere - which is where women track and field athletes seem to spend time between national championships - to provide a kaleidoscope of beauty and color that even the local Fourth of July fireworks could not match. Moreover, their femininity had helped to dispel many of the misconceptions about women and sport. One writer reported that, "If the meet emphasized one thing, it was that a girl no longer has to look like a boy to compete in track and field, a development that becomes more obvious every year." By the end of the decade, women had successfully begun to shape the image of women's track and field into one that included grace, beauty and certainly femininity.

In the 1960s a great deal of media attention focused on racial issues surrounding the sport participation of Black male athletes - African American females were not included in this dialogue, though they surely have stories to tell. Why they ran, what the

reactions of foreigners were to them at international competitions, how they fared with their teammates, their college experiences. The lack of information is not due to a lack of participation or interest. In large part, it is due to a lack of available materials and documents. While the activities of Black male athletes were routinely reported in the press, Black female athletes were scarcely the subject of newspapers or magazines, even to report winners and significant achievements. This is true for both the white mainstream press and Black press. Smith states, "Whenever females have succeeded in track and field, basketball, or other athletics, several factors appear to have been operative. First, there has usually been a strong desire to participate in sports, skill, and confidence on the part of the athlete, plus an organized sport structure through which the athlete has been nurtured in the African American community and more recently in the dominant culture." Great strides have been made, evident by the works done by historians Susan Cahn, Mary Jo Festle and Cindy Gissendanner. More investigations need to explore the racial and political experiences of these pioneering African American female athletes, with the same vigor and interest that has occurred in the study of Black male athletics.

---

70 Smith, "Women of Color." 237.
December 24, 1969

Dear Mr. Kuhn,

After 12 years in the major leagues, I do not feel that I am a piece of property to be bought and sold irrespective of my wishes. I believe that any system that produces that result violates my basic rights as a citizen and is inconsistent with the laws of the United States and the several states.

It is my desire to play baseball in 1970 and I am capable of playing. I have received a contract from the Philadelphia club, but I believe I have the right to consider offers from other clubs before making any decisions. I, therefore, request that you make known to all the major league clubs my feelings in this matter and advise them of my availability for the 1970 season.¹

Just as Jackie Robinson had pioneered baseball into re-integration and a more democratic stage of the sport, Curt Flood made his attempt at altering the economic face of the nation's pastime. When Flood refused to be traded to the Philadelphia Phillies in 1969 and challenged baseball's antitrust exemption and the reserve clause, the ballplayer was testing a rule that had survived in the game for decades. The reserve clause was first

instituted in 1879 and initially only five players per team were reserved. By the 1890s, every player was reserved. The reserve clause was an agreement binding a player to his current team. Essentially, the team owned the rights to the player for the following season and unless the player was traded or released, he was bound to his team for life. Critical of the reserve clause and what they believed to be the “highest paid group of slaves,” *Ebony* attacked the traditions of baseball for both the reserve clause, but also baseball’s color barrier which remained into the 1940s. The editorial, written five years before Flood’s challenge, pointed out that despite high paid players, such as $100,000 Willie Mays, players were essentially slaves in the baseball caste system. The magazine blasted baseball for their anti-trust exemption and the reserve clause, which enabled owners to own the rights to a player’s career. Such a clause in baseball magnified the business aspect of the national “game.” The crux of Flood’s argument was the fact that despite the opposition of most players to the reserve clause, as well as the legal ramifications of professional sports and anti-trust exemptions, baseball players were being bought and sold like property.\(^1\)


289
Flood’s argument that he was not a piece of property to be bought and sold fell on deaf ears and was dismissed by owners and fans of the nation’s pastime, as well as the Supreme Court. Viewed as a greedy ballplayer. Flood’s argument concerning baseball was not centered on the issue of money. Rather it was about the philosophy of athletes being treated like property, a situation Flood and others found ironic considering the tragic history of African-Americans and their enslavement that had only ended one hundred years prior. Flood’s challenge came ten years after Pumpsie Green integrated the Boston Red Sox, the final team to have a Black player on their major league roster, and a little over 20 years after Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier with the Montreal Royals. “I am pleased that God made my skin black.” Curt Flood remarked in 1972. “but I wish he had made it thicker.” Flood, in his stand, made the ultimate sacrifice of his career and reputation. This chapter explores the deeper meaning of the argument presented by Flood, that he is not property to be bought and sold irrespective of his wishes, and the price he paid, his career, his reputation, and essentially his American identity.

Flood had bitter memories of his playing experience in the early days of integration in the Carolina League. “My teammates despised and rejected me as subhuman. I would have gladly sent them all to hell.”

Flood, in his playing days before the end of baseball’s color barrier, was able to recognize that the management in baseball was critical to the success of integrating the national game. He was from the first generation of Black ballplayers that followed Jackie Robinson into the national pastime.

---

1 Herzog, *The Sports 100*, 179.
Flood knew the history of the game and knew that some of the best players in baseball had been mired in the Negro Leagues because of their skin color. He thought the exclusion of Blacks from major league baseball kept the quality of the game low. Even after Robinson and his generation entered the big leagues, Flood thought the quality of the game improved slightly, but was limited because of the quota system which kept the number of Black ballplayers to a minimum. Flood also criticized baseball executives with lacking the ability to "cope with the morale problems arise from racial tensions."\footnote{Flood with Richard Carter. The Way It Is, 79-80.}

Flood's early years in baseball made a profound impact on his racial identity and pride as a Black athlete. He started at a salary of $4000 in 1956, and became one of the best paid players in baseball during his era and by 1969, earning $90,000, which was a "unprecedented sum for a player who was neither a 20-game winner nor a home run hitter."\footnote{Flood with Richard Carter. The Way It Is, 79-80.}

In his autobiography, Flood recalled an incident that indicated his awareness of race issues in American sport, more specifically, the role of the Black athlete in sport. Flood recalled a party where football player O.J. Simpson brought two friends and someone in the crowd noticed the player and his friends and exclaimed, "Look! There's O.J. Simpson with a couple of niggers!" A Black athlete was viewed much different than other Black males. Flood noticed the differential treatment and commented, "Black athletes were accepted -even hailed- for their prowess afield or on stage, but remained outcasts between performances." As for O.J. and his two friends, Flood was positive that had the event been a white social gathering, something he saw as unlikely, and Simpson
was not wearing his Buffalo Bills uniform. “someone surely would have wondered who the three niggers were.” Flood knew that he was first of all a commodity used to win baseball games. He sarcastically attacked the prevailing myths of African Americans and the civil rights struggle for integration in the United States.

Having demonstrated our ability to help win ball games and having disproved the theory that our complexions would repel white trade, we blacks seemed to have reached our absolute zenith. We were being allowed to play major league baseball! We were being allowed to ‘prove’ that any black kid could get ahead in this enlightened society if he would only try! What more could we possibly wish Or, as cranky whites asked when things began to heat up in the United States during the sixties. ‘What do you people want?’

Though he could acknowledge his value as a commodity, Flood resented the treatment he received because of his skin color. He did not want to be treated as an exception because of his talent and saw himself as no better than “less prominent but equally worth blacks.” Flood took issue with people that viewed him as an exception, but treated other African American poorly. He posited that such treatment “supposes that we hope that our brief fame will somehow whiten us permanently.” Moreover, Flood did not support the false belief that such individuals held of African American athletes. This false belief was that “any worthy black can make the grade” and “whoever is still in the ghetto deserves to be.” Still, despite all the racial inequities and politics of the era. Flood also recognized that his integrated team, the St. Louis Cardinals, offered a glimpse of what a successful integrated society could achieve. Flood played with the “volatile” Orlando Cepeda, the

---

3 Ibid., 74-75.
5 Ibid., 76.
“impossible” Roger Maris, and the “impenetrable Bob Gibson, who were “three celebrated non-candidates for togetherness.” The Cardinals were, in Flood’s view, a diverse roster of “Latins, blacks, liberal whites and redeemed peckerwoods,” and also the best team in the game, “victorious on the field and victorious off it.” Flood lamented that his team represented a “beautiful little foretaste of what life will be like when Americans finally unshackle themselves.”

Curt Flood’s baseball career with the St. Louis Cardinals lasted twelve seasons and World Series Championships in 1964 and 1967. The Cardinals were owned by beer magnate August Busch. During one spring training, Busch met with the players and questioned the integrity of their attitudes. Flood recounted the meeting. Busch accused the team of “upstaging and occasionally manhandling” the devoted Cardinals fans. He was also adamantly opposed to the players association. Busch warned the team that failure to mend their ways would “ruin St. Louis baseball.” Flood felt that Busch’s untimely speech “demoralized” his team, who had just won the World Series. He saw it as an indication that he and his teammates, despite their on the field successes, were viewed as livestock. During the 1969, Flood was a little more outspoken than usual and had a few rifts with management. After the team had a poor showing in 1969, Flood, who had batted .285 in the losing season, was traded in the off-season to the Philadelphia Phillies. Flood believed Philadelphia to be the least desirable team for black athletes.

Philadelphia was the country's "northernmost southern city," the scene of "Richie Allen's ordeal," and home to "a ball club rivaled only by the Pirates as the least cheerful organization in the league." He had friends, family, and business interests in St. Louis. Moreover, he was distressed at the handling of his trade. Flood had been informed of the trade by Jim Toomey, an assistant to the general manager of the team, who simply told him that he had been traded to Philadelphia along with Tim McCarver, Joe Hoerner and Byron Browne for Richie Allen, Cookie Rojas and Jerry Johnson, and wished the star good luck. Flood's reaction to his trade was one of mixed confusion and disbelief. He felt rejected by the Cardinals. He was surprised not at being traded, but the treatment he received from the management of the team he had played for twelve seasons. His anger grew at the trade after all he had done for the Cardinals.

If I had taken inventory before the front office called, I would have compiled a formidable list. Expensive athlete. Painter of oil portraits as negotiable as an currency. Student of the human condition. Impervious to shock. Subdivision: black. Belief in the American dream: lapsed. Wrong. The dream dies hard. It lay deep within me, dormant but not destroyed. Just as stress can arouse a latent virus, one miserable phone call released the poison of self-pity. The hard-boiled realist who answered the telephone was a weeping child when he set the receiver down. The lightning had struck. The dream lay shattered. It was a bad scene. Feverishly, I harped on my twelve years of service, my place among the all-time stars of the Cardinals. My batting average of .285 had not been bad for a losing year. If I had been a foot-shuffling porter, they might have at least given me a pocket watch. But all I got was a call from a middle-echelon coffee drinker in the front office.

12 Flood with Richard Carter. The Way It Is. 188.
13 Herzog. The Sports 100. 179.
14 Richard Reeves. "Last Angry Man." Esquire, 1 March 1978. 44.
294
The day after the trade, the formal papers arrived notifying "Mr. Curtis Charles Flood that his contract had been assigned to the Philadelphia Club of the National League." Flood’s recollection of receiving the send-off was mired in the turmoil, anger, and hurt he felt at being traded.

I was an expert on baseball’s spurious paternalism. I was a connoisseur of its grossness. I had known that I was out of phase with management. I therefore had known that I might be traded. Yet now, when the industry was merely doing its thing, I took it personally. I felt unjustly cast out.

He spoke with his friends and felt his options were limited. He saw only two realistic actions, either play for the Phillies or retire from the game. He refused to go to Philadelphia. Flood was angered that he was virtually trapped by the rules of the industry of baseball. He announced, “I’m not going to let them do this to me. They said if I don’t play in Philadelphia, I don’t play at all. Right there, they shoot down my rights. They shoot me down as a man. I won’t stand for it.” When asked why he didn’t challenge baseball and the reserve clause, Flood saw too many obstacles to such a challenge: one being the enormous cost of such a fight, secondly, the “invulnerability of baseball,” and the impracticality of such a challenge.16

Flood met with John Quinn, the general manager of the Phillies, who was in St. Louis on business. Quinn had been trying to meet with Flood to see if they could come to some agreement about Flood wearing a Phillies uniform. Quinn informed Flood other roster moves designed to strengthen the team. A new stadium was under construction and there was money for a lucrative contract for the prized outfielder. Flood began to
seriously consider the trade and realized that his opposition wasn’t necessarily the city, but the lack of input he was afforded in his career. Flood admitted. “The problem was no particular city but was the reserve clause, which afflicted all players equally no matter where.”

In December 1969, Flood drafted a letter to Bowie Kuhn, the commissioner of baseball. Flood’s letter was in essence his “emancipation proclamation” from major league baseball and the American sporting scene. Kuhn’s response to Flood was, in part, “I certainly agree with you that you, as a human being, are not a piece of property to be bought and sold. This is fundamental in our society and I think obvious. However, I cannot see its applicability to the situation at hand.” Kuhn’s statement concerning the applicability of property and Flood’s reference to such treatment reveal the commissioner’s inability to recognize the symbolic significance of Flood’s argument. Flood countered that maybe being Black made him “more sensitive to issues of freedom and dignity.” He decided to sue Commissioner Kuhn, the presidents of both leagues and the twenty-four team owners for $3 million, triple damages and free agency. Flood’s goal was to create a ruling that allowed a player to “establish his value in an open market.” Most observers of the game gave Flood a reasonable shot at winning his

---

16 Ibid., 189.
18 Herzog, The Sports 100, 180-181; Reeves, “Last Angry Man,” 44.
20 Koppett, “Flood Backed by Players.” Marvin Miller, in his memoirs, reiterated the sentiment that Flood was standing up for a principle and that he truly did not want to be treated as a commodity: Miller, A Whole
lawsuit. Flood was supported by "an increasingly militant" Major League Baseball Players Association. Of the twenty-four owners, some assumed that Flood was being used by the players association to bring an end to the reserve clause, though Marvin Miller stated clearly that Flood's actions were of his own decision. Miller emphasized Flood's independence stating, "People underestimate Curt Flood. He is his own man, and he is probably the only professional ballplayer who won't benefit from change in the rules."21 Miller's prediction that Flood would not benefit from the outcome, but that other athletes might, was all too accurate.

Flood's decision to challenge the tradition of major league baseball and professional sport was profound and the impact of his efforts would only be recognized years later. In an assessment of Flood's impact on sport history, Brad Herzog ranks Curt Flood as the 39th most important figure in sports in his list of 100. Herzog could see the connection between Flood's fight for freedom and the past treatment of African Americans.

Having fought so hard to overcome the lingering effects of slavery in the United States as a black man, Flood decided to attack what he considered Major League Baseball's enslavement of its players. He would challenge the game's reserve clause, which he described a 'baseball's right to treat human beings like used cars.'22

Flood, as a Black athlete, was challenging baseball and the history and traditions of America's national pastime. Considered to be the most democratic sport since the entrance of Jackie Robinson and the subsequent trail of black ballplayers that followed.

---

21 "Players go to bat against baseball." Business Week. 28 February 1970. 74.
22 Herzog. The Sports 100. 180.
the comparison of the reserve clause to a player being considered a piece of property was central to the challenge, but also central to the owners' objections. Should the clause be revoked, tradition and economics of the game would be drastically altered and significantly impacted. Or so it was believed by the owners.

In his book, The Revolt of the Black Athlete, Harry Edwards praises the efforts of Curt Flood and highlights the ironies between the reserve clause and the treatment of black athletes during the late 1960s.

Curt Flood currently has a million dollar suit in court filed against professional baseball as a result of what Flood charges is 'the treatment and handling of professional baseball players as if they were chattel or slaves.' Flood is contesting the trading policy - common in most professional team sports - under which a player can be summarily sold or traded to another team by team owners and managers without so much as notifying him, much less inquiring about his feelings on the matter. Many a professional athlete has been shocked while casually reading his morning paper to discover that he has been traded to another team. His life is disrupted, his family is uprooted, his children are pulled out of school. Flood is fighting this master-slave relationship that exists between baseball owners and baseball players. I have heard more than a few professional athletes say that they hope he is successful. And they were not all baseball players. If Flood wins his case, the decision undoubtedly will set a precedent for other professional team sports. Little wonder that professional team owners and league presidents are squirming at the thought. For if Flood is successful, he will have pulled off the greatest victory for justice in pro athletics since another black man turned a similar trick in the late 40s when Jackie Robinson entered professional baseball.~23

Edwards' inclusion of Flood in his book indicates that he perceived the baseball player's actions were being interpreted as an expression of Black consciousness and protest, part of the larger "revolt of the Black athlete." Not only were Black amateur athletes taking risks in their protests, but Flood, as a baseball player, was one of a growing number of team sport athletes to speak out about the conditions of Black athletes in professional
sport. Moreover, Flood used language that fit into the rhetoric of Edwards. The issue of
slavery and athletes as chattel was at the core of Edwards' arguments and Flood's
challenge was a timely example of such mistreatment. Edwards equated Flood's
challenge of baseball with Jackie Robinson's entrance into segregated baseball two
decades prior. The outcome of Flood's case would impact all baseball players, Black and
white.

Flood had support from the Major League Baseball Players Association (MLBPA)
in his battle against the owners. The executive director of the MLBPA Marvin Miller
warned Flood that his lawsuit might "endanger his playing career." Miller believed that
Flood's decision to challenge "took at least as much courage as Jackie Robinson needed
in his rookie season." Flood knew that his career was in jeopardy. He candidly
admitted that no, he "was not trying to ruin the national pastime," and that to him,
fighting for a principle was more important than any amount of money. He also stressed
that "a peon remains a peon no matter how much money you give him." He was sure that
after the issue was settled that none of the 24 club owners would touch him "with a 10-
foot pole." He philosophized that the whole situation reminded him of who he was and
what

24 Flood with Richard Carter, "My Rebellion," 26. One player was against Flood's case. Boston Red Sox
outfielder Carl Yastrzemski announced that he was "against what Curt Flood is trying to do because it
would ruin the game." He called for a poll of all 600 players in the association. See "Baseball Goes to
Flood was clear headed and motivated to alter the economic situation of baseball players. He hoped to leave the sport with his imprint and even told Miller that he wanted “to go out like a man instead of disappearing like a bottle cap.”

Beyond the symbolism of Flood’s case was the reality that ball players had relatively no voice in labor negotiations with multimillionaire owners, who incidentally hired Commissioner Kuhn. One journalist felt that Flood’s status as an African American actually gave Flood’s case strength. With the increased attention to civil rights issues in the second half of the 1960s, Flood’s attack on baseball’s antitrust sanctuary was excellent timing. Still, his case would impact Flood’s future in baseball beyond his playing days. Ted Smits, once the general sports editor of Associated Press, wrote, “Every ballplayer, deep in his heart, expects one day to become a manager, and he wouldn’t upset the applecart. Because he is black, Flood harbors no such illusion.” Such limited options in the game left Flood determined to press forward with his case, no matter the pressure or personal cost to him. The situation led one journalist to predict that some of the “most important battles for organized baseball in the next season or two will be fought in the courtroom rather than on the diamond.” The owners were unanimously opposed to alterations in the reserve system and thought any such changes would kill the game. Commissioner Kuhn believed it would turn the national pastime into an exhibition business.

---

29 “Players Go to Bat Against Baseball,” 75.
Curt Flood was represented by former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Arthur Goldberg, who was selected by Marvin Miller. In a motion heard by Judge Irving Ben Cooper, Flood was denied an injunction to make him a free agent for the 1970 season. His trial began in May 1970, and three months later, the federal district court ruled against Flood. Despite the backing of the players association, no active player testified on Flood's behalf, though former players Jackie Robinson, Hank Greenberg, and Jim Brosnan and former owner Bill Veeck spoke out in support against the reserve clause. Robinson said of Flood's position, "I think Curt is doing a service to all players in the leagues, especially for all the younger players coming up who are not superstars. All he is asking for is the right to negotiate. It doesn't surprise me that he had the courage to do it. He's a very sensitive man concerned about the rights of everybody. We need men of integrity like Curt Flood and Bill Russell who are involved in the area of civil rights and who are not willing to sit back and let Mr. Charlie dictate their needs and wants for them." Robinson charged that the reserve clause favored the owners and that the players should have some control over their careers. He predicted a strike by the players over the issue. Greenberg, once a slugger for the Detroit Tigers, called the reserve clause "obsolete and antiquated." He encouraged a better working relationship between the players and the owners to eliminate the reserve clause and to create a substitute.

---

Greenberg offered his opinion that such actions should be done voluntarily by the owners, but conceded that they would more likely to respond to a court order. Owners were firm in their contention that the reserve clause was "reasonable and necessary" to maintain the stability of the game. Veeck was philosophical saying that every player had the right to determine his future. He thought it was in the best interest of baseball to remove the element of "human bondage" the reserve clause implied. While some active players, such as Bob Gibson and Richie Allen, supported Flood’s principle, they did not speak out in the court proceedings. Flood’s response to the lack of verbal support for his case by fellow players was one of disappointment. He said, "If I had six hundred players behind me, there would be no reserve clause." Economist Robert Nathan testified on behalf of Flood, assailing the reserve clause and citing an imbalance in the bargaining ability of players. National Football League Commissioner Pete Rozelle testified that professional football "had been able to live with its player option" rule and profit.

Testifying against Flood was Commissioner Kuhn, who admitted that football was not harmed by not having a reserve clause. Also testifying on the Commissioner’s side were Chub Feeney, President of the National League, Joe Cronin, President of the American League, Bing Devine, general manager of the St. Louis Cardinals, former

player Joe Garagiola, and several owners of clubs. Judge Cooper ruled that the reserve clause did not violate civil-rights statutes. After Flood and Miller appealed the decision, the Second Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the Lower Court’s ruling in January 1971. Flood was anxious to have his case resolved. He said, “Let’s put it in the open. Let the Supreme Court decide what’s right.” Surprisingly, the Supreme Court agreed to hear another appeal. In Flood’s final appeal, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 5-3 against the baseball player in the case of Flood v. Kuhn.

Despite the failure of Flood’s case in the court system, many believed that the case was significant beyond the legal decision. Called “a triumph of tradition over logic,” Flood’s battles with baseball was over. The nation’s highest court rejected Curt Flood’s antitrust suit challenging baseball’s privileged exemption from antitrust regulation calling it “an aberration and an anomaly.” Six of the eight Supreme Court justices admitted that baseball was in fact interstate commerce, contradicting their

---


Three of those six still ruled in favor of adhering to the almost fifty year old precedent. Chief Justice Warren Burger recognized error in the decision, but admitted his fear that correcting the problem would impact too many people. Marvin Miller commented that he had never read so much criticism of a majority decision by the justices who had formed the majority. Clearly their judgment was clouded and in his ruling, Judge Harry Blackmun cited the names of 87 baseball greats in his majority decision.

New York Times sports columnist Arthur Daley attacked the ruling and cited a sentence in the ruling. It read: “Only the business of baseball is entitled to stand under the umbrella afforded by the Federal baseball case.” Daley thought the court’s ruling embraced the status quo and that it “reaffirmed that only baseball” was entitled to the umbrella, excluding other professional sports, such as football, basketball and hockey. Those sports, Daleycommented, could stand out in the rain for all the high court cared. He also thought that the high court ignored that the umbrella was “leaking badly.”

Miller saw Flood as a martyr for the cause.

The reactions of fellow baseball players varied. New York Mets catcher Duff Dyer asked, “I guess the ruling makes the clause legal, but does that also make it right?” Houston Astros pitcher Jim Wynn quipped, “It’s a bad rule. We shouldn’t be treated like a bunch of animals.” Oakland A’s outfielder Reggie Jackson paid tribute to Flood saying, “If there is a change, we can all thank Flood. He suffered for it. Everybody wants

---


change, but nobody wants to pay the dues.” Others criticized the ruling calling it a “cop­
out” and an example of “buck passing.” Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, in
the minority, declared. “There can be no doubt that were we considering the question of
baseball for the first time upon a clean slate, we would hold it to be subject to Federal
antitrust regulation. The unbroken silence of Congress should not prevent us from
correcting our own mistakes.” Miller cited the significance of Blackmun as the author
of the majority decision because it was Justice Blackmun’s first “important” majorit
opinion.50

The legacy of Curt Flood and his challenge to the American national pastime
continues to be debated, but more so for the economic impact his case has had on
professional athletics and the subsequent multimillion-dollar salaries. Many argue that
Flood’s case was not racially based, but it is difficult to ignore the ideology and premise
of ownership of property coupled with the historical experiences of African American in
this country and the period of enslavement. By no coincident, Flood’s lawsuit came at a
time when race relations were at the forefront of the discussion of American ideology and
American civil rights. The true significance of the challenge is not the end result for
Flood or for the future players, but the challenge by a black man in a system designed to
control players as property. Marvin Miller, in his memoirs, recalled the real impact

50 Miller, A Whole New Ballgame, 145. Miller, on page 201, also noted the irony in Blackmun’s
authorship in a case concerning a man’s control over his body, in comparison to a majority opinion the
Justice wrote a year later. Roe vs. Wade, about a woman’s control over her body. For more on the
deliberation of the Justices, Miller suggests reading Bob Woodward and Scott Armstrong, The Brethren:
Flood’s challenge made upon the baseball and American sport landscape. Miller concluded that the “arguments against the reserve clause had never before been made so lucidly or so forcefully.” What the ruling really accomplished, in Miller’s assessment, was “raising the consciousness of everyone involved with baseball; the writers, the fans, the players - and perhaps even some of the owners.”51 In a fight that Curt Flood technically lost, “two decades of hindsight have labeled it an undeniable moral victory.” More than any other athlete, Curt Flood is “credited with ushering in the big-money era of sports.”52

Flood’s baseball career suffered as a direct result of his challenge to baseball. Sitting out the 1970 season and living overseas, Flood signed with the Washington Senators for the 1971 season at an increased salary.53 Before deciding to re-enter the game he was up against in the courtroom, Flood made a list of the pros and cons of returning to the game he had played for twelve seasons. On the positive side, Flood was confident that nobody could ever justly accuse him of selling out his principles for money. He had not dropped his case. Flood had been assured by his attorney that resuming his career in baseball would not prejudice the court system. Additionally, the Senators offered Flood a $110,000 salary, which the ball player needed. Most importantly, Flood was being afforded the opportunity to get back into baseball and re-

51 Herzog, The Sports 100, 180-181.
52 Ibid., 179.
establish himself as one of the game's best outfielders. On the negative side of Flood's ledger was his fear that baseball fans would take his playing as a sign of him abandoning his fight. In fact, Flood noted that he had once referred to himself as a "$90,000-a-year slave" and now he would be earning $110,000. He did not want to appear to be waffling on his principles or on the issue of money. He also feared the reaction of fellow ball players and was unsure of how they might treat his return. Ultimately, he was advised that he would gain nothing by staying out of baseball.

Flood's stint with the Washington Senators in the 1971 season lasted thirteen games, in which he hit seven singles and barely batted over .200. Playing in seven games for the Senators before he was benched. Flood was depressed at his poor performance. He was retired from the game at the age of thirty-three. Moreover, Flood was plagued by legal, fiscal and marital problems. Flood escaped to Europe.

After years of self-exile in Europe, Curt Flood returned to the United States and baseball as a sportscaster, earning $300-a-week. He decided that "there comes a time in a man's life when he should have some say in where he goes to work." Flood acknowledged that he was ahead of his time in his fight against baseball. In 1975, And Messersmith and Lee McNally won exactly what Flood had fought for – "the chance to

have some control over what you do."\textsuperscript{57} Former teammates had little to say about Flood and what was considered a "touchy subject in St. Louis."\textsuperscript{58} In a series that examined men who had stood up to the system, Richard Reeves discussed the obstacles he encountered when writing the story. More than one friend of Flood's had discouraged Reeves from finding the former ball player and stated that Flood had taken on something very big and that it broke him. Reeves featured Flood as a hero for his stand against baseball, but what he was uncovering was the crushing truth few realized. "If you buck the system, you are almost inevitably going to be destroyed."\textsuperscript{59} Flood was blacklisted from baseball. He spent five tortured years in Europe. He owed over $100,000 in legal fees. He longed to work in the game he loved, but found little interest. Flood was convinced that he was "the last man baseball would ever touch." Flood was reminded every day that he was the Black man who sued baseball over its legalized slavery. One summer, Flood was interviewed by two Sacramento sport reporters, who approached Flood from much different perspectives. Creighton Sanders of KXTV asked the same old questions, that essentially implied the common thinking, "Aren't you trying to destroy the American way of life you black son of a bitch?" Fellow KCRA reporter and San Francisco Giants baseball player, Bill Matlock, asked questions that revealed another theme. "Would you do it again? Are you blackballed from baseball? Would you like to get back in?" As a ball player, Matlock recognized the economic impact of Curt Flood on baseball and said, "You know, if it weren't for Curt Flood I wouldn't be living in that big house and getting a

\textsuperscript{57} "Baseball's Forgotten Man." Newsweek. 2 April 1979. 18.
\textsuperscript{58} Whitford, "Curt Flood." 102-103.
couple of thousand dollars for going to a banquet.” Moreover, Matlock saw the irony in Flood’s absence form the game and fortune that he helped to create. Of the situation, Matlock said, “It’s like a war. You send your best soldier out to scout and he doesn’t come back. He’s not there to celebrate the victory.” Of his suit, Flood admitted, “suddenly realized that it was just me against nineteen multimillionaires.” Such isolation, Reeves commented, was a “more feresome price than the money.” Reeves credited Flood as a man who would not bend and as a result of his not bending, “the rest of us had the small measure of freedom that came with the tiny chance that we might be the next to stand up.”

Being Black never escaped Curt Flood. He said, “Being black is like always having to be cautious about what they call you.” He knew that his Blackness “made other people uncomfortable.” When Flood was refused his trade to Philadelphia, “a bad team in a town no black ballplayer would choose,” he changed his life and the game and business of baseball. Flood sacrificed “fame, riches, respect, everything he had achieved since the difficult early days of his career.” According to one journalist, Flood’s refusal and subsequent challenge to baseball changed the perception of Flood as a Black athlete. “He became a nigger again.” In the last year of the turbulent 1960s and after tremendous struggle for equal rights, integration, the right to vote. Black power. free

59 Reeves, “Last Angry Man.” 41.
60 Ibid., 46.
61 Ibid., 42.
62 Ibid., 46.
speech and other American necessities. Curt Flood fought to be a free American Black
man and lost. Or did he?
And now Smith, Carlos and their country have arrived at a stage that seems to allow the good done by their gesture to be weighed against their sacrifice. They, and the civil rights activists of their generation, made the American public understand that the thousand ways - in law and custom and language and stereotype - by which whites pressed blacks were unconscionable in a society of equals.  

As America prepares to enter the new millennium, the issue of "race relations" continues to present Americans, of all races and ethnicities, with opportunities for difficult and challenging dialogue. As W.E.B. DuBois predicted at the turn of the nineteenth-century, "The problem of the twentieth-century is the problem of the color line," it is both disappointing that his statement rang true, but also disheartening that it may continue to ring true for decades into the twenty-first century. Discussion of issues of black and white have been the source of heated debate, intense racist thinking, and have resulted in numerous deaths and acts of violence. The study of skin color and sporting participation continues to present us with opportunity to examine the larger

---

American culture. The issues of identity and citizenship are still complex. In examining the contemporary experiences of African American athletes in American sport, we can simply conclude that while great strides have been made since the 1960's, old problems remain, new ones exist, and the more things change the more they stay the same. This chapter will review the role played by African American athletes in the 1960s and their efforts at promoting change and race consciousness through their participation in American sport and the civil rights movement. Furthermore, the actions taken by these athletes will be reviewed from a contemporary perspective. Thirty years affords us a distance, though perhaps not enough, that allows us to look at the event within the contemporary contexts of racism, self-identity, and the athletic arena. Finally, a brief analysis of the apolitical role played by the majority of contemporary Black athletes in American sport will be discussed, within the dialogue of identity and citizenship. Currently, movements and actions which easily identified Black athletes fighting for identity and citizenship in the 1960s remain absent from the dialogue.

The participation of ethnic minorities in sport has long been viewed as a criterion for entrance into American citizenship. Since before the turn of the twentieth century, a number of European immigrants have gained claims to American citizenship by their participation in various sporting activities, and while European immigrants were able to use sport as an effective vehicle to achieve "American" citizenship, African Americans were unable to receive such benefits from sport participation. After Jackie Robinson's entrance into major league baseball, African American athletes were afforded new

---

opportunities in professional sport. Moreover, after the Brown vs. Board of Education ruling, the integration of public schools altered the racial makeup of athletic rosters of predominantly white colleges and universities. With their entry into the American sporting culture, it was believed that African Americans would be able to enjoy a greater status, socially, economically, and politically; in a sense, this new sporting identity hoped to solidify African American citizenship. This new American identity, however, came at the expense of their African culture, or rather, their African American cultural heritage.

When critically thinking about the connections between ethnicity, assimilation, and sport, the experience of African Americans as an ethnic group in America significantly differs with the immigrant experience. It is impossible to understand the twentieth century experiences of Black Americans without comprehending the historical experiences of Africans enslaved in America. Where as immigrant groups were welcomed by the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, Africans were not escaping their home country, they were not seeking the promises of a strange land, and most importantly, they did not choose to enter America. Thus, there are undoubted similarities between immigrant groups and African Americans and the assimilation process, but it is critical to recognize that in America, African Americans have not and are not perceived in the same manner as other ethnic and immigrant groups.

Peter Levine comments that "Students of the 20th-century American black experience pay special attention to sport's role, both as experience and symbol, in that group's struggle for assimilation and full acceptance." Sport served as one effective

means of assimilation for several ethnic immigrant groups and as Black Americans remained excluded from participating in white sporting organizations, their entrance into American sport and American life were limited by this segregation. Ultimately, it was the athletic achievements that began to change the role of the Black athlete in America. According to Levine, recently written books about black sportsmen Jackie Robinson, Jesse Owens, Jack Johnson, and Joe Louis “emphatically underline their importance, for both blacks and whites, as symbols of racial pride and of the possibility for American acceptance.” Furthermore, in Levine’s assessment of Jules Tygiel’s classic work on Robinson’s entrance into modern major league baseball, he cites the author’s linkage between the “efforts of Robinson, other black ballplayers, and black newspaper editors and activists to break the color line in 1947” as having tremendous influence and impact on “the ideas and tactics of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.” Levine suggests that the athletic successes of Robinson, Owens, Johnson and Louis were significant for their victories, but socially significant as well for their contributions to easing the resistance of white America to the entrance of Black Americans into American society.

While Jackie Robinson has been canonized by many in the American community, both black and white, for leading the nation’s integration efforts, the function of black athletes within popular culture has seemingly disqualified them from playing central roles in the discourse of the civil rights movement. In their vocal and active efforts to bring attention to the continued inequalities and discriminations they confronted the

---

4 Peter Levine, *From Ellis Island to Ebbets Field: Sport and the American Jewish Experience* (New York: 314
consciously and unconsciously were part of a discourse about the direction of the civil
rights movement. The actions of Black athletes, the vocabulary presented and their
growing awareness of their position within the sporting world combined to articulate a
new vision of liberation – a liberation that placed the black athlete as a central character
in this process of self-definition. The sporting experience of African American athletes
since World War II has increasingly become a valid topic for scholarly research by sport
historians. Still, relatively little attention has focused on black athletes during the 1960s
and the protests and actions they participated in to challenge the discrimination and
inequalities the sporting world presented. The role of Black athletes in the civil rights
movement has been minimized by scholars in civil rights movement history, black
history, and sport history. Sport historians are now beginning to fully explore the
significant role played by the black athlete in the social and political context of the civil
rights movement.

Levine continues in his analysis of the black sport experience in the United States
and notes the “obvious progress” African American athletes have made in American sport
since World War II. Black success in “this very visible area of American popular
culture,” in Levine’s judgment, is representative of significant “movement toward
meaningful integration, full opportunity, and the diminishment of racism in not only the
sports world but society at large.” While he presents several examples of athletic
successes, Levine believes these athletic victories act as indicators of the integration of
sport, and as a result of this integration, positive attention, and accolades, supports the

---

315
myth that African Americans have successfully achieved the goal of using sport as a path towards assimilation. It was this myth that Black athletes of the 1960s challenged, but were never able to destroy. Black athletes in the 1960's noticed the inequities still apparent in sport and still faced discrimination in sport. As more succeeded in athletics, and a greater number gained notoriety, it was also more likely to hear the complaints. Coupled with the increasing pressure of Black communities across the nation rioting and fighting for equal rights, the right to vote, and efforts towards integration. Black athletes enjoyed support from the larger black community and began to see their position in sport as a possible platform to propose change and challenge current thinking. As their communities struggled to earn freedom from discrimination, many black athletes enjoyed a notoriety and fame unheard of for previous black athletes and few African American non-athletes. While their predecessors had maintained smiles of their faces and a "just glad to be here" attitude, a number of Black athletes of the 1960's presented the American public with a much different demeanor. These athletes protested the lack of black coaches, stacking at certain positions, mistreatment by coaches and teammates, the exploitation of their athletic talent, as well as issues in the political realm, the number of Black professors and Black studies programs on college campuses, campus housing, the miseducation of black students and athletes, the religious doctrine of the Mormon church, and the Vietnam War. Such protests resulted in suspensions, the loss of scholarships, the loss of Olympic medals, the loss of a heavyweight title, the loss of potential careers in professional sport, and the loss of millions of dollars. The sacrifices were many.

*Levine. *From Ellis Island. 282.*
Moreover, the great strides made on the athletic courts and fields in the 1970’s and 1980’s, as well as the increased salaries, led the majority of Americans to view Black athletes as “having made it.” The “having made it” came at a heavy price. To remain in the game, Black athletes of the 1970s and 1980s could not protest, could not complain, and could not bring up issues of racism or civil rights. To do so would result in similar fates suffered by a good number of Black athletes from the 1960’s: Curt Flood, Muhammad Ali, Tommie Smith, John Carlos are four such athletes who paid severe prices for their actions of self-expression, self-definition and liberation. Even dear old Jackie Robinson, newly retired, showed himself to be politically aware and involved in the civil rights struggle.⁶

As the 1960s came to an end and a new and less volatile decade began, Curt Flood was in Europe while his lawsuit against baseball forwarded, Muhammad Ali continued his fight against the government while he served his suspension, and fewer Black athletes spoke out against the inequities in sport. The relationship between athletics and black athletes did not go unnoticed however. The publisher of Black Sports wrote that only after the first year of publication did he realize the impact of sport on Black America. “No facet of our living experience has been untouched by sports. It is the one facility that has provided us with the resiliency necessary to vault the obstacles of racism, education and economics.” The publisher, no doubt influenced by the actions of Olympians Smith

and Carlos and boxer Ali, believed that Black athletes had "an opportunity to set examples of caring for the world." His definition of caretaking was "not a business of making victory, but rather one of making life more human and blessed. They face failure and achievement many times over and understand that injustice is the ultimate determining factor in the 'game of life.'"7 The magazine did not survive for long, but for a few years, it highlighted the achievements of black athletes both on and off the athletic field. By the 1970's, the magazine stated what most Americans believed, but would hardly admit. The black athlete was not only valuable, he had become indispensable.8

One writer poignantly asked, "Where do we go from here, and what does the future hold for Blacks in professional sport?" His answer was that the athletes would determine their future. He called for Black athletes to use their capital "in the wisest ways possible," and to "search their souls to determine if they have done enough." It was critical, in this reporter's opinion, that Black athletes of the 1970's be aware that they were "part of the Black explosion in sports" and were in such a position because of the efforts of Fritz Pollard, Paul Robeson, Duke Slater, Bob Douglas, Tom Molineau, Jack Johnson, Issac Murphy, Fleetwood Walker, Josh Gibson, and Jackie Robinson.9 Vince Matthews heeded the call and protested at the 1972 Olympic Games, an action overshadowed by the terrorism in the athlete quarters.10 Still, the momentum of an actions of black consciousness, by athletes and the civil rights movement, from the

---

previous decade was quickly fading. An attitude of "what more do they want?" prevailed in sport and society. Such an attitude persists in contemporary America, but often with more hostility and resentment as rosters are dominated by black athletes and class conscious American sport fans are inundated with endorsements of products by millionaire black athletes. Levine notes the irony of these black athletes who sell their talents, but also "sell something far more pernicious than the visible artifacts of a capitalist consumer culture." The prominence of these black athletes "as highly visible symbols of black success obscures the extent to which this society denied real opportunit for the large majority of American blacks, especially lower-class residents of neglected, deteriorating, burnt-out, drug-infested inner cities." Former football player and current self-appointed spokesmen for race issues in sport Jim Brown refers to modern black athletes as "gladiators." Mark Naison concludes that despite the false promises sport offers, it represents the only viable option for young urban blacks among a list of choices that includes "welfare, drugs, and hustling, and sports." Levine comments that even though sport is far less likely to "provide escape and opportunity," more than any time before sport has "taken on a new and special poignancy in the face of both racism and the imperatives of the new marketplace, as a metaphor for achieving the American Dream." In contemporary America, sport continues to be a cultural phenomenon, though African


American participation is almost always analyzed using social and political terms, while white participation is understood as part of the American fabric. The myth surrounding sport continues to be one of meritocracy and a playing field that acts to bring about racial harmony.

In examining the protests of Black athletes in the 1960s over thirty years later, contemporary sport and popular culture has handily participated in broadening our understanding the significance of the past and present. Within the last five years, America has celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of Jackie Robinson's entrance into major league baseball, the first victory of an African American golfer at the Masters and Augusta National, and the thirtieth anniversary of the 1968 Olympics. Curt Flood passed away giving cause for Americans to reassess his place in American sport. The 1996 Olympic Games and torch bearing Muhammad Ali ushered in a new era for American female athletes, a significant number of them African American. Other incidents, such as OJ Simpson's highly publicized murder trial, Latrell Sprewell's choking of his coach, and the never ending antics of now retired professional basketball player Dennis Rodman remind us that racism is still divisive in the United States. Moreover, some of the very issues that created cause for black athletes to protests, such as stacking, the lack of black coaches, and racist treatment, continue to pervade college and professional sport. Perhaps this is a case of repeating the past in a condemned future.

13 Levine, From Ellis Island, 284.
Muhammad Ali's actions in the 1960's, although religious based, were acted out on a racial level and were interpreted this was as well. He truly did not fit into any part of what white America was willing to accept and he crossed the boundaries of what a Black athlete was allowed to express and protest. He did not express a willingness or acceptance of the apparent goal of the civil rights movement, integration. Instead, he alienated whites and some Blacks who felt he was ungrateful, radical, militant, un-American. He was deemed un-American because he expressed ideas that did not fit well with the mainstream, as well as rejecting the role of American soldier. He was challenging and seemingly belligerent. Moreover, his refusal to be drafted acts as a climax to the coverage of his career that was fueled by his religious beliefs, but also his mouth and verbal expression of self. The rejection of Ali's religion, the Nation of Islam, is also racially based, as the religion is seen as non-Christian, therefore un-American, separatist, and violent. He acts as his own man, while simultaneously, by his actions and despite the religious meanings, encourages other Black athletes to participate in the protest of racial injustices within the sports establishment. Ali, and others inspired by the fighter, protested against a system where institutional racism makes participation appear as acceptance and success, but in reality is a modern day slave system where Black athletes are owned and controlled by white ownership. In this sense, Ali stands alone as a Black athlete and has yet to be replaced by a deserving or apparent heir.

Muhammad Ali resumed his career in 1970 and regained his title in the famed "Rumble in the Jungle" against George Foreman in Zaire in 1974. Ali's first professional loss, to Joe Frazier in 1971, represented the end of an era which had started with his

321
winning the title in 1964. Calling Frazier a “Tom,” Ali was the crowd favorite and during his suspension had “managed to sway a good part of disenfranchised black America and a good part of liberal antiwar white American to his side.” There was an increased level of anger among blacks who felt that the government was “more interested in leveling hamlets like M Lai than rebuilding the ghettoes of America.”\textsuperscript{14} Race politics and Ali’s fight against the “Uncle Tom’s” was the theme of the bout. Lipsyte credited politics with banning him from the ring and then welcoming him back. Moreover, his draft evasion, which had been viewed as “dodging” was evolving into “standing up for a principle.”\textsuperscript{15} Ali was seen in many lights in the early 1970s: the Third World: the Noble Savage: the Child Who Will Show Us The Way: the man who stood firm, who was willing to suffer for his convictions: the man who told the Establishment to stuff itself.\textsuperscript{16}

Ali retired from the ring in 1981, but not after fighting a few too many fights. While he became less threatening when he ceased separatist Nation of Islam rhetoric, Ali continued to ire many Americans, black and white, for his black pride and his draft evasion. He remained a symbol of an outspoken Black athlete who had stood up for his beliefs and who had paid the price. He also continued to be a source of great interest to sport historians and scholars.\textsuperscript{17} His sport of boxing, once an avenue for black athletes,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
was dominated by Latinos, and his heir apparent, Mike Tyson, was a far cry from Ali and what he had represented two decades prior. In fact, Tyson was really more in the image of Ali’s opponent, Sonny Liston.

With Tyson as the champion, new questions arose about the humanity of boxing, the thuggish image of the man in the ring, the credibility of the supporting cast of managers, and black masculinity. Ironically, after his imprisonment for the rape of Desiree Washington, Tyson turned to the Muslim religion which Malcolm X had embraced during his own imprisonment and which Muhammad Ali had embraced in the 1960’s. Tyson, unlike any other Black athlete in the 1980’s and 1990’s, represented an image that most Americans did not want to deal with. As one reporter noted, “It’s extremely hard to work up any sympathy for people who frighten us. Tyson frightens us. A certain type of young black male frightens us. We want them controlled for as long and by whatever means it takes to make us feel safe.” While our prisons are full of young black men, Tyson’s release from prison and back into the ring to earn millions of dollars disturbed many, though others felt he had served his time and was now seeking redemption. He was welcomed home in New York with a hero’s parade.

---


323
serving his sentence, was eventually sent back to jail for assaulting a motorist on a freeway. He has been labeled a menace to society, but even more appropriately and politically correct an "equal-opportunity menace.\textsuperscript{21}

Sharing the same moniker as another Mike, the NBA’s Michael Jordan, the two modern athletes are a stark contrast to each other. Jordan, the Good Mike, and Tyson, the Bad Mike, present different images to the American public. \textit{New York Times} sports reporter Robert Lipsyte compares the “gracious,” “diplomatic” Jordan with the “snarly,” “unrepentant” boxer. Lipsyte labels Tyson’s fans and supporters as the “have nots,” the disenfranchised. Cultural critic Nelson George sees Tyson’s challenge, “and his generation’s particular brand of pride,” as “whether he has the staying power to thrive in a highly uncertain future.”\textsuperscript{22} Certainly Tyson’s role in American culture is more than just about sports – it is inextricably linked with his childhood, his rise in boxing, his imprisonment, his ear biting of Evander Holyfield and his many attempts at redemption. Michael Eric Dyson writes that since Tyson’s initial claiming of the title when he was only 20, the fighter has “seemed spectacularly uncomfortable with the twin imperatives of black male athletic success: to nobly represent black masculinity while striving to undo its unfairly bestialized image in the public’s mind.” Tyson has been viewed as Don King’s “field general in the ghetto rebellion against a more conciliatory style of resisting

white supremacy often associated with black bourgeois culture.” Dyson concedes that if “Tyson suffered from white demonization, with King he endured, to a degree, black exploitation.”^23

Lipsyte saw many comparisons between Tyson and Ali, beginning with the exploitation of the two fighters initially by white sponsors. At the time Ali was supported by the all-white Louisville Group, “there were no blacks with there were no blacks with, as Ali put it, ‘the complexions and the connections to give me the good directions.’”^24 In his fight to regain his license from boxing, Ali supported Tyson. In explaining her husband’s appearance at Tyson’s hearing, Lonnie Ali said “He’s always been a defender of the underdog. Ali feels people deserve more than one chance. In his heart of hearts he feels he’s a good person if you peel away the layers of trouble. Muhammad knows Michael needs a friend, not a critic. Muhammad will always be there, available to Michael as long as he wants him there.”^25

At the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, Ali was carefully and masterfully selected to light the torch at the opening ceremonies. In what was viewed as coming full circle for the fighter, interest in Ali was renewed. A victim of Parkinson’s disease, the once verbose and eloquent poet was reduced to relying on his “pretty” face. The responses to Ali’s torch lighting was one of overwhelming support, but also an embracing of the fighter that he had not even enjoyed at the peak of his career, when he was much too

---

controversial and represented too many unknowns. One reporter believed Ali was the perfect symbol of the Games, whose theme was “look how far we’ve come” to justify Atlanta as the host city. Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr. were read during the opening ceremonies and a multicultural group of youth entertained the audience. Ali was viewed as a “fragile legend.” At a time when sports are in ill-repute for the behavior of some athletes, “moonning over Ali has never been easier,” Lipsyte crooned. Ali is viewed with a distance of three decades.

The current boomer establishment has nothing against them Vietcong. Their children see Ali as a distant icon, as they once saw Joe Louis. Ali is no danger to the sensibilities of the republic, no thuggish Mike Tyson, no punkish Dennis Rodman, just a sweet-faced shuffler who emanates an open-armed, nonjudgmental inclusiveness. He hugs all comers. Even his Parkinson’s syndrome, which is apparently advancing, enhances his appeal; if this once most beautiful of youths is not self-conscious about his disability, why should you be self-conscious about yours?

In the months following his Olympic appearance, Ali was also the subject of an award winning documentary. The film “When We Were Kings,” was a 90-minute documentary about his “Rumble in the Jungle” victory over George Foreman filmed in 1974. Regaining the title he had lost seven years prior to his draft evasion, Ali’s upset of champion Foreman in Africa saw Ali’s return to the forefront in the discussion of black nationalism. The film footage waited 22 years for funding and when it finally appeared

---

on screen garnered best documentary awards from the New York Film Critics Circle, Los Angeles Film Critics Association, National Society of Film Critics. It also won the Academy Award in the same category.29 Ali appeared before Congress in 1997 to testify for the need for increased funding and research for Parkinson’s disease. His wife spoke before the representatives, saying, “Parkinson’s has robbed him of one of his most prized functions – his voice, and the ability to speak clearly with resonance. I believe all of you remember Muhammad’s pre-Parkinson days when he moved millions with his vibrant voice and poetic expression.”30 Indeed, it is unsettling to see the fighter silenced.

Muhammad Ali’s appearance at the Atlanta Olympics renewed the fighter’s “box-office appeal and the salability of his collectibles.”31 Christie’s Auction House, in 1997, held an auction of Ali memorabilia. Items up for sale included Ali’s letter to the draft board seeking an exemption, his fight trunks, posters, a robe, and other personal effects. The letter eventually fetched $55,000.32 Ali did not lend his support to the auction and did not receive any of the proceeds. When asked about the items up for sale, Ali said “somebody stole my stuff.”33 In fact, Ali and his wife, Lonnie, have made plans to develop the “Muhammad Ali Center, a museum to celebrate the athletic, humanitarian

and spiritual aspects of his life.”34 The museum will “celebrate Ali as boxer, social lightening rod. Muslim and Parkinson’s disease patient as a way to reach adolescents with messages of racial, gender, religious and ethnic healing and tolerance.”35 In early 1999, Ali was finally put on the Wheaties box, an accomplishment viewed in American popular culture as “synonymous with athletic achievement and high esteem.” Of the honor, his wife said the overdue honor was “a long time coming,” but conceded that “at the height of his career in the 1960’s he might have been a little too controversial.” Jim Murphy, marketing manager for Wheaties, gave his explanation for the belated box cover. “I think it was a culture thing. At the time when the greatest boxers were boxing, the people weren’t ready to accept them on the cover of the Wheaties box.”36 Ali was also presented with the Messenger of Peace honor awarded by the Secretary General Kofi Annan. Of Ali. Annan gave his tribute to the fighter-activist.

People like Muhammad transcend their environment and their profession. Some of the skills they learned in athletics, the discipline, the art of competition, having compassion for those you defeat, working with groups and working as a team and being part of a team: knowing that you cannot achieve much without others.37

---

Muhammad Ali had truly come full circle. He co-authored a book on tolerance and philosophized that “hating people because of their color is wrong. And it doesn’t matter which color does the hating. It’s just plain wrong.” Such a sentiment was in stark contrast with his black separatist rhetoric from his days as a minister in the Nation of Islam. In a tribute to the late Bett Shabazz, the wife of Malcolm X, one reporter recalled the vilification of Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali in the 1960’s and noted with amazement that after three decades both men were enjoying a renaissance and a popularity previously unknown to them. One reporter felt that Ali’s Olympic appearance had “unloosed powerful feelings in people.” Americans, black and white, said that the Parkinson-suffering Ali “reminded them of what it means to stand up for something you believe in. Disabled people. Old sixties activists. Republicans. Black. White. Christian. Jewish. Muslim.” Ali was a big-hearted man who had a sense of himself as part of the larger scheme and while he was thrilling as an athlete, Ali was more important as a “social champion.” Even his one time foe, “Tom” Floyd Patterson recognized Ali’s social and historical significance, saying, “I came to love Ali. I came to see that I was a fighter and he was history.”

---

42 Robert Lipsyte. “Relentless Symbolism of Muhammad Ali.” New York Times. 6 December 1998. p. S11. Patterson was New York State Athletic Commissioner for years, but retired when he began suffering memory problems, which many wondered if they were the result of his boxing career. See “Patterson Quits Boxing Post.” New York Times. 2 April 1998.
While Ali used boxing as a platform to espouse his ideologies, no boxer since, including Tyson, has been successful in accomplishing such a task or even of having an ideology to express. Ali, as a result, of his silencing disease, is no longer the loud, outspoken conscience of racial injustice. As an individual sport, the talent of the boxer and his subsequent success is harder to control by the white power structure as a baseball player or football player, team sports where performance is often subjective. Boxing is no longer seems to be an individual sport where black champions speak out or even represent a move towards change. Golf, because of the success and endorsement appeal of Tiger Woods, now is in position to serve a similar function of boxing in the 1960’s and without the negative image of the brutality of boxing.41

At the 1997 Masters Tournament, held annually at the Augusta National Golf Club, 21 year-old Tiger Woods, who left Stanford University for a professional golf career, won his first major tournament and became its youngest champion and first of African American heritage.44 The first black player allowed to play in the Masters tournament wasn’t until in 1975 and the Augusta National Golf Club did not admit a black member until 1990.45 Woods paid tribute to those who had paved the way for his entrance into golf. “I’m the first, but I wasn’t the pioneer. Charlie Sifford, Lee Elder, Teddy Rhodes, those guys paved the way for me to be here. I thank them. If it wasn’t for

them. I might not have had the chance to play here." Elder's reaction to the win was "Here we're going to have a black champion, and that's something that certainly makes my heart feel very warm... It certainly means a lot for minorities. This is going to have a big-impact on what will happen in the future." Charlie Sifford called Woods's victory "a wonderful thing for golf - never mind the racial thing."

Tiger Woods's ethnic makeup could not be avoided though in the coverage of his victory and the events that followed. The first time Woods had played the Augusta course, he had hate mail waiting for him in the clubhouse, including a letter that stated, "Just what we don't need, another nigger in sports." Though Woods is of mixed parentage, his mother is Thai and his father African American, Woods was identified by a majority of the media, Nike, and most sport fans as a black golfer. One reporter identified the young golfer as "African-Asian-Native-American," and credited his multicultural heritage with "bringing millions of new fans to what has historically been the most exclusive of pastimes - exclusive especially with regard to race." His victory was seen as a breakthrough in the traditionally white sport. After his win at the Masters, fellow golfer Fuzz Zoeller was interviewed and made remarks that were widely interpreted as racist, though Zoeller maintained that he was joking. In a CNN interview,

---

46 Ibid., p. C1.
50 Frederick C. Klein. "Tiger Masters Masters." Wall Street Journal. 15 April 1997. A year earlier, Tiger Woods stated. "The critical and fundamental point is that ethnic background and/or composition should not make a difference. It does not make a difference to me. The bottom line is that I am American...and proud of it!" See Thomas Bonk. "The Driving Force of Tiger Woods." Los Angeles Times. 29 August 1996.
Zoeller referred to Woods as a “little boy” and then “urged him not to request fried chicken and collard greens at next year’s Champions Dinner at the Augusta National Club.” Kmart did not find anything amusing about Zoeller’s comments and dropped the golfer’s contract as their golf spokesman. Zoeller faced criticism in the press and even dropped out of the next tournament, the Greater Greensboro Classic, to restore his image. One reporter recalled her reaction at seeing the tape of Zoeller’s comments.

Stunned, I watched as this master golfer with a few choice words reduced Woods the champion to a “little boy.” Adding grease to the fire, the not-so-warm Fuzz dissed fuzzy chicken and collards, “or whatever they serve,” as fodder for Woods, and by implication, his less-than-desirable kind.

The timing of Zoeller’s remarks, and Woods’s victory, during a massive week of celebrations honoring the 50th anniversary of Jackie Robinson’s integration of baseball was ironic and compelling. It forced Americans, otherwise silent in the discussion or even the contemplation of skin color, to become aware. Zoeller’s remarks were the latest in a string of comments made by public figures in sports. A month earlier, New Jersey Nets coach John Calipari had called a reporter a “Mexican idiot” and David Halberstam, a Miami Heat radio announcer, “made a bizarre connection between modern basketball and Thomas Jefferson’s slaves.” Such incidents raised “concerns about racial and ethnic insensitivity among public figures in sport,” at a time when racial sensitivity was being heightened.

---

55 Richard Sandomir. “Zoeller Learns Race Remarks Carry a Price.” New York Times, p. C29. Moreover, sportscasters and commentators have continued to not learn from the mistakes of others and have actually contributed to negative stereotyping of black athletes. CBS’s Billy Packer called Georgetown hoopster Allen Iverson a “tough monkey.” Packer commented that he didn’t know why people were being so
Invited to appear at a Shea Stadium extravaganza in Robinson’s honor, Woods declined the trip, which included a private helicopter from the President of the United States. The golfer had already made plans to head to Mexico with college friends. Author John Feinstein expressed his opinion that Woods’s decision to not go “sullied the elegance of his Masters tribute to older black players.” Sports fans and commentators had wanted to witness the spectacle: “the new legend who effortlessly broke a color line in golf taking a moment to genuflect to the old legend who courageously broke the color line in baseball – 50 years earlier.”

The timing of Woods’s victory with Robinson’s anniversary added to the discussion of race and ethnicity. Many sports fans visually saw the color of Woods’s skin and considered him black, though the golfer did not identify himself as such. Many reporters focused on the emergence of Woods as an African American golfer and wondered about the impact of his victory on the access of minorities in the sport of golf. Others compared the significance of Woods’ victory, the barriers he was breaking and those of Robinson a half a century earlier. In the month after Woods’s victory, the young sensitive and that to him, his comment, “tough monkey,” had nothing to do with race. He stated that he “doesn’t see things in terms of black and white. Things, to me, are not an issue of black and white.” One reporter wondered how Packer could be so “immune to what ails the rest of America.” The same reporter thought Packer’s use of the monkey “slur” was “particularly egregious because of a centuries-old effort to dehumanize African Americans by lining them genetically with primates.” Moreover, years prior, broadcaster Howard Cosell had called a football player a “little monkey” on Monday Night Football. Since Cosell’s usage of monkey, “society has become hypersensitive to verbal offenses, real or imagined.” Packer was heir to a legacy left by Jimmy (the Greek) Snyder and Al Campanis, who both lost their jobs as a result of off-the-cuff remarks made on national television. Campanis’s comments were especially critical because they alluded to the idea that black athletes did not have the “necessities” to be a field manager. He went on to comment that blacks were also poor swimmers and on the low number of black quarterbacks in the NFL. See Courtland Milloy, “The Blinding Racism of His Comment,” Washington Post, 6 March 1996: Richard Sandomir, “When Elmer Gantry Was a Color Man,” New York Times, 5 March 1996; George Vecsey, “A Good Man Who Had a Very Bad Moment,” New York Times, 23 August 1998, p. S2. Maureen Dowd, “Tiger’s Double Bogey,” New York Times, 19 April 1997.
golfer starred in a controversial Nike commercial which introduced the element of race to American sport fans in a way no other commercial endorsement had done before. Initially, Woods had emphasized his multicultural background, and even played in a tournament in Thailand, his mother's home country. Nike and Woods's management team has been credited with pushing Woods as "a healer who could change the world, a racial pioneer along the lines of Jackie Robinson, Muhammad Ali and Arthur Ashe." \(^{57}\)

Woods's appearance in the Nike ad, which stated "There are still golf courses in the United States that I cannot play because of the color of my skin. I'm told that I'm not ready for you. Are you ready for me?" \(^{58}\) The responses were varied, but overwhelmingly against the commercial which attempted to sell something more than footwear. Researcher and activist Richard Lapchick assumed that much of the "vitriolic and condemning response" was a result of "those sitting in the clubhouse" being "deeply threatened by Woods's first Nike commercial." Reporters mocked the ad, correctly reporting that actually, Tiger Woods could probably play on any course he wanted. While a few others conceded that while Woods could play on any course, most people who looked like Woods could not and that point was the crux of the whole commercial. Lapchick praised Woods for speaking out on a social issue, an action that most contemporary athletes avoided in fear of losing their jobs and endorsement contracts. Woods liked Nike ads, saying, "Nike ads, they make you think." \(^{59}\) Nike was accused of using Tiger Woods to sell their products, specifically golf gear, to African Americans.

---

\(^{57}\) Ibid.

\(^{58}\) Larr Dorman. "'We'll Be Right Back, After This Hip and Distorted Commercial Break.'" New York Times, 1 September 1996.
Tiger Woods’s first attempt to engage in serious dialogue, bringing up an issue worthy of discussion, resulted in the young golfer being chastised by reporters and consuming sport fans. Lapchick lamented that Woods “learned a lesson there, one that I wish he had not learned. We are, as always, ready to tear down sport heroes at a moment’s notice.”

This time, however, and Lapchick should note the difference, the sport hero being torn down for speaking out on a political issue, not his most recent court battle or contract negotiation.

Fellow golfer, Vijay Singh, dark-skinned and of Indian descent, was not supportive of Woods use of skin color as an issue in the sports setting. Singh recalled that when he first started playing tournaments in the United States reporters tried to make

---

49 Ibid.
50 Richard E. Lapchick, “Lessons of Tiger Woods Will Not Be Easy Ones,” New York Times, 18 Ma 1997, p. S9. Just as Lapchick hoped golf would be more accessible to African Americans, he lamented that the same was said about tennis when Arthur Ashe had won Wimbledon, but no such long lasting effect occurred. Similarly, when black hockey goalie Grant Fuhr entered the NHL and won five Stanley Cup titles with the Edmonton Oilers, no media blitz highlighted the lone black player in the NHL. See Charles Krauthammer, “Why We Admire Tiger Woods…” Washington Post, 18 April 1997. Reporter Thomas Bonk assessed Woods’ impact on blacks, saying, “In this country, he’s quite clearly black. And I have no doubt that he is now able to generate a great deal of interest among young blacks, plus probably start a lot of black kids hitting golf balls for the first time;” John Merchant, CEO of National Minority Golf Association, predicted that by the time Woods was 30 years-old, the awareness of black kids about golf would have possibly quadrupled; see Thomas Bonk, “The Driving Force of Tiger Woods,” Los Angeles Times, 29 August 1996. Another sport which has traditionally remained very white is swimming. Research shows that “Blacks drown at almost twice the rate of whites and represent only 1% of the country’s competitive swimmers, but ‘not because African Americans can’t swim.’” The disparity is “due to a lack of opportunity and training. Sociological factors are the main reason why a smaller proportion of blacks can swim.” Such factors include the “availability of pools,” “expensive facilities,” and “having the ways and means to get to swim meets and pay for entry fees to compete.” Additionally, swimming has no “revenue-producing appeal,” making it hard to compete with money sports, like football and basketball. Minorities represent “just one percent of 250,000” American children. ages 5 to 17, who compete in swimming. No minority has made the US Olympic swim team. See Carol Krucoff, “Drowning Myths,” Washington Post, 28 May 1996. Also see Jere Longman, “Splashing Toward a Historic First,” New York Times, 10 March 1996, p. S6: Longman reports that “Swimming has historically been a sport of white middle-class suburbia, while blacks have been bound in an undertow of prejudice and inopportunity.” At the 1996 Olympic Trials, there were 7 black swimmers out of 455 and 2 black coaches out of more than 100. See Richard Lapchick, Five Minutes to Midnight: Race and Sport in the 1990s (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1991); Philip Hoose, Necessities: Racial Barriers in American Sport (New York: Random House, 1989).
an issue of his skin color, but he did not allow it. His response was “I’m here to play
golf. I’m here to make a living, and that’s the way it is.” Singh did not view himself as
colored, but as a foreigner, telling reporters. “I’m here as a foreigner, so leave me alone.
Let me do my thing.” African American sports reporter William Rhoden rightly noted
that Woods did not have the luxury of being foreign, but also recognized that though
Woods had initially identified himself as African and Asian, and that “when lucrative
advertising dollars met reality, dollars triumphed.” Rhoden thought “Nike played up his
black roots with ads saying there were still courses where he would not be allowed to
play.” Singh resented Woods’s use of color in his emergence into the endorsement and
professional golf scene. Singh echoed a sentiment that refused to recognize color, but
rather played upon talent and meritocracy, saying, “He’s the best thing that’s happened to
golf in the last five years. Let’s leave it at golf, not color.”

Still, others could not help but notice the wide impact the young golfer had on
black and white, young and old, male and female. Like Michael Jordan, Woods was a
“black” athlete who seemed to transcend race. He was “accepted by blacks as a brother
and by whites as a lot more than that,” and his multicultural background was part of a
growing trend in the United States, identifying individuals as “biracial” when in the past
they would have been labeled “black.” Woods’s father, Earl, had been visible in his
son’s amateur career and Masters victory, and had engineered his son’s golf career from
an early age. He knew that his son’s racial makeup was different than golfers of the past.

---

Rhoden as one of only a few sports reporters of African American descent at a major daily newspaper.

336
but also that his son's mindset was different. Of his son, the elder Woods proudly commented, “This is the first intuitive golfer ever raised in the United States. Before, black kids grew up with basketball or football or baseball from the time they could walk. The game became part of them from the beginning. But they always learned golf too late. Not Tiger. Tiger knew how to swing a golf club before he could walk.”

Reporter Paul Delany had never been a golf fan, but was converted by Woods's Augusta win. He appreciated that Woods was “smart enough to make the connection between himself and other pioneers. He is astute enough to know that he owes special thanks to Jackie Robinson for the different climate in which he plays today.” What was different for Woods than the pioneer Robinson, Delaney offered, was that “Whites won’t think Woods will fail and fade away, as many thought and hoped Robinson would.”

Obviously the commercial and the controversy surrounding it did not hurt Tiger Woods’s popularity, when the young golfer was named the second most popular American, behind only General Colin Powell, and just ahead of world famous Michael Jordan. All three African Americans were far ahead of political leaders, including the president, in the popularity polls. Ironically, the three most popular Americans were African Americans, two male athletes. Only Woods had uttered words construed as controversial, with Powell and Jordan avoiding issues related to race in American culture.

---

63 Dorman. "We’ll Be Right Back."
Harry Edwards, since his 1968 role as "radical agitator," has continued to press for racial equality in sport and has been vocal in his evaluation of the current sport structure. Edwards, "armed with statistical studies of the exploitation of black college athletes," has maintained an unpopular belief, that black college athletes have been duped into believing that they can beat the 1 in 10,000 odds of becoming a professional athlete. In Edwards's assessment, sports are still controlled by "a racist white society consistent reluctant to allow blacks full economic and political freedom." and as such, channels blacks into sports, "an area where black accomplishment does not especially threaten a dominant white power structure." While success in sports has been an indicator of achievement in most parts of society, and signifies a level of assimilation and acceptance, Edwards sees the success as a sign of the "corrupt, racist, oppressive nature of American capitalist society." His theory about the illusions of sports was recently supported in a controversial book, Darwin's Athletes: How Sports Has Damaged Black America and Preserved the Myth of Race. Author John Hoberman's central thesis was "the black domination of mainstream sports is both a product of racism and a subtle system for continuing inequality." He mentioned that racial issues in professional sports are rarely discussed, unless "a nonthreatening, highly commercial superstar emerges," such as Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods. Hoberman was widely criticized, though much of what he wrote resembled ideas expressed by others, including Harry Edwards. One writer scoffed at Hoberman's assertion that black superstars in sports hurt the rest of black

---

66 Levine. From Ellis Island. 282.
America and disagreed with Hoberman's statement that "this sports fixation damages black children by discouraging academic achievement in favor of physical self-expression, which is widely considered a racial trait."  

Ironically, Edwards works for the power structure he condemns. He is a sociologist professor at the esteemed University of California, Berkeley, and works as a diversity consultant for the San Francisco 49ers. His $250,000 advice to the 49ers allows them to sign players like Lawrence Phillips to their roster. He has also helped major league baseball hire "qualified black managers and executives." The very "American Dream" success of black athletes that Edwards questions is alarmingly similar to the very successes he has experienced in academia and professional sports consulting.  

Boycotts, like the one advocated by Edwards, are no longer as popular or believed to be as effective. College athletes are not nearly as politically active or aware as their 1960's counterparts. The potential for losing a professional contract or a starting position are enough to keep most discontent athletes silent. Since World War II, the number of black college students has increased. In California, the passage of Proposition 209, which would end affirmative action in educational institutions, combined with the drop in

---


69 Levine. From Ellis Island, 282-283.
minority enrollment in the University of California system, gave one reporter the cause to urge black athletes to become more involved in campus politics. Officials projected that over thirty percent of the black students on campus were athletes. The reporter, William Banks, thought the timing perfect for “black and brown athletes” to boycott the University of California campuses. Such an action would allow minority communities to “signal that they are unwilling to accept the entertainment niche for their sons and daughters on campuses, especially campuses that have made matters difficult for talented students who can’t run, jump or shoot baskets.” The Black Coaches Association recently threatened to boycott a game over the NCAA Proposition 48, which they deemed as racially unfair, but without the collective efforts of all the coaches involved, the idea of an active effort remained simply an idea.

One black athlete who dared to speak out and paid the price was Chicago Bulls Craig Hodges, although many sport fans would dispute his claims of racism in the black dominated NBA. Hodges filed a lawsuit against the NBA charging “the owners and operators of the 29 NBA member franchises,” as co-conspirators in “blackballing” Hodges from professional basketball as a result of “his outspoken political nature as an African-American man.” After 10 seasons in the NBA, Hodges was released by the NBA champion Bulls at the age of 32. Though he had been one of the league’s best three-point shooters, no other team picked up his contract. Hodges challenged. “Name another player who was on two straight championship teams and won three straight 3-point contests and who was then out of the league. There was only one. I’ve called and faxed

---

every general manager in the league. And called the coaches, and those who did answer said they'd keep me in mind. But I've never ever been offered a 10-day contract. Hodges thinks that the "blackballing" is a result of a visit to the White House and then President George Bush after the Bulls 1992 NBA championship victory. Hodges wore a dashiki and handed President Bush a letter that urged the President to do more for the African-American community. He alleges that this incident embarrassed the NBA.

Hodges had also been active in working with the controversial leader of the Nation of Islam, Louis Farrakhan, in trying to curb "the breakdown of the African-American family." Hodges also headed a group called Operation Unite: Save the Youth.

Hodges had been critical of fellow professional black, who in his opinion, had "failed to use their considerable wealth and influence to assist the poor and disenfranchised."

While Bulls coach Phil Jackson did agree with the release of Hodges, he found it strange that no other team picked up the player. As for the criticism of Hodges's inability to play defense, Jackson mentioned that there were a number of NBA athletes who couldn't play defense, but who also couldn't shoot like Hodges. Phil Jackson did appreciate Hodges's selfless approach to the game and respectfully noted that his former player had been a devoted student of Islam and seemed to be on a sacred mission. Hodges called every team and had been given the promise of a chance with the Seattle Supersonics. He recalled that Billy McKinney, the Black director of player personnel for the Supersonics.

---

was initially interested, but then backed off, telling him “brothers have families, if you know what I mean.” Still, Wayne Embry, African American president of the Cleveland Cavaliers, said this about a conspiracy, “I’m sure I would have if there was one. And in a league that has about 80% black players, it’s hard to charge racism.” David Stern, the NBA commissioner, called Hodges’s conspiracy charge ridiculous. Buck Williams, head of the players association, did admit that NBA players had to be cautious about speaking their minds. Williams stated, “It’s well known through the league that there may be repercussions if you speak out too strongly on some sensitive issues. I don’t know if Hodges lost his job because of it, but it is a burden when you carry the militant label he has.”

NBA player, Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf of the Denver Nuggets, was another Black Muslim athlete who encountered problems with his image. Near the end of the 1996 NBA season, a reporter noticed that Abdul-Rauf, formally known as Chris Jackson, was not standing with his teammates during the playing of the national anthem, but was in the locker room. When he was required to join his teammates, Abdul-Rauf refused to stand for the song charging that honoring the flag was against his Muslim religion. He was accused of being unpatriotic, unAmerican, and told to go back to Africa, though he hailed from Louisiana. Eventually the uproar dulled with the end of the season. Like Tommie

---

Smith and John Carlos who also protested during the most “sacred” of songs, Abdul-Rauf was verbally lambasted by the press, fans, NBA management and even other players. At the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, Michael Jordan had “protested” during the song by wearing an American flag over the evil Reebok symbol, revealing his American loyalty to Nike. Jordan escaped most criticisms and his action was excused as business.  

Perhaps the group to gain the most over the period of the past thirty years are African American female athletes, in large part because they had started so far behind. Today, I can turn on the television, open a magazine, or got to a movie theater and see Black women represented in a variety of images. While the evening news and politicians portray Black females as pregnant or welfare recipients, the sporting arena has emerged as a stage that highlights their accomplishments and achievements. Relegated to track and field in the 1960s, they have continued to dominate the sport, with stars such as sprinter Florence Griffith-Joyner, heptathlete Jackie Joyner-Kersee, and sprinter Marion Jones, who will attempt to win an unprecedented five gold medals at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. Track and field is typically a sport that gains the undivided attention of sport fans every four years during the Olympic year. Other sports that have seen Black female athletes emerge as excellent performers on the national and international level include gymnast Dominique Dawes, tennis sisters Venus and Serena Williams, and the World


Cup soccer goalie Brianna Scurry. Venus Williams, in tennis, has attracted as much attention for her beaded hair, as her forehand, not to mention the impact of her father on her and her sister’s careers. One reporter noted that Williams was encountering difficulties with the white sports media that Muhammad Ali faced; and commented that Williams, like Ali, does not fit into what whites want her to be. “Ali didn’t fit the image of what a good black fighter should be. But look now; Ali is loved. And Venus Williams and other black athletes with character will be loved when the realization sets in that white ‘Americans’ thinking is behind the times.”

At a celebration and fundraiser for tennis player Althea Gibson, suffering from illness, three New Jersey mayors reflected on the impact of Gibson on their young lives. Mayor Robert Bowser, of East Orange, recalled that “Everyone went out and bought a racquet. Tennis seemed to be another way out.” Irvington’s Mayor Sarah Bost, said that when she was growing up there were so few black female role models and that Gibson’s victories opened new vistas of possibility. Mayor Mims Hacket of Orange, believed that Gibson’s victory, only two years after Rosa Parks, seemed to be a part of the burgeoning civil rights movement. In retrospect and consistent with what Gibson wrote in her autobiography, the barrier breaking tennis champion never wanted to be a race warrior, but was forced by “time and circumstance to take on that bitter role.” and “suffered deep scars” from the experience. Gibson was the first black woman to break through in an elitist sport and was the “pride and joy of black and white Americans.” Her Wimbledon victory was in some ways as significant as Jackie Robinson’s entrance into baseball, in one reporter’s analysis. Her former gynecologist Willa Hayling affirmed that belief, saying, “She was a hero to so many of us. She was the Jackie Robinson of tennis, being first and doing it with so much pride and dignity.” See William C. Rhoden, “For Gibson, Her Legacy to Tennis.” New York Times. 29 August 1998. p. B18. Ira Berkow “Althea Gibson’s Long Days.” New York Times. 19 November 1996. p. B11. For an article that looks at Venus Williams see Angela Buxton, “There’s Some Althea Gibson in Venus Williams.” New York Times. 8 September 1997. p. C4. For an article that discusses the current racism in tennis see “Officials Accused of Racism.” New York Times. 15 December 1998. For more on African American women in sport see Susan Birrell, “Women of Color. Critical Autobiography and Sport.” in Michael Messner and Don Sabo, eds., Sport, Men and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics. 1990): 185-199; Yevonne Smith, “Women of Color in Society and Sport.” Quest 44 (1992): 228-250.

character” suggests a Black athlete that does not fit the prescribed image. Williams has yet to feel such appreciation and hopefully it will not take the three decades and a devastating illness for Americans to treat her right. Unfortunately, while African American girls play most sports, they are most often channeled into track and field and steered away from non-traditional sports, evident by the few recognizable names mentioned above.

Women’s basketball offers professional opportunities for women in the United States and college and WNBA rosters are dominated by Black females. Nike’s first shoe named for a female athlete is the Air Swoopes, named for African American hoopster Sheryl Swoopes. The 1996 Olympic team had 10 of its 12 spots filled by African American females. Tennessee’s 1998 national championship team started four African American women, including current WNBA rookie Chamique Holdsclaw.

With the folding of the American Basketball League, the WNBA picked up the teamless stars of the defunct league and expanded to add new teams in NBA cities. While the first year of the WNBA highlighted the femininity of the players, such marketing was gone by the start of the second season when it became clear to WNBA operations and sponsors that being athletic was not mutually exclusive of remaining female. The Sears commercial of Lisa Leslie in her slip emphasizing her femininity while still being a great athlete are rarely seen, though signs in arenas urge “You go girl.” and “Go on girlfriend,” echoing language originating from African American culture. At

---


345
home New York Liberty home games at Madison Square Garden, signs read, “A woman’s place is always in the garden.” African American author John Wideman is a fan of the WNBA and his daughter, Jamila, who plays for the Charlotte Sting. The elder Wideman’s cultural critique of the league reads as such.

This is obviously about more than a game. It’s so clear that from one end of the country to the other, people are watching these women play for a whole host of reasons. This is about stretching the horizons of gender: it’s about an audience out there that is being formed and waiting to be formed around something women are doing in sports.

The discussion of African American women in sport continues to be framed by the constraints of gender and sexuality, with ethnicity rarely the subject of an article or feature on a player. This is not to say that the diversity of the league goes unnoticed.

One reporter/fan wrote in a weekly column, during the first year of the league, “There are only 80 players in the WNBA, 10 on each of eight teams. They represent nine countries, six continents and more colors than Sherwin Williams.” What is different perhaps is that WNBA players have embraced speaking out as part of their professional responsibility. The athletes are not necessarily speaking out about issues of race, but social issues of women’s health and issues related to at-risk youth. The WNBA, league wide, does fund- and consciousness-raising for the National Association of Breast Cancer. Cheerleaders are “multicultural, gender-inclusive” youth groups, fans are a sea of racial and ethnic diversity, much different than the NBA with their exorbitant ticket

---


---

346
Wideman hopes "that women do a better job than men of fostering the idea of sports as cultural phenomenon with a higher purpose." The league is different from the male NBA in that the painful process of integration the NBA endured and continues to struggle with issues of race, the league is 80% black, the WNBA, while dominated by black players, did not experience.

Wideman wonders if given the opportunity to play professional basketball, can women, including his daughter, change the game? He asked "Should the WNBA be saddled with that kind of responsibility?" and comments that male athletes have long since given up their status as role models. Wideman finds it "exhilarating" that WNBA athletes "are embracing responsibility. Players seem anxious to expand the possibilities of their sport past entertainment into politics. They want to be seen and heard at the barricades." His only comment that hints at any recognition of skin color is that basketball is a game where players of "all sizes, shapes, colors are rigorously tested." Out of such "action come new perceptions - a new appreciation of what it means for a woman to struggle for self-expression inside her envelope of flesh." Wideman appropriately concludes with an encouraging "Go one with your bad selves. sisters."

Endorsements, magazine articles, and other commercial opportunities are presenting America with a variety of alternate images to the stereotyped African American female of the past. Clearly, the implications of the tremendous success of African American women in sport in the last few years are numerous and steeped in a

---

88 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
history of Black women's participation in sport that is widely unknown and unrecognized. With the increased amount of media attention and prestige afforded professional women athletes, Black female athletes can be expected to continue to excel in traditional sport, while appearing in larger numbers in non-traditional sports. They can also be expected to continue their role as an advocate for women and children.

As women's basketball grows and more African Americans, male and female, enter into a wider range of sports, the very sport that Jackie Robinson entered in 1947, the American national game of baseball, saw great setbacks on and off the field. In their most recent "Racial Report Card," Northeastern University's Center for the Study of Sport in Society reported that the number of black athletes in major league baseball continues to decline. One major league scout predicted that "African-Americans would soon disappear from the game." In fact, at one point during the 1996, the Philadelphia Phillies had no black players on their roster. The number of inner-city Little Leagues have declined, while recruiting for football and basketball have become more rigorous. In conversations with children who live in the Ebbets Field apartments, site of Robinson's home field, only one could name a major league baseball player. All could name multiple NBA players. Former baseball commissioner and foe of Curt Flood, Bowie Kuhn, regretfully admitted that baseball stadiums had become "a white man's place to be." Black fans had abandoned the game in large number.

---

Baseball suffers more deeply than other pro sports because of its once-central place in the culture – and because it preserved apartheid for far too long, barring African-American talent that was often superior to that of the white majors.  

Baseball had been a “thriving presence among black Americans during the segregation era,” with Negro League teams drawing capacity crowds in major league stadiums. The problem will likely not be solved anytime soon. Current commissioner Bud Selig once stated, “We need to reach out everywhere and certainly to minorities. But that to me is secondary. We need to focus on the game and its history rather than all this strife.” Selig’s denial is overwhelmingly and his tactic of “let’s focus on the history” seems ridiculous. Baseball’s past is wrought with segregation and will likely not improve until the issue is addressed. Another significant finding in Northeastern University’s study, director Richard Lapchick reported “that black players had to out-hit and out-pitch white players by substantial margins just to remain in the game.” Additionally, once their playing career was over, their career in baseball was essentially over. In contrast, Lapchick stated, white athletes could enjoy “long, profitable careers as journeymen, then coaches.” Lapchick also reported incidents of stacking, in which “black players were steered out of so-called ‘thinking’ positions – pitching, catching, the infield – into ‘athletic’ positions in the outfield.”

---

94 Brent Staples, “‘A White Man’s Place to Be.’” New York Times, 8 April 1997, p. B9. Lapchick’s findings regarding the stacking at thinking and athletic positions is similar to a study conducted by Ebony in 1969. The magazine found that the darker an athlete’s skin, the farther away from the game action the player was positioned. Lighter skinned blacks and Latinos were more likely to play infield than darker skinned blacks and Latinos. Recently, major league baseball voted to pay former Negro Leaguers pensions. Of the decision, American League President Gene Budig, said, “Baseball cannot restore the careers of these former Negro League players, but they were victims of discrimination outright and were prevented fro
Robinson, now a mythic figure, thanks in part to historians, but also a media and marketing campaign for the anniversary celebration, is still “underappreciated by some modern-day players woefully ignorant of his social and athletic legacy.” The 50th anniversary of baseball’s integration by Robinson has been a merchandise frenzy, with Robinson’s likeness appearing on McDonald’s lapel pins, Coca-Cola bottles, Apple Computer commercial, key chains, baseball bats, trading cards, T-shirts, and a Hasbro Toy action figure. The US Mint produced gold and silver coins, Nike featured an advertisement with Ken Griffey Jr. thanking Robinson, and the ballplayer finally made the cover of the Wheaties box. Larr Doby, the first African American player in the American League, recalled his National League counterpart, “I look back at what Jackie did, what a lot of us did, and I think it’s a shame so many black athletes do not carr themselves in a proud way anymore...I wish people would remember what a privilege it is to play professional sports. I wish owners did more for equality. I wish they knew what a privilege it is to be an owner.” Current player Vince Coleman, wondered “Who’s Jackie Robinson?”

Just as Jackie Robinson became an unknown name to some major leaguers ignorant of their game’s history, Curt Flood, the father of modern free agency, was another name that was unknown to the current crop of players. While they benefit financially from his fight, little tribute has been paid to the ballplayer who sacrificed his


350
career for his principles. When Flood argued that he was not a piece of property to be bought and sold, his allusion to a modern day slave system in professional sports went unheard. Currently, athletes enjoy lucrative contracts that earn them tens of millions of dollar and this is all before they have even performed a service. Players change teams at the end of every season and the concept of Flood’s team loyalty is throwback value honored by only a handful. Still, despite all the millions of dollars and the freedom some players have to change teams, there is an exploitation of black athletic talent that is unprecedented.

Curt Flood died of throat cancer at the age of 59 in January 1997. His death at a young age caused reflection in the baseball world and served as a cautionary tale to an black athlete considering fighting for a cause. Flood was never honored by major league baseball. At a players representative meeting held in 1994, Flood, then representing the United States Baseball League, was given a standing ovation by the players.87 Upon his death, David Cone and Tom Glavine, the American League and National League player representatives, issued a statement. “Every major league baseball player owes Curt Flood a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid. With the odds overwhelmingly against him, he was willing to take a stand for what he knew was right.” 88 Still, no current major leaguer attended Flood’s funeral, just as none of Flood’s contemporaries had attended his court battle. Obituaries lauded his courage and his legacy. New York Times wrote.

87 John P. Lopez. “‘This is madness:’ Robinson’s legacy often gets lost as money drives modern sports world.” Houston Chronicle.
"Flood never made a dime from his courage...But by the time he died...he had earned the gratitude of an entire generation of players who have profited hugely from the freedoms that he made possible."\textsuperscript{100} New York Times sports reporter Robert Lipsyte eulogized Flood in his column and stated that his "case an added urgency during a war in Vietnam being fought disproportionately by American blacks." Moreover, Flood's case was occurring not coincidentally only two years after Muhammad Ali was stripped of his title, and a year after the Olympic boycott of Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, and the Black Power salute at the 1968 games by Tommie Smith and John Carlos. Lipsyte reported that Flood had admitted "that he believed he had suffered harder times than white players" and that "the change in black consciousness in recent years," had made him "more sensitive to injustice in every area" of his life.\textsuperscript{101} The Washington Post lamented that current major leaguers had not learned much from Flood's sacrifice and the explosion in salaries: "Sad to say, some of these wealthy young men haven't handled the situation any too gracefully; among them no doubt are a good many who didn't even recognize the name of Curt Flood." The obituary suggested that the players "take some time to learn a little bit about him and others of his generation of African American athletes whose strivings for dignit were motivated by things a good deal more substantial than the notion that $90 million contract offer is a sign of disrespect because it isn't $100 million."\textsuperscript{102} A year after his death, Flood was posthumously honored symbolically when the Senate Judiciary Committee approved the Curt Flood Act, an "important – and long overdue – milestone."

\textsuperscript{102} "Life of a Free Agent." Washington Post. 23 January 1997.
The bill was endorsed by the Major League Baseball Players Association and commissioner Bud Selig. The bill would end baseball’s 76-year-old exemption from federal antitrust laws. The Flood Act – suitably named for the player who sacrificed his career in the fight for free agency – “would make it possible for players to file antitrust suits against management when labor negotiations begin.” Such leverage “could force owners back to the bargaining table and thus prevent extended work stoppages, such as the 1994 strike of major league baseball players which resulted in the cancellation of the 1994 World Series.”

In the month of April 1997, the celebration of Jackie Robinson’s 50th anniversary in major league baseball served as a backdrop to the larger issue of race in American society. One reporter asked, “What has become of the glory Robinson gave an entire race? What has become of the boundaries he stretched, the walls he scratched through, the example he set for owners, athletes and chroniclers of the game?” As a part of President Bill Clinton’s efforts to engage the nation in a dialogue about United States race relations, a town hall meeting on race and sport was televised by ESPN, a sports channel. Clinton, in explaining the subject of sport as an appropriate setting for a discussion of race, stated that “America rightly or wrongly, is a sports crazy country, and we often see games as a metaphor or symbol of what we are as a people. We learn more about the rest of the country and what needs to be done.” Clinton initiated televised “town hall

---

104 John P. Lopez, “‘This is madness’: Robinson’s legacy often gets lost as money drives modern sports world,” *Houston Chronicle*.
meeting" as part of his campaign to foster national discussion on racial issues. The 
discussion of difficult racial issues was itself evidence of good intentions and a sign of 
progress." Moreover, Clinton, an avid sports fans himself, "suggested that more 
minorities should rise to high management positions in professional athletics." and that 
"athletes and sports teams have an obligation to lead by example." 

Richard Lapchick agreed with Clinton about the use of sports to engage people in 
a discussion of race issues, saying "It is the broadest cultural common denominator you 
have in the country. We're a country that thinks sports." Susquehanna Universit 
professor Dwayne Williams says, "There are sacred places in American society and sports 
is one of them. Sports has been one place where black men have been able to have 
success." Clinton noticed that at sporting events people of different races and 
backgrounds joined together in the common bonding of a shared team and at closer 
inspection wondered why most of the player were black, yet the owners, managers, and 
even the fans are mostly white. Judith A. Winston, executive director of Clinton's race 
initiative, stated, "We see it as an opportunity to use sports as a microcosm for the larger 
society. Sports has both perpetuated stereotyping and in other instances exploded 
stereotypes." Another member of Clinton's staff, White House communications 
director Ann F. Lewis, offered her explanation for the town hall meeting; "It engages the 
imagination of the American public, including people who are not otherwise engaged in 

---

108 Peter Baker and Michael A. Fletcher. "Clinton's Town Hall taking Discussion of Race Into Sports 
issues of public policy, let alone race.” Perhaps that was the greatest point to be made; b
exposing a population, ESPN viewers, who may miss the evening news and current social
and political issues for SportsCenter, the program exposed them to a difficult issue, race,
in a comfortable and familiar setting, sports. The *Washington Post* reported on the
unique position of sport to engage in such a debate, especially one proposed by the
President of the United States.

On one level, the sports world offers heartening success stories about integration
and employment based on merit, an arena where young people grow up admiring
heroes with different skin colors. Yet on another, it remains a segment of
American life where troubling divisions persist, where different sports are
perceived as belonging to different races and where the coaching staffs and front
office personnel remain predominantly white even if the players’ rosters are
not.\(^{111}\)

While most sports fans are white, a number of the “industry’s biggest and best
marketed stars are black men,” such as Michael Jordan, Ken Griffey Jr. and Tiger Woods.
Black athletes makeup 80 percent of NBA rosters, while only 24 percent of the coaches
and managers are Black. Sixty-six percent of NFL rosters are black, but only ten percent
of head coaches are black. Statistics are more startling in major league baseball, where
17 percent of major league baseball players are black. In fact, Latino ballplayers account
for 24 percent of major league baseball players, though only four percent of the league’s
managers are Latino.\(^ {112}\) Twenty-eight percent of people running day-to-day operations of
NBA franchises were African American, compared with 13 percent in the NFL and 3
percent in baseball. Similarly, only ten percent of the athletic directors at Division

---

\(^{109}\) Ibid., p. A2.
\(^{110}\) Ibid., p. A2.
\(^{111}\) Ibid., p. A2.
\(^{112}\) Ibid., p. A2.

355
colleges and universities were African American, though the majority of men’s football and basketball players were black. The National Hockey League is less than 1 percent black.

The panel included several black athletes and coaches, including John Thompson, Jackie Joyner-Kersee, Jim Brown, Keyshawn Johnson, Felipe Lopez, and of course, Bill Clinton. Lopez was a last minute addition when Latino advocate groups and president of La Raza, Raul Yzaguirre, charged that the town hall meeting, and Clinton’s race initiative package, focused too much on issues of black and white conflict, and was not reflective of the true multicultural nature of the country.

They always talk about how important it is to be inclusive and to get away from the black-white paradigm. In this event, as with the others, you see the obsession with the past. The black-white issue is a framework of the past and it is totally ignorant of the new framework of the country. As America evolves into it’s greatest level of ethnic diversity, the black-white framework will become useless. In sports, however, few minorities other than African Americans, with the exception of Latinos in baseball, have made significant enough gains in sport to press for an expansion of the black-white framework. Still, one might investigate why other minorities have not been successful at the higher levels of competition in American sports.

---

112 Ibid., p. A2.
113 Ibid., p. A2.
114 Elizabeth Shogren, “Clinton Urges More Minorities in Sports’ Upper Levels,” Los Angeles Times, 16 April 1998, p. A5. Such a framework, black-white, does not allow for the inclusion of other minority groups and marginalizes their presence in sport. During the 1998 major league baseball season, Caucasian Mark McGwire and Cuban Sammy Sosa battled it out for the home run title and Roger Maris’s record. Sosa, despite his Latino background, was often mislabeled by the public as black because of his appearance.
On Clinton's race and sport panel, former football player and Hall of Famer Jim Brown raised the issue of African American athletes involvement in black community issues and economics. Brown was the only panelist that expressed an interest in a discussion that focused on the community building power held by Black athletes. While most other panelists, including ESPN's moderator Bob Ley, wanted to focus on "sport" issues, such as the number of minority players, coaches, and owners in professional sport. Brown's inquiries into what African American athletes were doing for African American communities put his fellow panelists on the defense and Georgetown coach John Thompson was visibly upset at the suggestion he hire a black sports agent. Brown wondered what wealthy Black athletes such as Tiger Woods and Michael Jordan, both sponsored by Thompson's sponsor, Nike, were going to do with all their "loot." He asserted that Nike "was getting more from Jordan and Woods and Thompson than any of them gave directly to the general black community."115

Brown's solution to the passive nature of current black athletes is the formation of an initiative, a collective force or major enterprise that would form a solid base for change, similar to what Brown had envisioned and attempted in the late 1960's. The tremendous amount of money available to black athletes was a major factor in the attitude of younger black athletes. Of this group, Brown noticed, "These young men today, the money they are making has no meaning from the standpoint of breaking down barriers or

earning more opportunities. It’s wasted money. Just like the gladiators. The money is
used up in cars, houses, jewelry. It’s excess.” Brown continued in his assessment of
modern black athletes.

Today they have everything they want. America has accepted them into every aspect of life. They are surrounded by white agents, managers and lawyers who offer them everything and shield them from their communities and the realities of modern-day racism. There are few blacks in those circles and these players don’t have the vision to reach out and find black lawyers, agents and managers and introduce them into that multimillion-dollar industry.

Brown, very outspoken and active in the black community, was disappointed in the efforts of black athletes to work in the community projects selected for them by their white agents and coaches, activities he saw as having little lasting impact; the delivering of turkeys on Thanksgiving was one example. Such activities served to give the athlete a good public image with the least amount of thought or controversy. Brown wanted to see inner-city areas, predominantly inhabited by African Americans, revitalized. One black athlete who took his basketball millions to improve a struggling community was retired Los Angeles Laker Magic Johnson. Johnson invested his money in the Crenshaw district of Los Angeles by building the Magic Johnson Movie Theater. The success of the theater “has brought with it a fresh spirit of entrepreneurship and optimism.” Johnson echoes Brown’s call for black athletes investing in their communities. “We have plenty of African-Americans who make money who should be investing in our communities. That’s the way to rebuild our communities. We can’t wait on the government, we can’t

---

116 John P. Lopez. “This is madness:’ Robinson’s legacy often gets lost as money drives modern sports world.” Houston Chronicle.

wait on somebody else to come in and do it. In Brown’s experience, and Johnson’s opinion, the changes sought by minorities in sport would only come with the efforts made by those minorities, though major sponsors and leagues should develop their own programs to enact change for minorities in sport. The NFL has started a program to expose owners to minority coaches, though since its inception there have been no minority hirings.

Charles Barkley thinks the “black community is too fixated on professional athletes, and that it’s producing children who care more about honing their jump shots than learning to read.” He commented, “If I weren’t earning more than $3 million a year to dunk a basketball, most people on the street would run in the other direction if they saw me coming.” Sport sociologist Harry Edwards agrees, noting that “the image of the black athlete has soared to the top of the prestige order. More and more African-American athletes, more so than white athletes, “have been expected to give something back to their communities.” Black athletes have not acted as agents of change though. Despite the increasing “minority cries for help from the inner cities get louder, as the safety net for the poor gets weaker.” While some urge superstar Michael Jordan to speak out on racial issues, others concede that perhaps the black ballplayer does not have an obligation to “speak out, to take stands, choose sides.” Ironically, Jordan has chosen to “stand right in the middle, to offend no consumer,” certainly pleasing Nike, “champion of

359
the third-world sweatshop." Jim Brown urged Jordan to become more socially and politically active. In understanding the risks taken by pioneer Jackie Robinson, Brown sees the current silence of black athletes about political and racial issues as sending a message to pioneer black athletes; the message is that the athletes are happy with the money they are making. Brown attacked Jordan, saying the successful multimillionaire player takes no risks. Jordan is "a model of that 50's 'organization man.'" Lipsyte labels Jordan as the "golden cog in the corporate wheel." Jordan's "calculated assumption" about his role in corporate mainstream America "has made Jordan frustrating to outsiders who want him to use his clout for their definitions of good, whether that is directly inspiring inner-city youth or calling the shoe companies to task for their overseas employment practices." Now retired, Jordan remains silent on such issues.

The racial issue that has received the most attention over the last year in professional sports has not been access to the playing field, but the roles in management and ownership. In 1980, Jomills Braddock conducted research and found that the "horizontal discrimination in the N.F.L. had subsided as more Africa-Americans were allowed to play professional football." However, "hierarchical racism remained," and there were many barriers. Braddock noted, that prevented African American players from

---

122 John P. Lopez. "This is madness: Robinson’s legacy often gets lost as money drives modern sports world." Houston Chronicle.
123 Robert Lipsyte. "Jordan. DiMaggio and That Cool Stardom." New York Times. 26 October 1997. Lipsyte says that as a result of all his commercial endorsements Jordan is actually replacing Muhammad Ali as "the most recognizable live face on the planet."
124 David Andrews book on Jordan. David Halberstam, other Jordan books, including his own "inspirational."
climbing the organizational ladder. Of the current situation in the NFL, Braddock says, "Obviously things have changed. There are now black head coaches, although the number is small. But it's very disappointing, primarily because the barriers to getting head coaching positions had been broken. Art Shell had a winning record - even though he was pushed out and has never gotten another opportunity. It's like getting in and being successful isn't enough." Statistics show that close to 70% of NFL players are African American, with "many of the starting offensive and defensive units are 80 to 95% African-American." Still, only three NFL coaches are black.\(^{125}\)

William Rhoden suggests that if black NFL players urged front offices to hire black head coaches or even voiced their displeasure at the racial makeup of NFL head coaches perhaps we'd see a change. Rhoden senses a "growing resentment among some players of the implicit message that black muscle is fine, but black judgment and leadership are somehow lacking."\(^{126}\) Rhoden, in another article on the same subject, continues to urge black players to get more involved. He accurately reports that "Black athletes have played a significant role in making the league a billion-dollar enterprise and the Super Bowl the highest-rated televised sporting event of the year, a billion-dollar bonanza."\(^{127}\)

---


In the week leading up to the 1998 Super Bowl between the Atlanta Falcons and Denver Broncos, many players were asked to discuss the issue of black coaches. Ra Buchanan, of the Atlanta Falcons, showed up to media day wearing a spiked dog collar. He predicted an Atlanta victory, but refused to discuss blacks and coaching, saying it was too controversial a topic. John Mobley, of the Denver Broncos, attributed player silence on the issue to a “combination of apathy, selfishness and intimidation.” Mobley said, “No one wants to stir up something that really isn’t affecting them directly. It’s a shame, but at the same time, what can you do about it if you don’t have the forces behind you?” Mobley’s teammate, Ra Crockett, echoes those thoughts, saying, “A lot of the players don’t want to upset the coaches – or the owners – because they are playing for them. And there’s not enough representation of black coaches to defend them. If we put ourselves on the line, and there’s still a bunch of white coaches out there, of course you’re intimidated. But I will say that if you’re good enough to play this game, why can’t you be good enough to coach it?” Broncos teammates Alfred Williams believed that the black majority in the NFL had been neutralized and held hostage, claiming, “Privately, we talk about it a little; it’s never something we’ve met as a group about. In this league you can’t just speak your mind and feel like it’s going to go unnoticed. We play in a league with no guaranteed contracts.” Rhoden concurs with the situation, reminding his readers that black NFL players work in an “industry without guaranteed contracts, where one missspoken word can result in removal without explanation, players think long and hard before saying something management may construe as impudent.” Still, Art Shell, once of the few black men to head coach in the league and now an assistant with Atlanta,
charged that "high-profile players must help raise the issue or there will be no progress."

Shell was adamant: "The players have to stand up and let it be known that they are
dissatisfied with what is going on. Until they start getting involved in this thing, things
just might remain the same." 128

Of fifteen head coach job openings over a two-year period, none were filled by an
African American coach, despite the fact that in 1997, over 100 assistant coaches were
African American. A group of black assistant coaches privately discussed the possibilit
of filing a class-action discrimination lawsuit against the NFL and even spoke with civil
rights lawyers about their options. Still, a lawsuit seemed unlikely. One assistant said,
"Right now, it's just talk." One reason for the inaction: the prevailing belief that "a
lawsuit could prove to be more detrimental than helpful and that any assistant coach who
became part of it would 'end up like Curt Flood.'" 129

One player who spoke out about the issue was Chicago Bears Bryan Cox. Cox
was very outspoken about the racial makeup of NFL coaches. He claimed that "The
good-ol'-boy network is alive and kicking. How many black owners are in this league
How many black coaches?" He wondered about the influx of recycled coaches recentl
hired by NFL teams in need of a head coach. Cox criticized the NFL for their "house
Negroes" mentality. Cox has been easily dismissed by fans and management for other
incidents. such a flipping his middle fingers at fans and punching opponents. The
league's labor relations director. Harold Henderson is black, as is the league's director of

---


363
player personnel, former player Gene Washington. Henderson cited the racial makeup of
the players and said that “Our players ought to be very happy that 70% of our work force
is African-American. These are high-paying, highly sought-after jobs. The fact that we
can compete and hold them at every position: a couple of years ago, we couldn’t be
offensive lineman, we couldn’t be quarterbacks.” When asked if he believed his
employer’s to be racist and why there weren’t more black head coaches in the NFL,
Henderson wondered, “Is it present in people’s attitudes? It probably is. We have to
adjust the process by which coaches are changed. We have to open the closed group.
You go on gut feeling and emotion: you tend to like people who are like yourself. Is that
racism? Bottom line, it is. Subtle, subtle unseen racism, unintentional.” Gene
Washington attempted to justify the situation by noting the progress made. He said, “To
show you how old I am. when I broke in in 1969, black cornerbacks were a rarity. Forget
trying to be coaches; we just wanted to be able to play certain positions.”
In NFL commissioner Paul Tagliabue’s office, only three of 40 vice presidents are African
Americans.

---

11 The situation is no better for college football coaches, where only one black coach was hired out of 34
available positions over a three-month period. White men still dominate the coaching ranks at the Division
I football level. Though half of all scholarship football players are black, only eight black men served as
head coach at the 112 universities that fielded a team. One of those eight, Coach Ron Dickerson, of
Temple, stated, “When there’s a search out there, there are very few African Americans that are
recommended to get the job.” Nine percent of coordinators were black and 26 percent of assistant coaches
were black. Moreover, when black athletes look for a college, they look at the racial makeup of coaching
staffs. USC running Delon Washington stated, “Coming from a predominantly black school, I didn’t want
to go to an environment where there is just one black coach.” See “Michael D. Shear and Bill Brubaker.
that address black coaches in the NFL, see Mike Freeman, “Tagliabue To Confer On Black Coaches.” New

364
The issue of black coaches also increased the awareness of the startling low number of black agents in professional athletics. Muhammad Ali had been represented by the Nation of Islam in the 1960's and Jim Brown attempted to operate a black-operated agency during the late 1960's. The concept behind it was consistent with the tenets of Black Power, that money earned by the black community should stay in the black community. There was a cultural and economic value of black athletes in sports. At a meeting of NCAA basketball coaches, Louis Farrakhan, the current leader of the Nation of Islam, whose invitation to speak was controversial, urged coaches to “stop allowing black athletic gold to leave the community.” He implored the coaches to show their athletes “the value of the money they’re making.” Farrakhan used current NBA stars as examples.

Shaq and Penny and Michael are great athletes: What institutions are they building with that money? If they are not building institutions that will last, it’s our fault. Why not steer them to good black agents, steer them to a good black accountant. Never sell out the future of our people for money.132

Attorney Johnnie Cochran proposed to start his own sport agent firm to give black athletes an opportunity for black representation at the bargaining table. In a meeting with Spike Lee, the two discussed “how some players don’t take advantage of a major resource – black lawyers and sports agents.” Cochran accused some current black athletes with having a “plantation mentality.”133 David Falk, the white agent of superstar Michael

---

Jordan, tells players that the issue of agents is not about black and white, but rather green. Falk commented, “This is about green. I think this is a business issue, not a social issue.” Jerome Stanley, a black sports agent, retorted echoing DuBois, “You can’t separate the business and the social. That’s like saying you’re not a black man in America, you’re just an American.” The issue of black athlete having black agents was partly an issue of empowerment. Charles Ferrell, of the Sports Perspectives International Institute, echoed this theory of empowerment. “Black agents are more likely to steer black athletes to black realtors, car dealers, charities, financial planners. In essence, they are more likely to put an athlete’s millions in black hands, which benefits the larger African American community.” Of the approximately 1,500 black athletes, 10 percent have black agents.¹³⁴

When the NBA lockout occurred before the 1998-99 season, some players claimed that race was an issue and that the all-white ownership was treating the players, in Karl Malone’s words, “like children.” Malone added, “The league has cast us as dumb and stupid and uninformed.” Jayson Williams of the Nets said, “For some guys it’s hard not to think about race.” Former player and Hall of Famer, Bob Cousy, doubted such claims and stated his belief that “The league has been ahead of most of the rest of the country in race relations.”¹³⁵ The NBA “provides an interesting twist to the affirmative action debate. In the larger society, high-achieving blacks often feel as though their success is under a microscope.” Buck Williams, a Black NBA player, says the reverse is true in professional basketball, where a white player on a NBA roster is viewed as a

token. Jon Barry, a white NBA player, says that white athletes in his sport are a dying breed. The less than twenty percent of white athletes in the NBA feel pressure to prove that they belong in a sport dominated by black athletes.

It is one of the most unusual circumstances in the American work force, whites as minorities in a high-paying industry closely scrutinized by the public. Typically, it is blacks and other minorities who must conform to the norms of a mostly white workplace...And the NBA, now in the midst of the playoffs, is an intriguing laboratory for exploring how whites fare in an exclusive, predominantly black society.136

Steve Kerr, who is white, doesn’t believe that the interactions between black and white players is really comparable to race relations experienced daily by non-athletes, mostly due to class issues. Kerr explains, “We live in sort of a utopian society where everybody is doing well financially. And you don’t have the same sort of racial resentment and competition that you have a lot in the working world.”137 Class issues will continue to be a major factor in analyzing the role of race and ethnicity in sport and the impact of these athletes on American society. While class has always been a factor to consider, the increasing salaries, endorsements, ticket prices, merchandise costs, and media have heightened the issue of money for players, coaches, owners, and especially fans.

Sports fans are much more informed in this media age: the information is available to them twenty-four hours a day – the internet, ESPN, other sports channels, newspapers, and too many sport magazines to list. Moreover, ESPN has moved beyond their classic SportsCenter to producing “Outside the Lines,” hourly shows that investigate a single issue closely, such as race in sports. Jackie Robinson, the moving of the

Cleveland Browns to Baltimore, and homosexuality in sports. Their most recent special was a retrospect look at the 1968 Olympic protest of Tommie Smith and John Carlos. HBO has acted in a similar fashion, producing a monthly show, "Real Sports," which has looked at Curt Flood's 1969 act, Deion Sanders image, and other issues that go beyond the score of a game. HBO has also released a video series, "The Journey of the African-American Athlete." The impact of such retrospective flash to the past specials can be immeasurably educating, but also can serve to put the behaviors into their appropriate context measured by their time period, but understood by our ideals and values. In some damaging sense, many of the courageous actions are seen as behaviors no longer needed and made more safe by the distance of years, almost less powerful. ESPN reminds us that in our color blind sport system such protests today would be fruitless, but moreover, not even necessary. Increased exposure to the plight of minority athletes is essential to change, but fans are reluctant to feel sorry for an athlete making an obscene amount of money and then complaining about their coach yelling at them or a cover story about their fathering six children with five women who all want some money. One reporter, in his evaluation of the recent economic success of NBA signings of free agents, says that the money says a lot about race relations in America.

What was once called the 'color bar' in American life is for all intents and purposes finally and irrevocably dead. In basketball, where more than 80% of the paying customers are white, being a superstar means winning a place in the hearts and minds of white America itself...But the meaning behind this summer's triumphs is that most Americans – can find a place in their hearts for minorities, can make them their heroes and objects of emulation. This is an extraordinary fact, perhaps unprecedented in the history of nations.

Such a simple explanation does not work for me. In fact, it is his very point, that the athletic and economic success of black athletes and the idolization of black athletes by white sport fans is indicative of improved race relations that smacks of simplistic denial. Sports fans emulate black athletes that fit into the prescribed appropriate behavior of athletes. The black athlete who charges racism is laughed off and lampooned. The black coach who is looked over for a head coaching job is told he needs more experience. The black athlete who refuses to stand for an American flag is condemned as unpatriotic and unAmerican, and the black athlete who invests his money into black neighborhoods is viewed as a separatist. Such behaviors are not acceptable; so, in fact, not all black athletes are emulated by white sport fans. Certain black athletes have been successful in "transcending" race – Michael Jordan being the best example. How would fans respond to Jordan if he charged the NBA with not hiring enough minorities in their front office or challenged Nike to reduce their costs of Air Jordan to make them more affordable to their targeted inner-city youth population? I suspect that most would label Jordan "uppity," to use an old term from the 60’s. Still, the media has altered our perceptions of African Americans.

---

Pick up most American sports dailies, and along with last night’s scores, player transactions and racing results, are page after page of the black athlete in pictures, rich, superrich, bald-headed, super bald-headed. The downside of such visceral overflow is that it creates a false sense of equity about the American workplace, while simultaneously pricking insidious fears and hostilities some whites carry about blacks.¹³⁹

This same reporter refers to black athletes as the “black jumping class.” His industry, the media, has manipulated white and black American with their coverage of the “black jumping class.” We are led to believe that blacks are naturally athletic, whites are good at only certain sports. He wonders how a white fan can be exposed to the sports world and not be impacted by the success of black athletes and have it carry over into their thoughts about race relations.

How can a white fan – a fan whose middle-management career has been forever deleted by encroaching technology, who has just lost his or her health insurance, whose son’s and daughter’s rooms are decorated with Shaq and Little Penn bobbing head dolls, who has just made the horrifically expedient decision to send his kids to junior college instead of Michigan or Fordham – how can that fan not perceive that American needs Affirmative Action the way we need a bunch of white defensive backs⁴⁰

His question is profound and he offers no solutions, only more warnings. And he takes his industry to task for their perpetuation of the manipulated perceptions. But even coinage of the phrase “black jumping class” is somewhat discomfiting in its focus on the physical.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.
Every day, parents, teachers, even a few coaches of conscience try to reach black teens about the harsher realities of a life in sports, not the reality one sniffs from a new box of sneakers endorsed by the jumping class, or the reality chanted in seductive pop culture mantras (e.g., “Just do it”). The sports page too often says to suggestible children, black and white, that the keys to the kingdom go through the paint.\(^{141}\)

Though President Clinton attempted to get Americans to discuss race within the framework of sports, he failed to discuss why such patterns of racism exist. The forum failed to address those “insidious fears and hostilities” and failed to ask why in some instances, sports can serve to join different groups together within the boundaries of the playing field, but can also divide teams and individuals. Sports fans have little interest in understanding deeper, underlying issues, and the economics of current sports nullifies most political, racial, and social issue. Black athletes have changed as well.

Jackie Robinson and Muhammad Ali both represented larger ideas and issues. Both paid severe prices for their unique positions in sport and American history. Robert Lipsyte wonders if the stories of Robinson, Ali and other active black athletes have been a “cautionary lesson to other black athletes given the option to be more forceful role models for positive social change.” He notes that Robinson died at 53. Arthur Ashe died at age 49. Curt Flood at 59. Althea Gibson has been sick for years, and both Joe Louis and Ali were “diminished in early middle age.” Lipsyte wonders, “How much physical and emotional damage did he suffer just being Jackie Robinson, fighting every step of the

\(^{141}\) Ibid.

371
way even after his retirement?" Since Ali and his compatriots of the late 1960’s, no black athlete has shown a comparable "level of positive and progressive involvement." Lipsyte essentially absolves Jordan of his silence.

If they suffered for our sins, who can then blame Michael Jordan for channeling excess energy into all-world selfishness, or Albert Belle for bad manners, or Dennis Rodman for an idiosyncratic sense of fun.142

But Lipsyte's co-worker at the New York Times, William Rhoden, asks the real question, ignoring the punishments of the past and recognizing the power of the almighty dollar.

Why should millionaire athletes who collectively form a vast power base, tremble in fear? In sports, courage and pride by African-American athletes are now narrowly defined by what happens on the gridiron and the hard court.143

Today's athletes are nothing like athletes of the past. We lament this in every way, saying "Imagine how many home runs Ted Williams might have hit on androstine." "The Bulls dynasty is nowhere near the dynasty of Bill Russell's Celtics." "Whatever happened to the days when a player wore one uniform his whole career?" or "Athletes never got in trouble like this before." We compare performances on the field, but also behaviors off the field. Standards are changing and for change to occur we cannot be satisfied with athletes, black or white, that remain neutral in times of trouble. Race and ethnic relations are at a critical juncture and sports truly do have the ability to impact the rest of society. But difficult questions need to be asked and answered, not dismissed or avoided. How much has really changed for African Americans since the days of Jackie Robinson and

Muhammad Ali? Is it even conceivable that a black athlete in these days could have the type of impact of these two athletes? How far have we really come if black athletes not only avoid involvement in racial protests, but even lack the awareness and race consciousness to understand that they are still a piece of property exploited for their physical talents? The difference today - their paycheck is a little bit larger. If 1968 was the Year of the Awakening, as is has been referred to in popular culture, thirty years later Americans have fallen back to sleep.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

A. Articles

Amsterdam News 1968
Baltimore Afro-American 1967
Black Sports 1971-1973
Chicago Daily Times 1968
Chicago Defender 1967, 1968
Los Angeles Sentinel 1968
Los Angeles Times 1968
Muhammad Speaks 1964-1969
Oakland Post 1968
San Francisco Chronicle 1968
San Jose Spartan Daily 1968
Sports Illustrated, 1956-1999
Washington Afro-American 1968
Washington Post 1968


“Arthur Ashe may Shun Pro Ranks for Work with Blacks.” Muhammad Speaks 3 January 1969, 34.


Brody, Tom C. “At Last the Girls Are Ours.” Sports Illustrated 17 August 1964, 68.

Bruce, Joan. “Althea the First.” Sports Illustrated 15 July 1957, 12.

“Carlos, Smith Feel Beautiful.” Chicago Defender 24 October 1968, 38.


“The Fastest Female.” Time 19 September 1960, 75.


“Hobbling the Winged Foot.” Newsweek, 19 February 1968, 85.


Mix, Ron. “‘Was This Their Freedom Ride?’” Sports Illustrated 18 January 1965, 24-25.


Patterson, Floyd. “How I Lost the Title.” Sports Illustrated 4 June 1962, 32.


Reeves, Richard. “Last Angry Man.” Esquire 1 March 1978, 44.


“World Tennis Champion Arthur Ashe Declares His Militancy, Determination to Struggle for His People.” Muhammad Speaks 27 September 1968, 16.

B. Books


Secondary Sources

A. Articles


B. Books


Jones, Reginald L. *Black Psychology*. Berkeley, CA: Cobb and Henry


393


