



Black Men Can't Shoot by Scott N. Brooks

Review by: Douglas Hartmann

Contemporary Sociology, Vol. 39, No. 2 (March 2010), pp. 145-146

Published by: [American Sociological Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20695323>

Accessed: 27/03/2013 16:17

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



American Sociological Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Contemporary Sociology*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

from their American and Asian counterparts who control most of the foreign-owned factories along the border. In the final section of the book, Bank Muñoz reports that such claims to ethnic solidarity were turned on their head during a contract campaign for truck drivers in the U.S. factory. As part of the widespread immigrant-organizing efforts that swept through California in the 1990s, organizers on this campaign engaged in "ethnic-based organizing," framing Tortimundo as a binational *chupacabras* ("goat sucker"), a mystical, Latin-American creature, sucking the blood out of its workforce.

Despite having spent three months on the shopfloor of each factory, Bank Muñoz presents relatively few fieldnotes, relying heavily on *telling*, at the expense of *showing*, what happens in each site. This is partly the result of the limitations she faced in the field—"the one condition of my right of entry was that I would not have access to workers" (p. 19)—and reflective more generally of the challenges involved in obtaining managerial approval to conduct workplace ethnography. Whereas she presents rich data on the part of managers, I would have liked to have read more about social relations among workers as they played out on the shopfloor, particularly with respect to her important claim that workers collude with management by reproducing lines of division and justifying hierarchies of race, class, gender, and citizenship status at the point of production.

Ultimately, Bank Muñoz has woven together admirably the macro, meso, and micro levels of state policies, labor markets, and workplace dynamics, producing a well-written, accessible, and fascinating account of exploitation and resistance among tortilla workers along the border. *Transnational Tortillas* should be of considerable value to scholars and students of labor, immigration, and global production.

Reference

- Salzinger, Leslie. 2003. *Genders in Production: Making Workers in Mexico's Global Factories*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Black Men Can't Shoot, by Scott N. Brooks. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009. 228pp. \$22.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780226076034.

DOUGLAS HARTMANN
University of Minnesota
hartm021@umn.edu

The last 10 to 15 years have witnessed the emergence of a large and diverse body of literature on race and sport in American culture, much of it focused on basketball. The result is a vibrant and sophisticated body of work—one that, in my view, is far ahead of conventional sociological theorizing on race and culture in the contemporary, post-civil rights era. For example, studies of omnipresent images of African American male athletes in the U.S. mainstream media have made manifest that racialization and racism itself results not just from negative stereotyping and active discrimination but from romanticized consumption that depends upon and deepens overarching (and deeply distressing) conceptions of difference. This first book by Scott Brooks is best understood and assessed in this context.

Black Men Can't Shoot follows the lives and high school "careers" of two young basketball players, "Jermaine" and "Ray," who have big hopes and dreams for athletic fame in the hotbed that is Philadelphia. Based upon years of fieldwork and interviewing, their stories introduce us to the youth leagues, adolescent and teenage subcultures, local networks, schools, and community organizations that actually produce the superstar basketball players who attract so much scholarly and public attention. This book is, in other words, a rare, behind-the-scenes case study of the inner workings and realities of the developmental wing of the basketball industry.

The book's obvious strength is its vivid documentation of the social milieu of elite youth basketball and how that world is experienced and understood by its most active—while easily overlooked—participants and potential beneficiaries. In this sense, *Black Men Can't Shoot* nicely supplements and extends Ruben May's recent, award-winning treatment of high school basketball

in Georgia. And Brooks' treatment makes several additional, subtler contributions to the literature on race and basketball, and sport studies more generally. Perhaps most useful is its description of the structure and organization of elite-level youth basketball—the many different and competing leagues, teams, tournaments, coaches, and sponsors that constitute the extensive, patchwork system by which elite athletes are recruited and developed in the United States. It is worth pointing out that while Philadelphia basketball may have been an early example, it is no longer an extreme case. Indeed, the sports development system that Brooks captures is eerily similar to traveling leagues all over the country for sports ranging from soccer and skiing and volleyball to tennis, golf, and softball.

Also emphasized throughout the book is the "making" of reputation among aspiring basketball players. In Brooks' eminently sociological description, this involves not just what these young athletes do to "get known" via their performance on the court, but also the social networks and institutional structures that they must navigate in order to be recognized as up-and-coming players. Brooks also talks a great deal about the coaches, advisors, and mentors—the "old heads"—that initially identify promising young prospects and then help guide and direct them through the system. With this idea, Brooks highlights the role that key community members (often in unofficial positions) occupy in the construction of elite level youth sport as well as the way in which the entire system is constituted in intergenerational, life course terms.

With its easy narrative style and back cover blurbs from a host of sociology and basketball standouts (including, respectively, Howard Becker and NBA All-Star Jason Kidd), this book has the trappings of a big seller. But it is not the prototypical product of a top university press. For example, the book's 24 staccato chapters (not including the introduction, conclusion, and epilogue) may make the book accessible for student readers or a popular audience, but they do not allow the more sustained interpretation or broader contextualization one usually looks for in a scholarly monograph. Most uncomfortable on this score is Brooks'

treatment of his chief informant and personal mentor. Brooks' extensive depictions of "Coach Chuck" exhibit very little distance from a subject whose attitudes and practices embody much of the authoritarianism, parochialism, and patriarchy that sport scholars and activists have spent careers working against.

In previously published chapters and articles, Brooks has demonstrated a real capacity for deeper, more critical analysis. This includes impressive sociological critiques of the young black basketball player as an exploited laborer, and powerful arguments that basketball represents an alternative to the chaos and dysfunction of inner-city neighborhoods as previously described by his academic mentor Elijah Anderson. But in the absence of clearer, more explicit analysis, one can't help but worry that *Black Men Can't Shoot* will reinforce commonplace stereotypes about both sport and race, even as it illuminates the social complexity of elite high school basketball and all that it means to the young African American men who participate in it.

The Sexuality of Migration: Border Crossings and Mexican Immigrant Men, by **Lionel Cantú, Jr.**, edited by **Nancy A. Naples** and **Salvador Vidal-Ortiz**. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009. 245pp. \$22.00 paper. ISBN: 9780814758496.

HÉCTOR CARRILLO
Northwestern University
hector@northwestern.edu

The publication of *The Sexuality of Migration* occurred under unusual circumstances. The core of the book consists of an edited collection of articles written by Lionel Cantú, Jr. before his sudden and untimely death in early 2002. Cantú was in the process of revising his PhD dissertation and transforming it into a book manuscript, a project that he left uncompleted. With admirable dedication to his work and his memory, Nancy A. Naples and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz undertook the labor of compiling and adapting Cantú's published articles, as well as incorporating some of his unpublished writing (mainly in the book's introduction and conclusion),